Negotiating Teaching Presence: Implications for online teaching, course design, and the Community of Inquiry Framework

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Introduction

Some background

Research Questions

1. How do online instructors negotiate their teaching presence in online contexts?

2. What are the constraints and affordances that influence this negotiation?

The "why's"

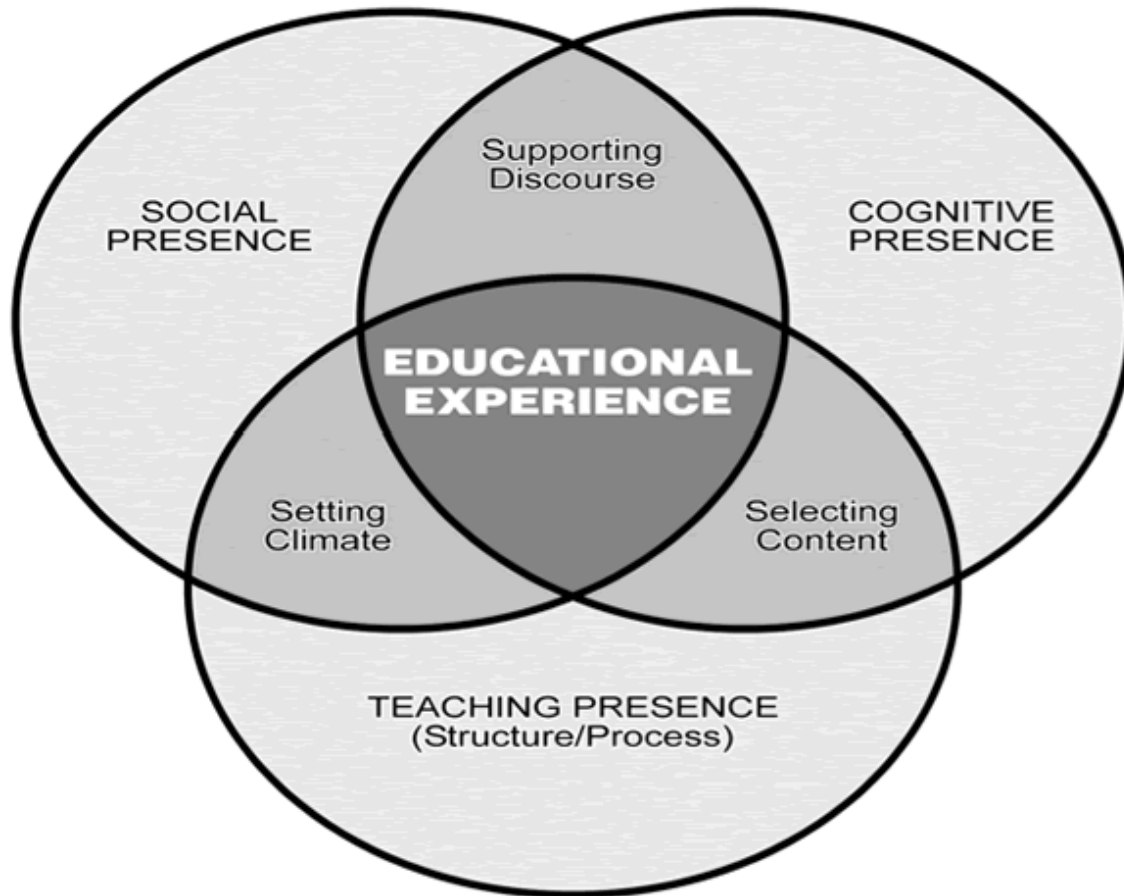- Tsang (2004) and "interactive decisions" that teachers make

Teaching Presence

- "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).

Teaching Presence

- Analytic tool to assist the research process
- Means for instructors to assess, reflect, and make changes to their postings

Community of Inquiry

- Supporting Discourse
- SOCIAL PRESENCE
- COGNITIVE PRESENCE
- EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE
- Setting Climate
- Selecting Content
- TEACHING PRESENCE (Structure/Process)

Communication Medium

Limitations

- Complexity of contexts and mediating factors in which "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" occurs

To summarize…

- Teaching presence research suggests that there are many possible roles and associated behaviours or actions that define online teaching, and these ultimately have an effect on student perceptions and learning. The critical gap in this research is that it doesn't address the decision-making processes that instructors engage in and the reasons for such decisions.

A bit about the methodology

- Adopted Activity Theory as framework
- Multi-case study with cross case analysis (Stake, 2006) as methodology
- Six cases in "international" online contexts

Data

- 2-3 interviews with instructor
- Forum transcripts
- Course documents
- Interviews with program directors
- Interview with co-instructor
- *student course evaluations
- *student questionnaire

Triangulation

- Multiple sources of data
- Minimum 2 sources of evidence for each claim
- Member checking
- Peer debriefing

Contexts

- 1. International Masters program at a Canadian University
- 2. E-learning program in Eastern Europe
- 3. Masters in DE at a South American University

A bit about Activity Theory

- Cultural historical activity theory (AT) (Engeström, 1989, 1999, 2001) provides a way of looking at the complex contexts of online teaching activity and identifying tensions and contradictions that occur between the mediating components of the activity system.
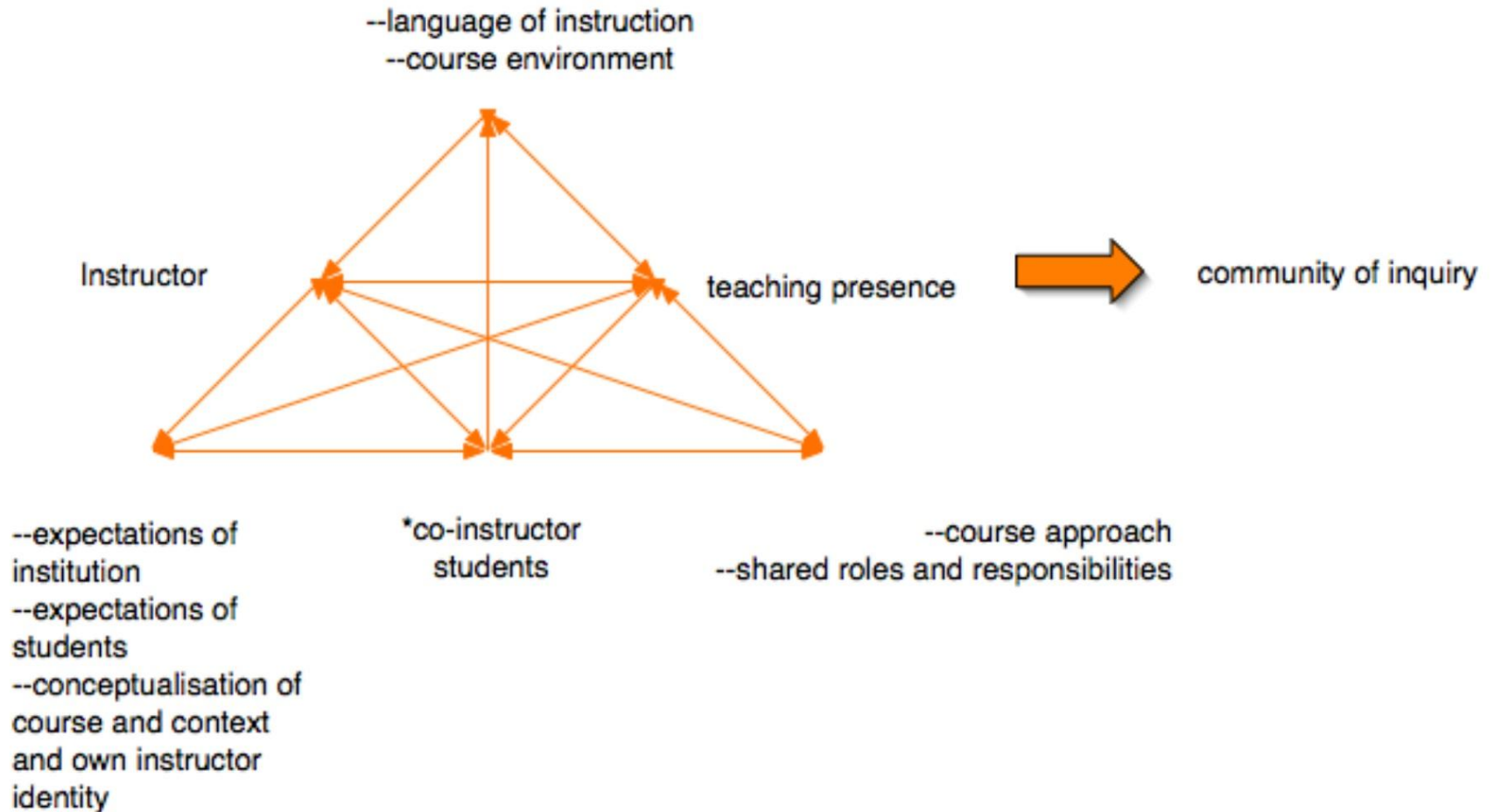
A bit about Activity Theory

- Unit of analysis is the whole system

- Extends beyond an individual acting in a context and considers other mediating components

For example…

"By taking account of the *interactions* between people involved in the activity, *structures* within which the activity takes place, *conventions* on which it is based and *artefacts* used (here, teaching tools and methods), I was able to ground my study in the broad context and capture practice as socially situated, rather than simply evidenced in actions or performance." (Fanghanel, 2004, p. 579)

Instructor Activity System

--language of instruction
--course environment

Instructor

teaching presence

community of inquiry

--expectations of
institution
--expectations of
students
--conceptualisation of
course and context
and own instructor
identity

*co-instructor
students

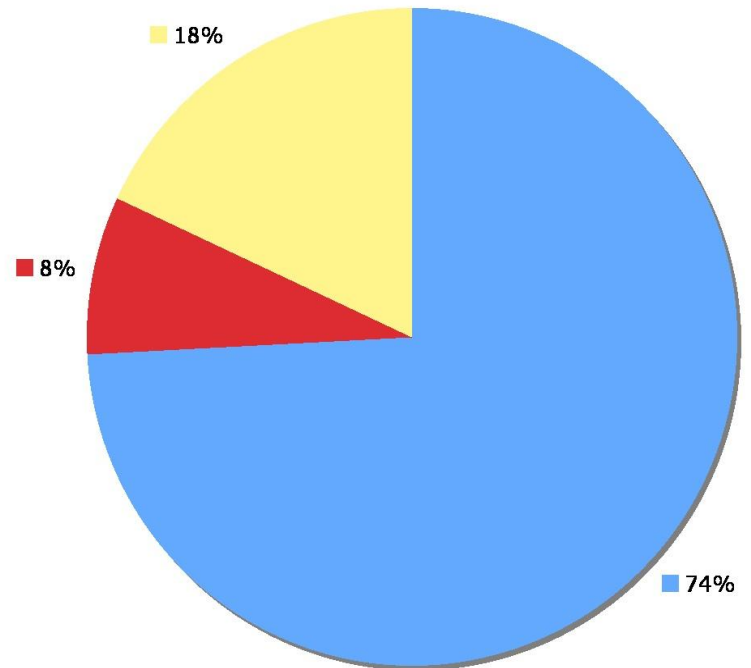--course approach
--shared roles and responsibilities

An illustration—Case John

- Designed with his co-instructor
- Years of f2f teaching experience, first online experience
- Co-instructor was a seasoned online instructor

John's postings

	John	Phillip
No. replies	31	57
No. initiated	7	31
Total messages	38	88

John

- 9/38 acknowledging Phillip's contributions
- Frequent use of pronoun "we"
- Students emailed Phillip and not John and tech constraint didn't allow a cc option for Phillip to keep John in the loop

John

- *"[...] I felt a responsibility and I looked for my [opportunities] and tried to make contributions either big or little just to have a voice because whether they viewed me as secondary or not I thought it was my responsibility to post and make contributions where I could."*

What would online teaching best practices tell us about…

- The instructor who contributed to 1/3 of all 1000+ discussion forum posts?

What would online teaching best practices tell us about…

- The instructor who consistently tries to participate as a student peer?

Finding: Conceptualizations

- How instructor viewed purpose and goals of the interaction spaces
- Variation across six cases:
  - Community
  - Activity space
  - Online graduate seminar
  - Student centred online classroom
  - Community in the making
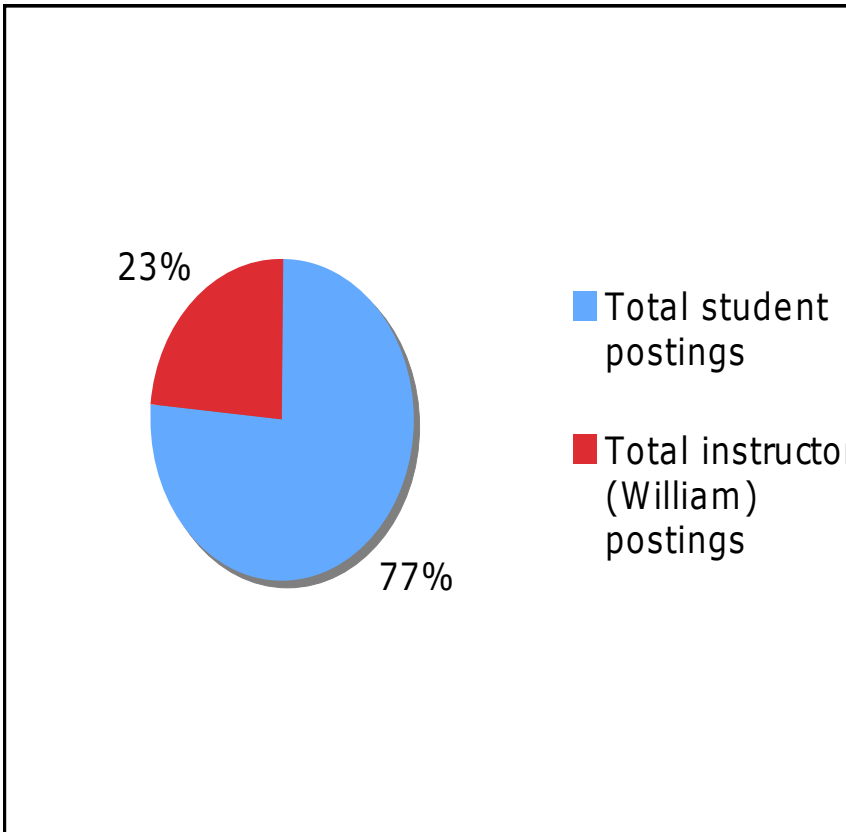 - Teacher directed online classroom

William

1. The instructor who has contributed to 1/3 of all 1000+ discussion forum posts?

   Online graduate seminar

William

William--247 posts/3 weeks
11 students--1094/3weeks

Least active student: 35
Most active student: 127

William

- Realizing 'constructivism' through highly individualized teaching (constraint--extremely time consuming)
  - Positioning students as authorities
  - Frequent use of term "community" (38)
  - Very short posts
  - Encouraged student-student communication
- Influenced by his beliefs about teaching and learning and well established identity as a professor

Daniel

- online classroom where he resisted being perceived as an authority

- posted in 10 of the 13 weeks of the course

- The majority (54/63) of his messages were replies to student postings

- 28 of 63 messages contained statements that acknowledged student contribution, while in 15 messages Daniel provided an element of his own expertise or a statement that pointed the student towards additional resources.

Daniel

- *[...] if the discussion was really flying along I would participate almost as a peer. Just really throwing my two cents. Actually I had to be very careful about this especially early in the classes because I started to feel like a real discussion killer. I would see this rolling, rollicking discussion with arguments and stuff flying back and forth and I would take a position as if I was a member of the student cohort and it would often stop discussion dead in its tracks, especially early on.*

- The concern for creating an authoritative yet non-authoritarian presence was something that Daniel continually struggled with

[…] especially early on in the course, I think in both instances by the end of the year there had been enough trust built up that I could kind of pitch in my two cents. I tried all sorts of things, I tried to really say that ' this is just my opinion' but you can say those things but it takes a fairly brave student to take their teacher on.

Finding

- instructors conceptualize interaction spaces differently, which has a considerable influence on their teaching presence (as demonstrated by instructors sharing the same spaces in the same course at the same time (3/6 cases))

Conceptualization and constructivism

- John and William adopted contrasting approaches to teaching presence but students in those 2 courses had highest average posts/ week

- Both were successful in creating an environment conducive to student participation

Implications for Teaching

- Insight and understanding of the strong relationship between your own conceptualization of a course and how you direct your teaching is useful when tensions arise.

Twiselton (2004):The identity of student teachers, and the way this impacts on their reading of the teaching situation, structures their capacity to identify and use the opportunities for action that are available within the activity system and their identities are, in turn, shaped by these opportunities. (p. 159)

Implications for CoI research

- the need to be cautious in relying solely on quantifying types of interactions as a means of describing teaching presence

- In some cases (demonstrated by John and Daniel) there was a disconnect between what the instructors did and what they intended or wanted to do that can't be captured in content analysis

Sociocultural definition

- When a sociocultural position is adopted, teaching presence could be defined as *"the negotiation of instructor interactions within a mediated context with the object of attending to student learning"*

To summarize

- Describing teaching presence as a negotiation within a mediated context requires a broader view of what instructors bring to the online context, how they position themselves and are positioned by others within it, and the components of the activity system that shape this negotiation

Thank you!

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