Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students in Open and/or Online Learning Environments: A Research Symposium

International Students' Perspectives: Effective Practices and Strategies to Support Online Learning and Teaching

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Abstract

International students and their instructors had to pivot their courses from in-person sessions to virtual platforms, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, Chinese international students have coped with more challenges than domestic students, in terms of language practice, academic performance, and life expectations. This practice-based paper drew from the learning experiences of a group of Chinese international students. Using the Community of Inquiry framework, we examined the online learning strategies and practices that were effective. More specifically, the

tasks of peer-review and online poster presentation provided scaffolded experiences and opportunities to practice speaking, while leaving a record of comments for future reference. Additionally, these activities provided some relief from the stresses of the pandemic. The paper provides implications for post-secondary instructors who teach culturally and linguistically diverse students in open and online environments.

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many academic institutions around the world pivoted their courses from in-person sessions to virtual platforms. This sudden transition provided both benefits and challenges to international students. The objective of this project was to demonstrate the learning of five international students and their instructor. The students felt that the online learning in their graduate course supported their academic development as culturally and linguistically diverse students, and could also be applied to the teaching of other such students. Using the Community of Inquiry framework, they examined the online learning strategies and teaching practices that were effective. The question that guided this practical inquiry was: Which elements of the Community of Inquiry framework were evident in the emergency online teaching during our course, and why did we feel they were effective?
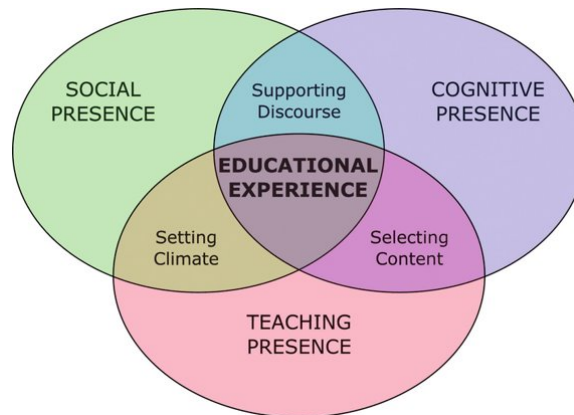
Literature Review

Canada's international student population tripled over the past decade to 642,000 in 2019, and Canada has become the third most attractive study-abroad country (EI-Assal, 2020). International students hold high aspirations for their educational investments; therefore, it is significant to understand how effective post-secondary teaching can support worthwhile academic performances. Tweedie and Kim (2016) identified that international students have fewer opportunities for authentic social interactions than local students. The semi-quarantine lifestyle during the pandemic intensified their feelings of isolation. International students "tended to be reticent in many of their courses" (Morita, 2004, p. 586), so it would not be difficult to imagine how they may cope with unexpected online learning. Lei (2021) pointed out that both formal classroom settings and informal contexts pose challenges for international students, so scaffolded experiences in online learning are especially important. We argue that it is worth examining our past practices, with the hope that provides implications to better accommodate the needs of international students.

Theoretical Framework

According to Garrison et al. (1999), teachers and students are the main social actors in the process of learning and teaching. To describe this process, they created the Community of Inquiry framework (as shown in Figure 1). Community of Inquiry presumes that learning occurs within the community through the interaction of three essential and interdependent elements: cognitive, social, and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 1999).

Figure 1
Community of Inquiry Framework (based on Garrison et al., 1999)

SOCIAL PRESENCE

COGNITIVE PRESENCE

Supporting Discourse

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Setting Climate

Selecting Content

TEACHING PRESENCE

Cognitive presence is "the extent to which participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison et al., p. 89). It is a vital element in critical thinking, and serves as a solid base for achieving academic success in higher education. How cognitive presence is created and sustained in a community of inquiry partly depends on how communication is restricted or encouraged by the medium of instruction (Garrison et al., 1999). In addition, cognitive presence is necessitated by the engagement of the whole community of students and their instructor.

Social presence is "the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships, by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, 2009, p. 352). It directly contributes to the success of educational experience, and functions as a support for cognitive presence. High levels of social presence, accompanied by high degrees of commitment and participation, are necessary for the development of higher-order thinking skills and collaborative work, which can significantly nurture cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 1999). Social presence is created through the interactions among students and instructors.

Teaching presence is "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2019, p. 5). It has two main functions: the design of the classroom experience and the facilitation, which is a shared responsibility among the instructor and all students. This element plays a pivotal role in supporting a social and cognitive presence for the ultimate goal of realizing educational achievement. An effective teaching presence can establish a critical community of inquiry through active discourse and knowledge construction.

In a collaborative community of inquiry, social presence is amplified. When appropriate, teaching presence is integrated into social presence, and a high degree of cognitive presence can be expected, which would yield a productive critical inquiry (Garrison et al., 1999). In this paper, we examined how all three presences were reflected in our online learning and teaching practices.

Online Educational Experience

It was back in March 2020, and the COVID-19 situation in Canada continued to deteriorate. During an on-campus class on March 12, our instructor informed us of the realistic potential of a

transition to online learning and assured us that we could still achieve quality learning outcomes with good preparation. The next day, our campus was closed and immediately, our course moved online. As we delved into our online learning journey, we found that the three core elements of Community of Inquiry were obviously present in our teaching and learning in our course.

Social Presence

We all felt a strong social presence in online learning, partially due to our time in face-to-face classes, and partially due to aspects of the online learning. Some of us had already known each other before the enrollment of the course. As we speak the same first language and come from the same cultural background, we could better understand each other's confusion, concerns, as well as aspirations, with regard to pursuing study, work, and life in a foreign country, especially during that time of uncertainty. Early on, we agreed to set up a "WeChat" chat group, and it became the place of open communication for us to exchange information, express emotions and connect ideas, especially after we moved online. Articulating ourselves in an academic context, while facing the camera in a language other than our mother tongue can be difficult, yet we could express ourselves in a risk-free environment, because we trusted each other and shared the common aim of improving our speaking proficiency. We were actively involved in the class, by stating our opinion aloud, while respecting others' different opinions. This affirming and mutual trustful atmosphere we created certainly increased our confidence of speaking and built more resilience among us during the pivot to online learning.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence in our course involved a focus on critical thinking and developing knowledge around research and our field of study. The learning tasks allowed us to pursue a topic of interest, learning how to argue for its importance, and research what was known about the topic. One of the learning tasks required us to design and deliver an online poster presentation. We also uploaded pre-recorded videos introducing our research topics to the course shell. Faculty members and students' own supervisors were invited to engage in the online discussion forums by posing questions and making comments which could be retrieved for later reference. To complete this task, we needed to think and reflect continuously to make a poster, and revise it, based on the insights and feedback we received. This activity not only allowed us to strengthen our oral presenting skills, but also challenged us to thinking critically about our topic, and opened a window to gain new and different perspectives.

Teaching Presence

Teaching presence was evident in the combination of both asynchronous and synchronous learning tasks. Prior to our online learning, our instructor discussed with us about the similarities and differences of teaching methods between China and Canada. When we pivoted to online, we managed to take advantage of the benefits of both cultures. Additionally, as our instructor had encouraged us to make full use of our language repertoires, we could actively engage in virtual classroom discussions. For instance, we were able to take notes by using code-switching and translanguaging strategies, and reference literature in multiple languages. Not only did we

learn through weekly real-time online sessions, but we also participated in asynchronous discussion forums. All of these interactions provided us with a strong sense of a teaching presence.

Online learning offers convenience and flexibilities; however, it can be challenging, especially during a global health emergency. Compared with face-to-face classes, we did not have to spend time on commuting, which could take some of us nearly 3 hours. This is particularly important for students who need to fulfill their parental duties and other family-related responsibilities. On the other hand, engaging in online discussion forums gave us the opportunity to learn and to get involved in class content on our own schedule. Online learning has various challenges (e.g., interruption by the children, unstable Internet connections, or technical issues). Nevertheless, the overall benefits still outweighed the drawbacks, because of the various online learning experiences and activities in this course. Through it all, we managed to maintain deeper-level conversations and build meaningful connections with each other. We also improved our time-management and problem-solving skills through writing, revising, and completing our final assignments in a more efficient way. Most importantly, we learned how to work and cooperate with each other constructively in remote learning.

Practices and Strategies to Support Online Learning and Teaching

On today's postsecondary campus, instructors are quite often inspired, and challenged, when facing culturally and linguistically diverse students. It is important that they incorporate sound pedagogies into actual classroom practices. In order to create an inviting, inclusive, and diverse learning and teaching space, instructors and students should be committed to constructing a community of belonging. We would argue that assigning technology and/or collaboration informed assignments can promote better and deeper understanding among students through exchange of thoughts and genuine connections. We argue that information sharing about academic and professional opportunities within a community of inquiry enhances international students' learning experiences.

At the end of our course, the instructor initiated and invited us to participate in a journal article publication project. We were able to learn how to work as a team and familiarize ourselves with the entire publication process. Most importantly, we had an unforgettable experience of collaborating with each other to publish a literature review paper based on our final assignments, which greatly fostered community bonds and group cohesion. Although this collaboration was technically not part of our course, it was a perfect example of how instructors can help international student realize their academic achievements. While some international students are eager to make their hard work recognized in academia, they may have to overcome certain obstacles, as they might have limited, or no experience in publishing papers. Nearly one year after our course, we successfully collaborated again, and presented at the symposium together with the guidance of our instructor. We contend that the additional support and assistance from a professor, in terms of publication and conference, play a pivotal role in boosting international students' academic progress and study satisfaction.

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International Students' Perspective

Effective Practices and Strategies to Support Online Learning and Teaching

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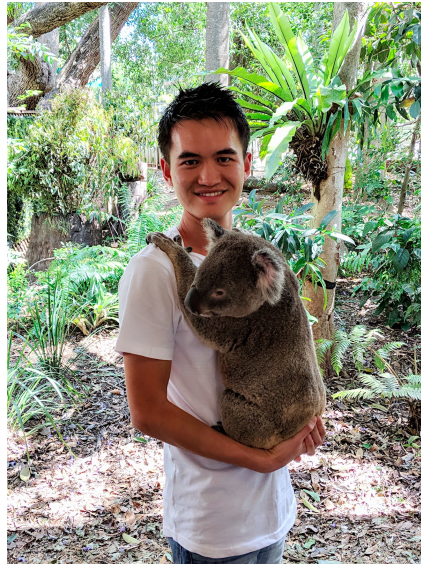Cong Luo, Qiuchen Li, Yue Ma, Roswita Dressler

June ꓳ , ꝏoꓳ

- In person classes pivoted to virtual platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic

- Culturally and linguistically diverse international Students and their instructors were among those who had to pivot

- We, as Chinese international students, have coped with challenges in terms of language practice, academic performance, and life expectations

- Here we examine our learning and provide our perspective

- Canada has become the third most attractive study abroad country (EI-Assal, 2020).

- International students perceive they have fewer opportunities for authentic social interactions than local students (Tweedie & Kim, 2016)

- International students "tended to be reticent in many of their courses" (Morita, 2004, p. 586).

- Both formal classroom settings and other contexts might pose challenges for international students (Lei, 2021).

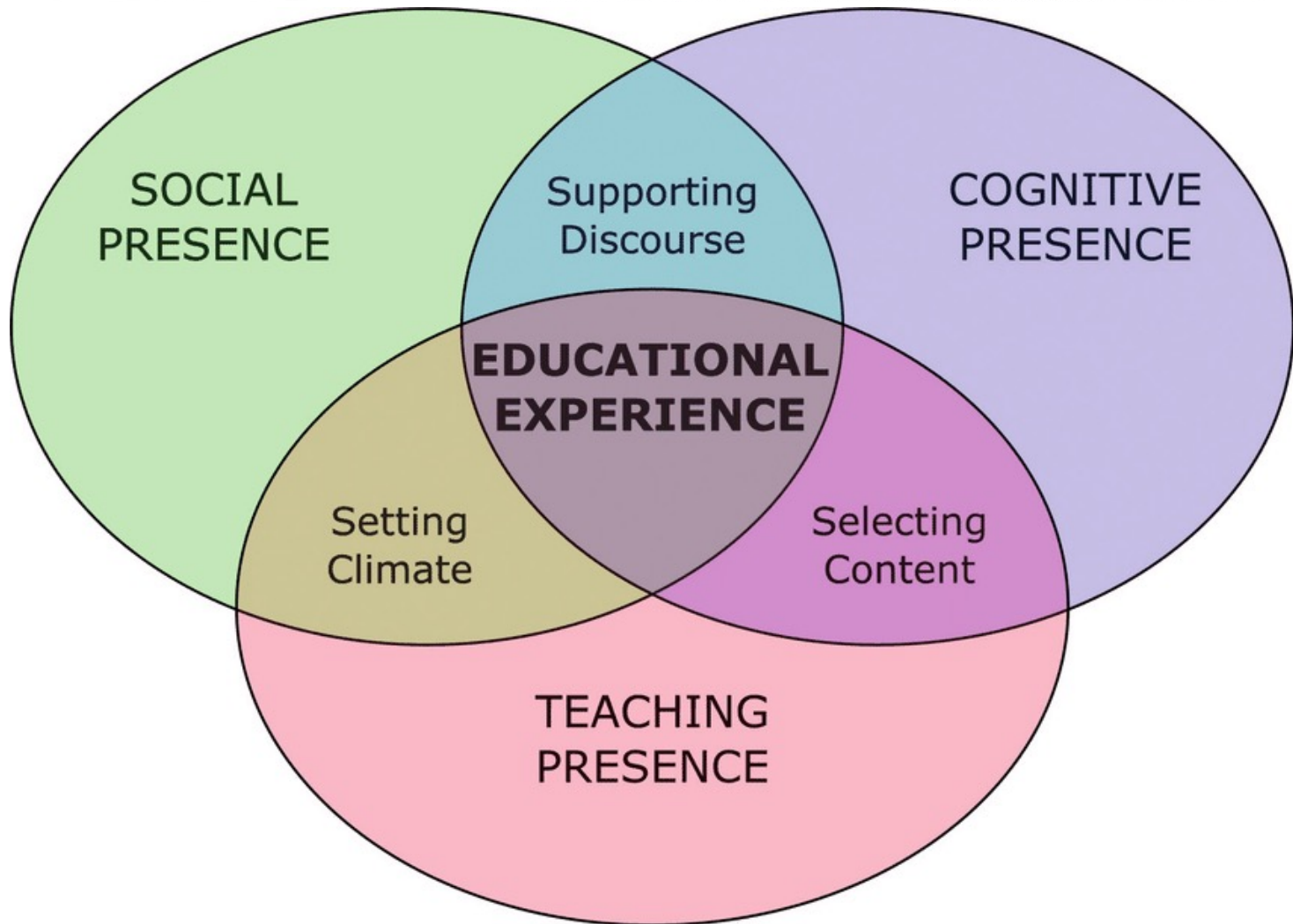Jie Guo

Cong Luo
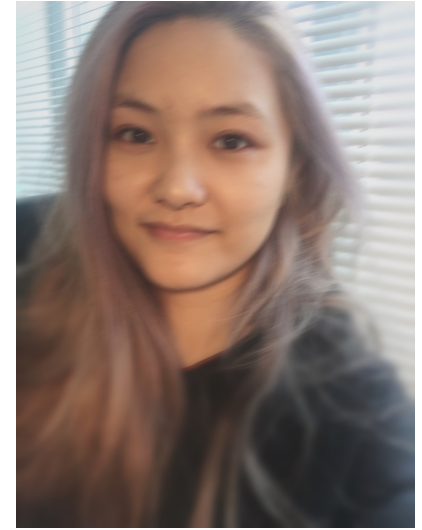
Tian Lei

Yue Ma

Qiuchen Li

Roswita Dressler, instructor

Methodology

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (1999). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The internet and higher education*, *2*(2-3), 87-105.

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Social presence

- Background
  - some knew each other before the course
  - some might speak the same first language, better understanding of each other when face challenges
  - snack sharing break (before online teaching)
- Online
  - using "WeChat" group & email (emotional expression, open communication)

Supporting discourses as a factor of social and cognitive presence

- collaborative tasks including
  - online peer review
  - poster presentation
  - publication (fostering group cohesion)

Cognitive presence

- online poster presentation

- collaborative journal article publication

Selecting content as a factor of cognitive and teaching presence

- Guests commenting on online poster presentation

- peer-review each other's papers

Teaching presence

- Experienced online instructor
- Other faculty invited to participate in learning process
- instructional management, building understanding, and direct instruction.

Setting climate as a factor of cognitive and teaching presence

- Climate of co-construction of knowledge

Our educational experience online

➢ Online learning offers convenience and flexibility, it can be limited in many ways.

➢ It certainly had its challenging parts yet brought various possibilities.

➢ We managed to maintain effective (deeper level) conversation and build meaningful connections.
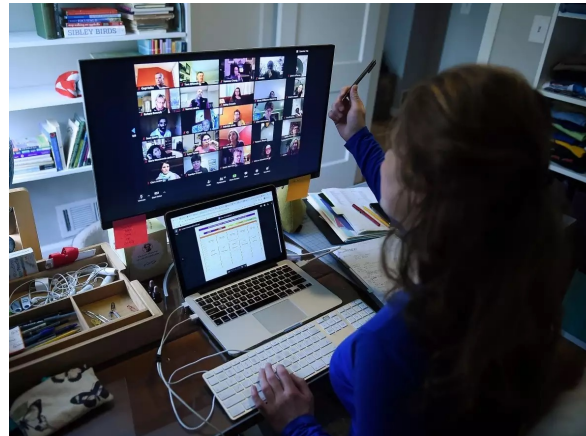
➢ We improved our time management and problem-solving skills

➢ We learned how to cooperate with each other in remote learning.

- **Practices and strategies to support online learning and teaching**

  ❖ Create an inviting, inclusive, and diverse learning and teaching space.

  ❖ Incorporate culturally appropriate/respectful pedagogies into actual teaching practice.

  ❖ Encourage students to make full use of their language repertoires and actively engage in virtual classroom discussions.

  ❖ Assign technology and/or collaboration informed assignments.

  ❖ Promote better and deeper understanding among students through exchange of thoughts and genuine connection.

  ❖ Encourage information sharing in terms of academic/professional opportunities.

  ❖ Collaborate with the students to publish papers and attend conferences.

谢谢！Thank you! Merci!