



Conceptualizing effective feedback practice through an online community of inquiry



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ABSTRACT

This study applied Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) community of inquiry (CoI) framework to teacher learning by designing and investigating online participatory practice in which 14 prospective teachers (PT) were engaged in collectively evaluating and reconstructing their written feedback in their teaching, cognitive, and social presences. Data included the PTs' action logs in the three presences, their observation notes on fellow teachers' feedback practice, their feedback on students' different versions of texts, and transcripts of discussion forums and chat rooms. Results showed that in an online teacher learning community, the teaching presence reinforced and sustained the cognitive and social presences in the virtual community as the PTs learned to serve as subject matter experts. Through these three presences, the PTs provided micro- and macro-level feedback and observed each other's practices in the teaching presence. An online participatory practice allowed the PTs to recognize problems in feedback practice and develop principles of effective written feedback through collaborative efforts. Practical implications and useful functionalities of an online system for teacher learning were also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Teachers' written feedback plays a significant role in improving students' writing and supporting their text development. Students often require feedback from a knowledge authority so they can learn how to develop their writing skills, in order to produce well-structured and grammatically correct essays as part of their studies (e.g., Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lockhart & Ng, 1995). To fulfill the role of a knowledge authority, teachers need to work collaboratively as well as individually to continuously evaluate and improve their feedback practice. However, research has indicated that when teachers work face to face with each other, they tend to focus only on their own problems, rather than use the resources of the group to develop deeper and more comprehensive insights (Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Sandholtz, 2002) into effective feedback practice. An online learning platform featuring collaborative technologies may provide a more productive environment for interactive efforts that lead to a better understanding of effective feedback. To explore this possibility, an online system supporting participatory practice was designed in this study as an intervention for preparing prospective teachers (PT) with a means of collaboratively developing principles of effective written feedback.

Unlike face-to-face collaboration, online participatory practice allows teachers to co-construct pedagogical knowledge without time and space constraints while allowing for documentation of their practices in log files. Such synchronous and asynchronous discussions are powerful catalysts (O'Sullivan, Mulligan, & Dooley, 2007) for teachers to collaboratively

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construct what they perceive as effective practices. However, scholars have argued that online social interaction alone may involve only simple social interaction and low-level cognitive engagements, such as venting problems and frustrations (Bangert, 2009; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, 2001; Kanuka, Rourke, & Laflamme, 2007; Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, 2006; Rourke & Kanuka, 2009; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009). To move from low-to high-level cognitive activity that generates integrative solutions to problems, Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) advocate that online social interaction needs to be closely tied to relevant teaching contexts, teaching objectives, and learning progress.

2. Theoretical framework: Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) community of inquiry (Col) model

Garrison et al.'s (2000) Col model can generate a high cognitive level of inquiry for knowledge construction, with the integration of social, technological, and instructional processes. This model features three interdependent presences in an online environment: namely, the teaching, cognitive, and social presence (Fig. 1). The underpinnings of this model are Dewey (1933) collaborative constructivist principles. The teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 5). The cognitive presence refers to the extent to which the participating members are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). The cognitive presence in Fig. 1 reflects the acquisition and application of high-order knowledge, which depends on careful instructional design and support in the teaching presence and an interactive social learning environment in the social presence (Garrison et al., 2001). Garrison (2009) defines the social presence as “the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities” (p. 352).

The interdependent presences in the Col model which focus on reflective inquiry into issues (Garrison & Anderson, 2003) can serve as an appropriate framework for teachers to deepen their pedagogical knowledge of feedback practice in the current study. Through onsite participatory practice in the teaching presence, teachers' knowledge construction through a community of inquiry involves identifying pedagogical problems, exchanging ideas and brainstorming solutions, integrating what teachers have sorted out as the most effective solutions or ideas in the exploration phase, and applying the new knowledge to their own teaching practice in the cognitive presence. These knowledge construction processes do not take place naturally (Garrison et al., 2000) but require shared goals and problems requiring teachers' collaborative efforts (Arnold & Ducate, 2006). When members are actively engaged in a learning community, their interaction in the social presence with others can be nurtured to promote critical inquiry and knowledge construction. The social presence thus facilitates the development of the cognitive presence (Picciano, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009).

The past decade has seen the rapid development of Col in studies of online learning, student adjustment (Cleveland-Innes, Garrison, & Kinsel, 2007; Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2004), sense of community (Shea, 2006), causal relationships (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010), and metacognition (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). Garrison and Arbaugh (2007) have called for more studies to focus on investigating the three presences simultaneously. This call has been answered by surveys to explore how the three presences interact with each other along with student reactions (e.g., Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Boston et al., 2009; Garrison et al., 2010). These surveys show how the three presences correlate with each other, resulting in different levels of learning outcomes and satisfaction. Akyol and Garrison (2008) reported that the three presences significantly influenced student satisfaction with the online learning community, but only the teaching and cognitive

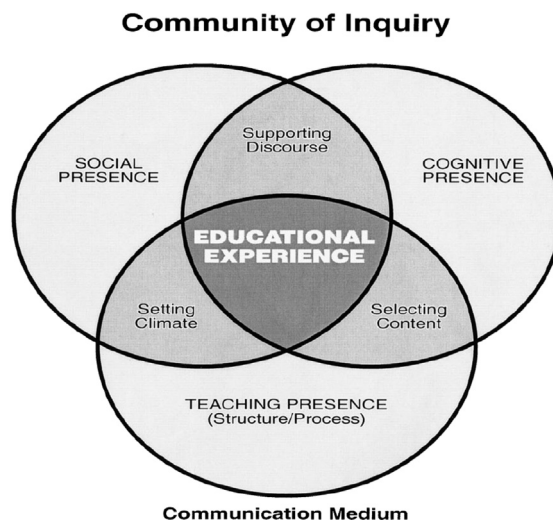


Fig. 1. Three presences in a community of inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000).

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