

Building Creative Critical Online Learning Communities through Digital Moments

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Abstract: This paper is a mixed methods case study measuring student perceptions of a pedagogical strategy called “Digital Moments” (DM) for developing creative interactive online learning communities. The theoretical framework within which this resides is the Fully Online Learning Community (FOLC) model (vanOostveen et al, 2016), based on a foundation of problem-based learning, cognitive and social presence, and learner-centred pedagogies. The article reviews a specific teaching strategy for increasing social presence and student engagement through the use of creative and artistic expression in problem-based learning spaces. Using “Digital Moments” as a way to build inclusion in two synchronous graduate online courses, the author describes how the teaching strategy increased student participation, developed student ownership of learning, and encouraged collaborative processes between participants. This teaching strategy makes a significant contribution to digital pedagogy. Although the growth of online learning is quite substantial, our ability to develop online communities that inspire critical and creative thinking has not kept pace. Traditional teacher-centred learning environments do not meet the needs of students in today’s Fourth Industrial Revolution. As such, the FOLC model provides an online learning community model that removes traditional teacher-learner roles, allows the instructor to act as a facilitator and challenges learners to co-design and co-create the learning process. Within this digital space, collaborative disruption is encouraged, and, in fact necessary for the types of critical and creative thinking to emerge that are central to the FOLC model. Digital Moments, is one example of a pedagogical strategy that enables learners to co-create and own the digital learning space, within a fully online learning community.

Keywords: Critical thinking, creativity, online learning, communities, disruption

1. Introduction

This paper examines a simple yet powerful pedagogical strategy used in graduate online courses to create engaging learning communities. For the purpose of this work, the theoretical foundation is the Fully Online Learning Community (FOLC) model (VanOostveen et al, 2016). FOLC environments facilitate the development of collaborative, disruptive learning spaces within which learners participate in constructive, collaborative discourse that shapes the learning process. (Chapman, Ramondt & Smiley, 2005). This model asks students to actively construct their own learning, rather than passively accept it, which allows students to take ownership for their learning (vanOostveen et al., 2016).

Contemporary digital learning environments have the potential to empower individuals with the confidence, competence, and skills to manage, analyse, and filter information, but also to create, develop and connect new information that collaboratively solves social problems. It is essential in this powerful new learning world that pedagogy is two-fold; we must teach the digital skills to cope and navigate in this world, but we are also bound to nurture the skills that students require to live and work in digital communities (World Economic Forum, 2016).

The author’s goal in designing the Digital Moments (DM) strategy was to replicate the relationship building moments which naturally occur as students enter a face to face class before the structured learning begins. In an effort to do this, each week students met synchronously in Adobe connect. Classes of 20-25 students entered the virtual room to find share pods in which they each uploaded a ‘Digital Moment’. The content of the pod could include a variety of pictures, quotes, colours, links to describe in a single snapshot where the person was at that week. As weeks passed, students began to arrive earlier to class, in advance of start times, and began to look forward to connecting with classmates and sharing their own digital moments with others. As a unique pedagogical strategy, qualities which one might not normally associate with traditional online learning emerged: empathy, humour, risk-taking, compassion and a shared sense of community. This is an arts-based qualitative pedagogical strategy that elicits affect from students/learning community members and thus contributes to building relationships, more frequent and higher quality dialogue and interaction amongst students and between students and their teacher. From a group of individuals learning geographically all over the world evolved a close knit community of learners where the playing field was leveled and the traditional roles of teacher and learner become no longer visible.

2. Theoretical framework

This paper rests on three primary areas of literature, including (a) the Fully Online Learning Community (FOLC) model, (b) Problem-Based Learning, and (c) Arts-Based Qualitative Inquiry and Pedagogy. (VanOostveen et al, 2016; Savin-Baden, 2007; Brearley, 2000). This intersection of these ideas in an online learning situation provides the foundation for our work.

The FOLC is a theoretical and conceptual ideal of a problem-based learning (PBL) environment. The infrastructure of the learning environment is situated on the theoretical basis of the Fully Online Learning Community Model (FOLC) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yk1kVbMfbXE>. In general, the FOLC Model integrates elements of more foundational theories guiding practice in distance and online education, including the Theory of Transactional Distance (TTD) (Moore, 1993), and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010). The CoI framework, in particular, recognizes three presences essential to supporting distance education: Social Presence, Teaching Presence, and Cognitive Presence. As a result, “learning is subsumed by and subordinate to communal belonging” and “critical thinking is best developed through becoming a part of a community that appreciates and values critical thinking (Trninic et al, p. 622). Specifically, the DM strategy is used to increase social presence, thus it can be considered a contributing factor to increased social presence in online learning communities. Further to this, the PBL approach facilitates dialogue and group problem-solving, and the DM technique can be used as a way to develop relationships amongst students. In this way, the affective sharing is a component of effective collaboration, risk-taking, and developing divergent solutions to problems. As students know more about each others’ lives outside of class, they create more opportunities to use the personality characteristics of individuals more effectively in group situations.

Central to the model are four key elements.

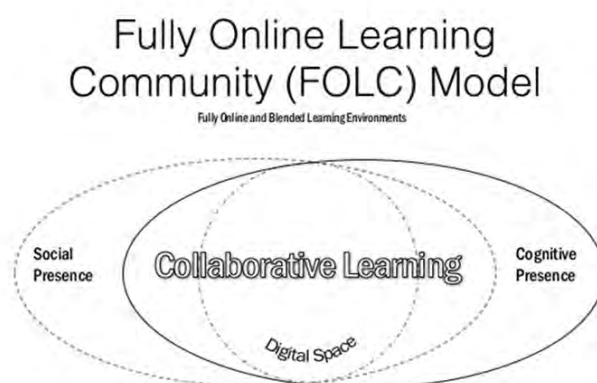


Figure 1: The FOLC Model (Van Oostveen et al, 2016)

First, the community is centred on collaborative work within a variety of digital spaces. In other words, the community exists within class time and space (eg Adobe connect or other web based video conferencing tool), but it also extends to relationships and discussions that occur outside of class time, through the connections that students make by social media, facebook, twitter, Instagram, or other social media tool. Social media posts were not used as data for the purposes of this research, however, students did make reference to using social media outside of class to connect with classmates and develop personal relationships. All course work is designed with collaboration in mind, and disruption and conflict are expected as part of the process. Counterintuitive to traditional teacher-led classes, this model requires community members to be full contributors, active self-directed learners who bring their own lived experience as adults to the digital space. In this way, the online class is co-designed and co-created by students and teachers together, it is a fluid space within which negotiation and teamwork become key.

The second pedagogical foundation for this paper rests is that of Problem Based Learning. We believe that this orientation, towards a learner-centred and problem-centred approach, allows for a social constructivist approach to learning, and provides a model of practices for organizations and institutions to develop and cultivate digital competencies in students or employees. PBL as situated in the FOLC model has several key

features including 1. A focus on complex real-world situations that have no one 'right' answer; 2. Students work in teams to confront the problem, to identify learning gaps, and to develop viable solutions; 3. Students gain new information through self-directed learning; 4. Instructors act as facilitators; 5. Problems lead to the development of problem-solving capabilities (Savin -Baden (2007).

The FOLC model and its emphasis on PBL aligns well with learning outcomes as indicated by several sources, namely the skills and competencies students require for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. There exist common ideals of what 21st century competencies are desired by (international and local) economic and government organizations such as the World Economic Forum (2016), the Conference Board of Canada (2016) and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2016) and e-learning (2015). All of these sources recommend an increased emphasis on skill development in complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. These recommendations match a list of best practice principles for online learning, including group collaboration; active learning; active participation; knowledge construction; learner-centred pedagogies; meaning-making discourse; and higher level thinking, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of real-world problems.

Clearly, one identifying and unique feature is the celebration of disruption. In order to allow for the development of creativity and criticality, is important to strive for learning communities rather than conserving communities.

"Learning communities (such as the science community) aim to expand the collective knowledge of the group. Conserving communities (such as the medieval church in Europe) aim to perpetuate and protect an established system of beliefs. Collins (1998) advocated for shifting school communities from conserving communities towards learning communities, as students not only develop understandings through participation in the knowledge-construction process, but also because they "learn how to learn." We agree and support a view of critical thinking as a habit developed through communal practice." (Trninic, 2018, p. 622)

Further, a third series of elements that support this work include arts-based qualitative inquiry and pedagogy (Brearley, 2000) the role of creativity in an academic context Barone (2006), and critical reflective practice (Griffin, 2003). Davis (2012) argues that our pedagogy must change, that it isn't enough to simply add technology on to our already existing practices; we must infuse it throughout, just as it is fully integrated into the daily experiences of individual students and teachers. She reiterates that "teaching with technology is not just about how to use the hardware and the software, but is also very much about people, processes and a range of different interactions" (p. 149).

In relation to the theoretical background and purpose of investigating Digital Moments, this project aims to measure the affective impact that this strategy has on the social presence in the online learning community. Thus, the primary research questions are:

1. What are student perceptions of the impact of the Digital Moments strategy on their learning experiences and
2. How does this practice of weekly sharing of Digital Moments create an engaging creative community.
3. How does the FOLC model facilitate the development of a learning community, within which creative and critical thinking emerge?
4. How does the interdependence of social presence and cognitive presence become stronger through the use of Digital Moments.

3. Rationale for case study methodology

This research was a mixed methods approach using survey data, participant comments, instructor field notes and class recordings in order to discern multiple corroborative sources of data to ascertain the effectiveness of the DM pedagogical strategy. The work consisted of three phases (a) implementing Digital Moments in an online class, (b) using a 7 point Likert style survey to ascertain effectiveness of DM's and (c) data analysis of class recordings, survey data, instructor's field notes and Adobe chat room notes. Merriam (1998) states that there are four major features that characterize a qualitative case study. First, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed. Individual cases in this study focused on the meaning that the subjects have placed on selecting and sharing their weekly Digital Moments. Second, the researcher was the major instrument of data collection and analysis. Third, this qualitative research involved field work, which in this study entailed class recordings and direct/indirect observation. Fourth, this qualitative research used

inductive strategies. In this work, the research applied existing models of online learning using TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) to the subjects in order to broaden our understanding of how engaging online communities have an impact on learning. Finally, Merriam (1998) believes that the product of a qualitative research study is richly descriptive. This researcher used learners' stories to describe the process of developing meaningful learning and human relationships online.

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Phase 1 digital moments implementation

This was a pilot project to implement a new digital teaching strategy, and it occurred over two terms of teaching two graduate online courses entitled "Authentic Assessment" and "Critical and Reflective Practice in Education." The total number of individuals in both courses was 54, the total number surveyed was 47, and 25 students responded. Participants in the implementation phase were 54 graduate students, and the instructor was an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education. Classes met once a week for four hours over a twelve week period in the fall/winter terms. Anecdotal reflections from students recorded in Blackboard chat rooms, audio recordings of Adobe classes, and journal notes from the professor were used to provide additional qualitative data.

3.1.2 Phase 2 participants

The total number of students enrolled in the two graduate courses was 54. Of these, a population of 47 students were sent an online survey that asked 12 questions with responses based on a Likert- 7 point scale (where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, and 7=Strongly Agree). Of the 47 students sent the survey, 25 responses were received which indicated a 53% response rate. Gender of participants was noted with a 1 or 2 (Female/Male), with 21 participants identifying as female and 4 identifying as male. Student participants in the study gave informed consent and were given permission to withdraw from the project at any time. Their participation in the research was not related to their academic grades in the class, and the research survey was designed and data collected by a second researcher who was not the course instructor.

3.2 Data analysis

The Likert Scale survey, based on a Likert- 7 point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Agree, and 7=Strongly Agree. The 25 participants answered an online survey to provide responses for each of the 12 questions. Responses for each question were averaged numerically to result in an average score (1-7) for each of the twelve questions. The two open-ended questions relating to benefits and challenges of *Digital Moments* were coded qualitatively and analyzed along with instructor field notes from classes to determine themes, and a word search of the responses was also performed for keywords "community," "social presence" and "connections".

4. Data

The numerical average of responses to each of the 12 questions is indicated here, with 1 being correlated to a Strongly Disagree response and 7 being correlated with a Strongly Agree response. These average scores are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Attitudes toward the use of digital moments (n=25)

Items	Mean (SD)	% Agree ¹	% Disagree ²
I felt Digital Moments were conducted in a respectful way.	6.8 (0.4)	92%	0%
Digital Moments created a greater sense of community for me.	6.6 (0.7)	100%	0%
I felt safe when participating in Digital Moments.	6.6 (0.6)	96%	0%
The expectations of participating in Digital Moments were clear to me.	6.5 (0.8)	96%	0%
Digital Moments improved connections with my peers in class.	6.4 (0.9)	92%	0%
Using Digital Moments is an effective teaching strategy in online learning environments.	6.2 (1.3)	92%	4%
Digital Moments energized me at the start of the class.	5.9 (1.4)	88%	4%
Digital Moments made the class engaging for me.	5.8 (1.5)	84%	8%
Digital Moments supported my overall learning experience.	5.7 (1.4)	88%	8%
Digital Moments increased my motivation in class.	5.2 (1.7)	64%	12%
Digital Moments encouraged me to take risks in my learning.	5.0 (1.5)	72%	12%
Digital Moments improved connections with my peers outside of class.	4.8 (1.8)	52%	20%

¹Includes Somewhat Agree, Agree and Strongly Agree responses

²Includes Somewhat Disagree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree responses

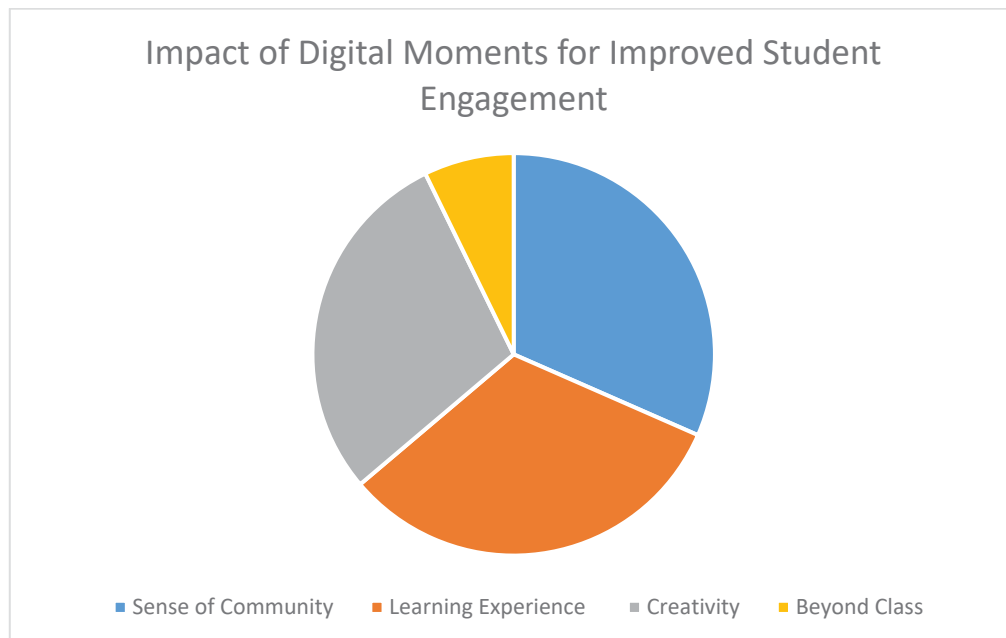


Table 2: Sample student reactions to digital moments (n=19)

It's so emotional
At the beginning I was so nervous and kind of cynical, so I thought "ok here we go" but now I really look forward to finding my own Digital Moment for the week and seeing everyone else's
I loved it!
I never thought I would get to know people online so easily
Doing this every week makes me actually ask myself how I am doing
I like guessing who puts what in their Digital Moment
I just started using this strategy with my own class and they loved it! Grades 5-6 students really opened up and I used it on the smart-board
This is a great way to get students to express how they feel without words
I think it helps to decrease the kind of stereotyping that you can get when you meet people face to face
It's really weird finally meeting classmates face to face and feeling like you already know them super well
When I used it with my own class it really helped me as a teacher to track where the kids were at
It's a safe way to express how you are feeling inside, sometimes I think technology is less personal but this was really personal
I actually shared with my peers, which I usually don't do in face to face settings
I found it interesting that you got to know people's sense of humour, without any real cues like you would get in a f2f environment, like body language
My friends reached out to me on weeks when I was struggling
It levelled the field for me as the teachers did it too, so we could see who they were as people, which made me want to contribute more
Really valuable! Best course I've taken in this degree
One week my Digital Moment was about a family member who had died, but she really had inspired me to go back to school so, it was really good to share it with the group
I am amazed at how well I got to know my colleagues in this class; I've had some awful online experiences and this was a refreshing change

5. Analysis: Overview

This survey data based on responses by 25 of 47 graduate students participating in 2 online courses reports on the results of 12 questions that were numerically rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The questions were each framed positively, and as a result, agreement of a positive impact of Digital Moments would result in a higher score. It is interesting to note that the average of all 12 questions was a score of 5.95/7, indicating that 85% of participants found a positive impact of Digital Moments on creating community.

Researchers triangulated data from multiple sources including survey answers, students comments, class recordings and instructor's field notes.

An analysis of the answers to the additional open-ended survey questions of 1. What were the benefits of using Digital Moments if any? and 2. What were the challenges of using Digital Moments if any? resulted in the following themes being coded and identified:

(a) the impact of developing social relationships in online classes, (b) the role of creativity as an element of an engaging online community, (c) teacher-learner role shifts in online spaces, (d) the de-valuing and re-valuing of types of knowledge representation using creative qualitative pedagogies, and (e) the value of disruption in creative critical thought and (f) the importance of revisiting and reshaping notions of failure as a means of redirection and innovation.

Data resulting from the 12 question survey was reviewed with significant positive results indicating that overall student responses demonstrated a positive impact on community building and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the class. For example, 92 % of participants indicated that the Digital Moments Strategy was conducted respectfully. Qualitative comments also indicated that students had clear expectations about their right to pass, that there was no academic penalty or value for participating in the activity, and they felt safe, and 96% of participants expressed a feeling of safety. It is interesting to note that fully 100 percent of students indicated that a greater sense of community was built through the investment of time up front doing Digital Moments at the beginning of each class. Those participants who were nearing the completion of their degrees, who had the majority of courses completed, spoke clearly about the fact that this was the first course where they had gotten to know classmates. It was evident that while they had been in other courses with the same

individuals, they did not know them well, and in previous courses, the only interaction had been during class time. With no group assignments, students felt that in other courses it was difficult to develop interpersonal relationships. One student remarked that “this was the first time I actually learned more about my colleagues, so I felt more encouraged to speak out in class”. Another participant whose first language was not English, expressed that he felt encouraged to speak more often, due to the fact he knew classmates more intimately and they also knew that he found it challenging to speak up in class.

An interesting comment from a student who was a public school educator, adopted the strategy to use with her own students, and as her school moved to an online setting during the pandemic, she remarked at how effective it had been with elementary age students. Having used the strategy prior to the pandemic, it was a smooth transition for her own students and it became a ubiquitous way to continue building her class community while teaching online. Further to this, another participant who was an administrator in a secondary school remarked that he had used the strategy with faculty who were teaching online for the first time, and it served as a useful icebreaker to maintain relationships between faculty who no longer met face to face. He remarked that this was a low key strategy to make technology and online teaching more accessible and less threatening for educators new to online teaching, and he had better communication with teachers and was able to support them in more meaningful ways as they began online pedagogy, some for the first time.

The relationships between students were enriched, as numerous participants felt they could “reach out to peers better” when struggling with course material, assignments, or with technology. They felt that because the course instructor also participated, the Digital Moments strategy increased the approachability and relatability of the professor. Interpersonal connections, within a professional context were a key component of the class, and professional boundaries were respected. In only one case, a student remarked that on some days they felt it was unnecessary to do Digital Moments, that at times it took up too much class time and “felt too much like a therapy session”. This feedback was important, as one of the challenges of using Digital Moments is to keep it within the context of the learning experience. For example, the students read several conference presentations and proceedings that were previously published about the Digital Moments strategy. In this way, they were provided with some evidence of how it had worked in a previous undergraduate online course taught by the same professor.

Results from the survey data indicated clearly that over 90 % of participants felt that the DM strategy increased the sense of community within the online course. Students remarked that they looked forward to guessing each person’s Digital Moment, and they often reflected during the week prior to class about which image they would share. This may indicate that they have increased reflective time about the cognitive elements of the course, while reflecting on the community building strategy.

Over 80 % of participants indicated that the strategy increased student engagement, while 64% responded that using class time for DMs increased their motivation. While this number is significantly lower, it is important to note that DMs may not have a large impact on student motivation, perhaps because they are already motivated to take a course, or because motivation for an elective course such as this is intrinsic. In addition, one student who self-identified as “not really artsy – I’m more task-oriented” expressed some cynicism about the strategy, and whether it had any value to his learning. This same student stated that he preferred a more traditional format, where the professor uses “top down lecture style teaching – I mean I paid for the course and you deliver it to us”, so the DM strategy did not engage him enough. The digital learning space he experienced in the past, and the one he himself created for his own students as an online teacher, was one where students produced a “right” answer, a “correct” assignment and a “good” grade. Creative learning spaces challenged him, but over the weeks in the course, he began to accept graduate level learning as a process, without a specifically defined end point.

A full 72 percent of students indicated that the strategy enabled them to take more risks in class, and interestingly only 52% of students mentioned connecting outside of class. This may be due to other time demands, as most of the students were working full time as educators or nurses while taking the course in the evenings. Some indicated that they had family commitments, and many shared images of their children and spouses, which gave colleagues a richer picture of the time commitments of each student. This in turn, increased the quality of interpersonal relationships between adults who were experiencing similar life contexts and personal obligations. Students often commented that it was a challenge to manage their time, and that while they enjoyed DMs, they still needed to have clear expectations for assignments and grades in the course, and

that the “end grade” reflected not on the community feeling, but on the assignments and end products they submitted for grading.

Overall, students indicated that the benefits of using DMs as a community building strategy included, but were not limited to, better social relationships, greater interpersonal support in class, more meaningful interactions with colleagues, a more positive course environment, and a greater sense of curiosity about the role of creativity in their learning process. Further benefits were expressed by participants in the ways they felt safe to be assessed and evaluated by the professor, the right to “have a voice” in class, the “sense of ease” between colleagues and the encouragement to “take more risks in my learning and what I discuss with peers”. Further to this, when disruption or disagreement occurred, students indicated that they were using interpersonal skills to disagree respectfully, to negotiate assignment due dates and assignment values, and to request extensions for assignments.

Some of the challenges indicated by students were the length of class time used each day to share, the fact that not all students participated, the voluntary nature of the strategy and the lack of grades attached to the process. They indicated that some types of sharing were “too personal and more like a counselling session”, so maintaining professional boundaries while sharing personal data was a balancing act and an important line to protect.

Clearly, the implementation and acceptance of arts-based and creative assessment tools meant a significant ‘unlearning’ and ‘revaluing’ what it meant to demonstrate one’s knowledge. It became important to unpack how each learner had developed their values about the importance or lack of importance of marks and grades versus the value of the learning process itself. Students began to see how the development of friendships and simple human qualities like trust, caring and compassion were the real foundation for creating meaningful learning experiences. It also helped them to begin to trust themselves; they began to believe there was an authentic self in each learner who could choose which direction to go, define tasks that were personally and professionally relevant, and which were best left for others to tackle.

By using Digital Moments, where there is no “correct” human response, we created the kinds of authentic relationships in the learning community that offer a balance of challenge and support, and we are able to disrupt students’ notions of the importance of learning versus the importance of grades. As Eisner (1997) states, what we count, counts, and students significantly repositioned their views on the importance of grades, rather than the importance of deep learning, creativity and critical thought processes.

6. Conclusion

This research demonstrated through mixed method data collection that both quantitative and qualitative results showed Digital Moments had a positive impact on the quality of the online learning community. More specifically, the Digital Moments strategy was a significant factor in increasing social presence, a key element in the Fully Online Learning Community Model (FOLC).

This paper has discussed in detail how Digital Moments as a pedagogical strategy contributes to the development of meaningful, co-created online learning spaces, and the Fully Online Learning Community model can be effectively used to develop critical and creative online learning environments. By encouraging the interaction of social presence and cognitive presence through the use of Digital Moments, participants indicated that they experienced increased social presence within a PBL -FOLC model, and this had an overall positive effect on the quality of the online learning community. By engaging students in Digital Moments, the author created a safe learning space wherein teacher-learner roles shifted, learning became a student-centred adventure, and multiple learning outcomes became plausible. Learners were supported by pedagogical approaches such as problem-based learning that include, but are not limited to, the use of Digital Moments to create social presence.

It is important to note that DMs do not work for all students, and may not work in all subject areas. The students here were in a Faculty of Education, and it is possible that in areas of study (eg engineering or medicine) that are heavily content-oriented, DMs may not be as positively perceived by students. In addition, the predilection of some instructors to measure knowledge using tests and exams may predispose the instructor to perceive that they cannot “waste time” on affective or creative processes. However, some medical schools are moving towards a greater use of PBL and more group processes in diagnostic dialogue. Thus, student and instructor

willingness to adopt and fully invest in DMs may be more effectively used in courses and programs where process is valued more than product. In addition, the role of “failure” may be perceived differently in merit-based programs or courses where admission to the profession is highly competitive, as such, students may be less willing to take risks or be creative in case it has a deleterious effect on their grades and career outcomes.

Online instructors are tasked with the challenge to develop digital communities with the kind of social capital and presence to engage students, decrease attrition and improve learning outcomes. Badge, Saunders and Cann (2012) acknowledge that students’ online attention is focussed on these other sites with high activity rates, and that “engagement is more than participation, it requires emotion and sense-making as well as activity, these social networks are rapidly moving beyond their original purpose and are inevitably becoming part of the learner experience” (p. 2). While we may be aware of institutional barriers or traditional models of learning, the digital world demands that we adapt and evolve, using creative, socially constructivist and community-based approaches to learning. This research indicates that pedagogical strategies such as Digital Moments can have a significant effect on student engagement, and the concomitant improvement in the quality of the learning community. Although Vetrano attests that “education is tied up so tightly in its own web of red tape and bureaucracy that real learning, the rich and deep learning that needs to be there, often, struggles hard to escape” (2010, p. 77), it is imperative that digital educators begin to explore arts-based strategies to engage and challenge online students. Cousins and Bissar affirm, “What stories can be told about the fast-changing world of higher education, and what can we learn from them? Adapting to new situations, conquering fears and overcoming obstacles are familiar storylines, with particular relevance for university lecturers having to introduce new technologies in their working practices.” (2012, p. 1). This examination of the Digital Moments strategy has been an effective way to address these concerns raised by many higher education professors moving to an online teaching and learning space.

As such, using arts-based strategies such as Digital Moments can create a community of learners who take risks and support one another, thereby coming up with original thoughts and ideas that they may never have come to by taking a traditional “distance education” course where learners often feel isolated or alone. Creative and critical online communities can develop with intentional and purposive design, using collaborative processes to disrupt old ideas, and make room for innovation and new direction. It is entirely possible, and even desirable, that a group of distinct individuals whose learning lenses are geographically and culturally diverse, can evolve into a close-knit community of learners where the playing field is levelled and the traditional roles of teacher and learner become imperceptible. A fully democratic and innovative online class provides a digital space for creative critical thought to emerge. This research provides an examination of the use of Digital Moments through a FOLC, and we argue that is a highly useful pedagogical tool that can be implemented to attain the goal of improved social presence and cognitive presence in creative critical online learning communities.

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