The Role of Social Presence in Online Communities

Robert K. Caples, Ph.D.

Carroll County Public Schools

Need for Research

- "Web-based learning has been the subject of numerous studies as an effective mode of content delivery for distance education (Berge & Collins, 1995; Dunderstadt, 1999; Schrum, 1998)."

- "Online communities offer a new and challenging opportunity for learners to develop a collaborative learning process (Gabriel, 1998; Garrison,1997; Hiltz, 1994; Oren & Ram, 2000)."

- "Moderators can create learning environments where the technology becomes an instructional partner in the learning process (McDaniel, McInerney & Armstrong, 2004)."

Need for Research

- Online staff development for teachers is becoming a new means of delivering instruction

- Online communities provide a medium for the sharing of resources and communicating with peers

Need for Research

- Online community technology can be expensive for local school districts

- Research needs to explore the factors that may affect the quality of online instruction with teachers

- What things need to be in place to maximize the online learning experience?

Definition of Terms

- Social Presence: "The ability of participants in an online community to project themselves socially and emotionally as 'real people' through the medium of communication being used."

Definition of Terms

- Cognitive Presence
    - The ability of learners can construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse
    - It is a condition of higher order thinking

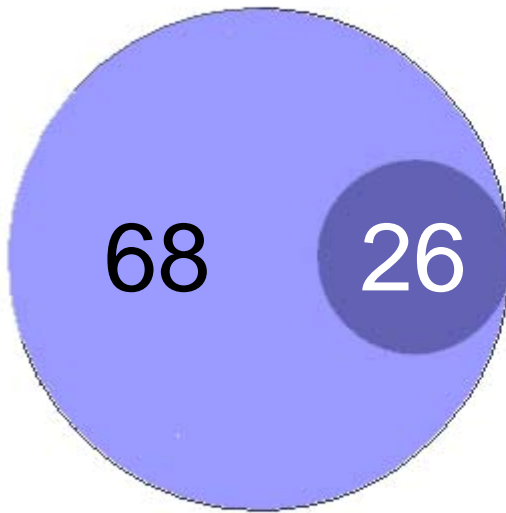# Definition of Terms

- Teaching Presence
  - The design, facilitation, and direction of the cognitive and social processes to guide the meaningful educational learning experience
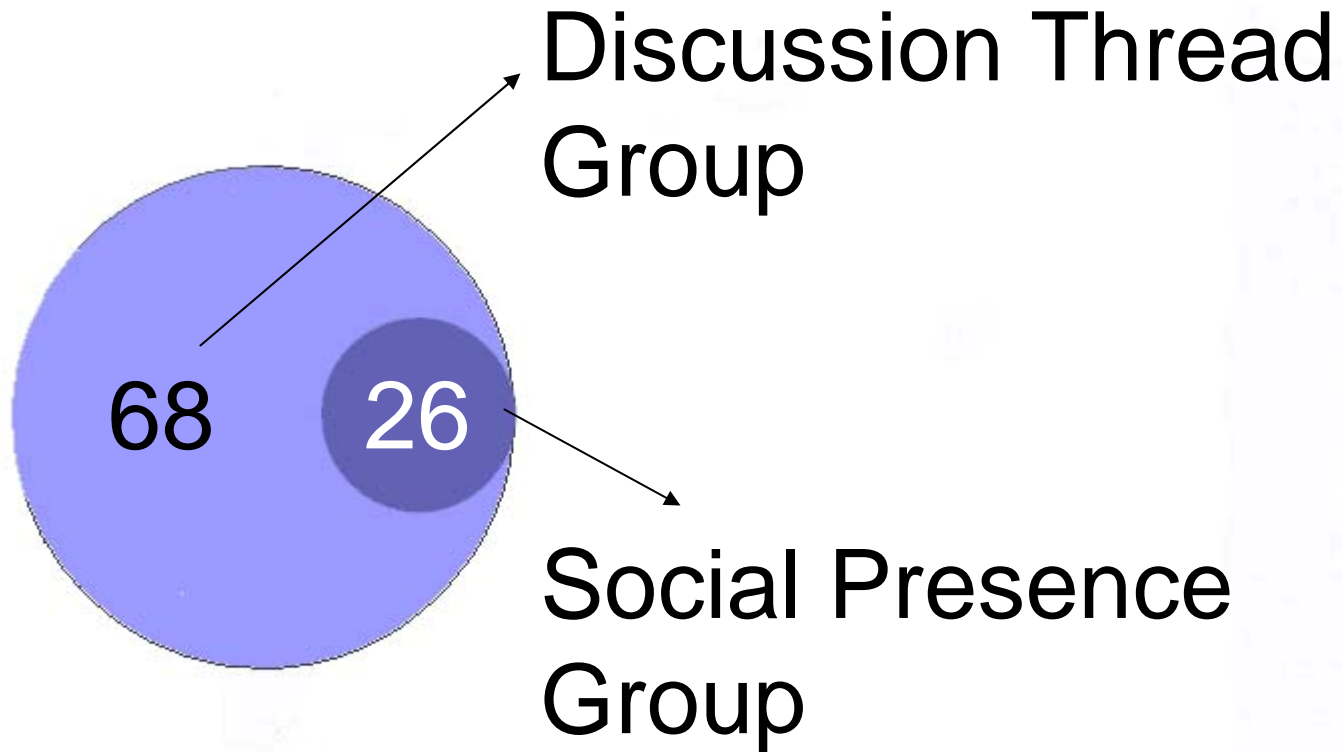
Definition of Terms
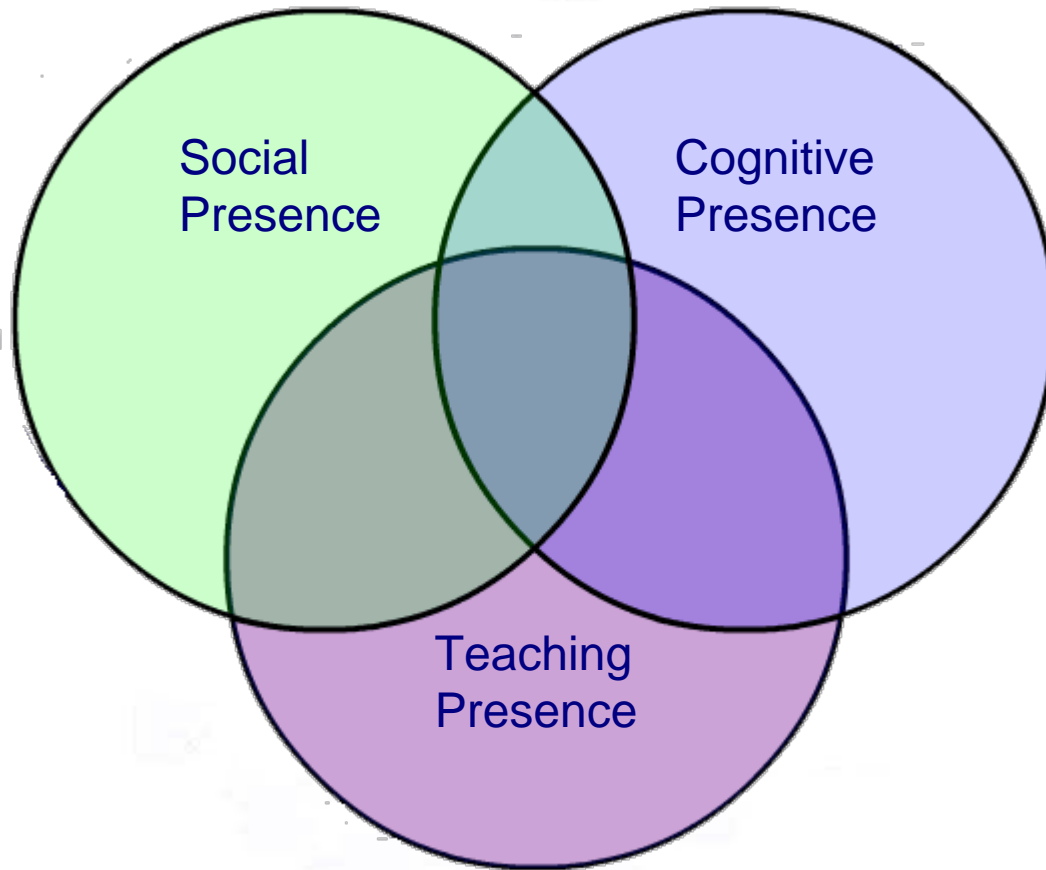
Methods

Study Design:

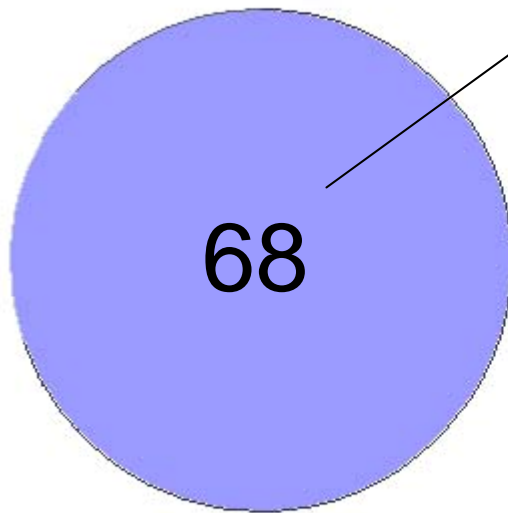94 teachers enrolled in 3 online courses

68 participants in the large group

26 participants in the small group

Methods

Discussion Thread Group
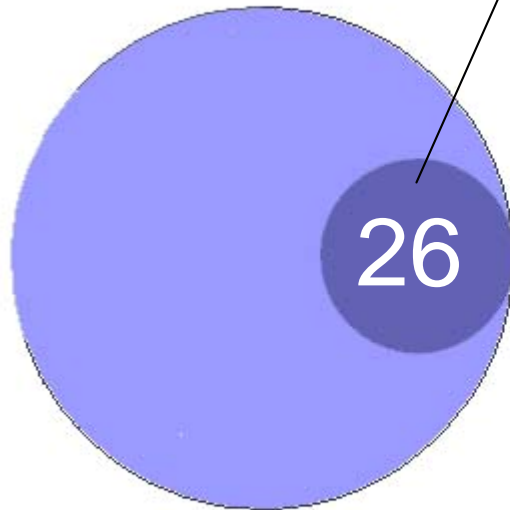
68   26

Social Presence Group

Methods

Discussion Thread Group

68

All elementary school teachers

Allowed Content Analysis of their online textual discussion threads for 30 days.
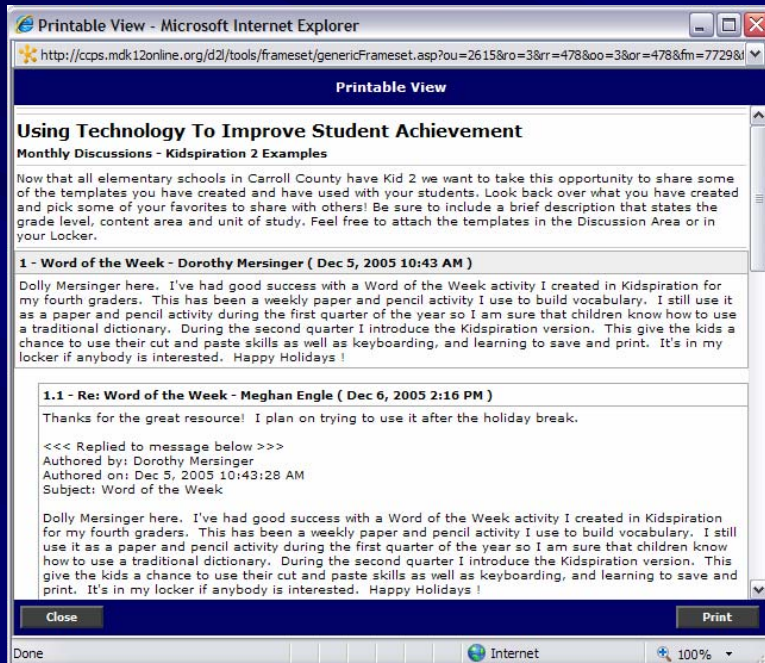
Methods

Social Presence Group

26

Allowed Content Analysis of their online textual discussion threads for 30 days.

Completed Background & Demographics Survey

Completed Social Presence Questionnaire

Methods

Discussion Threads

Responses were required as a part of each course

29 discussion threads were analyzed and coded using the Social Presence Model based on work by Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2003)

Methods

- Interpretative Analysis (Neuendorf, 2002) focused on the sentences written by each teacher in their threaded discussions

- Three people examined the data and coded each sentence using the classification and indicators of Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001)

Methods

Discussion Thread Coding: 3 Main Categories:

Affective Responses	Represent the textual display of emotional conditions
Interactive Responses	Responses which furthers communication between the members of the online community
Cohesive Responses	Social communication used to refer to themselves as a group or entity

Methods

Discussion Thread Coding: Indicators:

Affective Responses	Interactive Responses	Cohesive Responses
Expression Values (VA)	Continuing Discussion Thread (CT)	Vocatives (VO)
Expression of Emotions (EE)	Expressing Agreement (AG)	Greetings & Salutations (GS)
Conspicuous Punctuation (PU)	Expressing Appreciation (AP)	Group Reference (GR)
Use of Humor (HU)	Asking Questions (AQ)	Phatics (PH)
Self Disclosure (SD)	Factual Responses (FA)	
Personal Advice (PA)		

Methods

Content Analysis Example:

"Lisa, I am in desperate need of some help!!!!! What am I doing wrong? aaaaAAAAAHHHH!!!!! Stop laughing Jen ☺!!!"
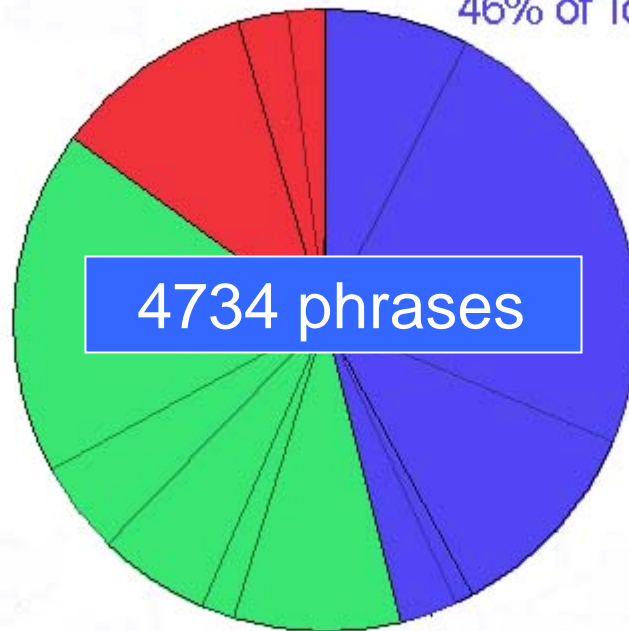
"Lisa, (VO) I am in desperate need of some help!!!!! (SD, PU) What am I doing wrong? (AQ) aaaaAAAAAHHHH!!!!! (EE, PU) Stop laughing Jen ☺!!!" (HU, VO, PU)

Above Example: 9 Phrases

PU: 3 VO: 2 SD: 1 AQ: 1 EE: 1 HU: 1

Group Cohesion Responses:
16 % of Total Discussion Threads

Affective Responses:
46% of Total Discussion Threads

4734 phrases

Open Communication Responses:
38% of Total Discussion Threads

Rank Order Levels of Social Presence Indicators by Group		
Level	**Discussion Thread**	**Social Presence**
High	1) FA	1) VA
	2) VA	2) FA
	3) PU	3) VO
	4) CT	4) PU
	5) GS	5) CT
Moderate	6) AP	6) EE
	7) EE	7) AP
	8) AQ	8) AQ
	9) VO	9) GS
	10) GR	10) AG
Low	11) SD	11) GR
	12) AG	12) SD
	13) HU	13) HU
	14) PH	14) PH
	15) PA	15) PA

Phrases were ranked ordered highest to lowest based on the number of phrases for each one

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Focus was to compare the results of the Discussion Thread Group

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High Level Indicators

Factual Responses

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High Level Indicators

Factual Responses

Values/Opinion

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High Level Indicators

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Conspicuous Punctuation

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High Level Indicators

Factual Responses

Values/Opinion

Conspicuous Punctuation

Low Level Indicators

Self Disclosure

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	4) CT	4) PU
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High Level Indicators

Factual Responses

Values/Opinion

Conspicuous Punctuation

Low Level Indicators

Self Disclosure

Humor

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High Level Indicators

Factual Responses

Values/Opinion

Conspicuous Punctuation

Low Level Indicators

Self Disclosure

Humor

Phatics & Personal Advice

Findings

High Level Indicators

Affective Responses	Interactive Responses
Values/Opinions (VA)	Factual Responses (FA)
Conspicuous Punctuation (PU)	Continuing Discussion Thread (CT)

Findings

Low Level Indicators

Affective Responses	Cohesive Responses
Self Disclosure (SD)	Phatics (PH)
Humor (HU)	
Personal Advice (PA)	

Methods

- Social Presence Questionnaire-Secondary Analysis Tool
  - 45 total questions
  - 4-point Likert scale: "Always/Sometimes/Seldom/Never"
  - *"Do you express your personal feelings when you are in an online environment?"*
  - *Do you use repetitious punctuation when you communicate to others in an online environment?"*

Methods

- Social Presence Group's responses from the Questionnaire were then compared to their actual responses written in the discussion threads.

- The goal was to see if they did what they said they did in the online communities

Results

- *"Do you express your personal values or opinions when you are in an online environment?"*
  - From the data in the Social Presence Questionnaire, the Social Presence Group reported that 60.26% **did** express their values or opinions
- This corresponded to the high number (761/2226, 34%) of *Expressing Values* phrases written by the Social Presence Group

Results

- *"Do you self disclose personal information when you are in an online environment?"*

  - From the data in the Social Presence Questionnaire, the Social Presence Group reported that 85.71% **did not** self disclose personal information

- This corresponded to the low number (11/2226, .005%) of *Self Disclosure* phrases written by the Social Presence Group

Findings

- The Moderator:
  - Can affect the levels of social presence by assisting in the creation and enforcement of policies that govern the community
  - Can also affect the social presence levels as they facilitate the threaded discussion by the types of questions they ask

Results

- Example of a moderator question:

  - "That's a thought. What are the important elements establishing a scientific community? I think the rule or guidelines are pretty important in creating an environment that supports learning science, so it might fit. So what do you think the first lesson should include?"

Results

- Example of a teacher response:

    - Teacher 1: (in response to moderator) "Greetings, I have seen the elements established in the science handbook that Montgomery County has created. Wow!! What a wonderful resource!!"

    - Teacher 2: (in response to teacher 1) "Great resource, you can't go wrong with that one!!!"

Results

- Moderators in these online communities did:
  - Ask various types of questions related to the purpose of the community
  - Give factual answers
  - Continue discussion threads
  - Call teachers by their names
  - Use conspicuous punctuation

Results

- Moderators in these online communities did not:
  - Express their emotions
  - Use humor
  - Give out personal advice to others
  - Talk about social things that were off topic
  - Self disclose personal information

Discussion

- Teachers in these online communities did:
  - Express their opinions and values
  - Use conspicuous punctuation
  - Continue discussion threads with others
  - Provide factual answers

Discussion

- Teachers in these online communities did not:
  - Self disclose personal information
  - Use humor
  - Give out personal advice to others
  - Talk about social things that were off topic

Findings

- Aligns with current research studies:
  - Erickson (2001) Social Translucence:
  - Visibility, Awareness, & Accountability
- Teachers were visible to each other online
- They were also aware of other discussion threads
- Combined, this made them accountable for their behavior in the online community and as an employee of CCPS

Findings

- Aligns with current research studies:
  - Preece (2000) Components of Online Communities
  - People, Purpose, and Policy
- The role of the moderator can shape textual responses and influence the levels of social presence
- Policies of the community can govern the behavior of the members

Conclusions

- Patterns of behavior observed in this study suggested a relationship between the levels of social presence indicators and:
  - the types of questions posed by the moderator
  - the policies that govern the community

Implications for future research

- More research may be needed on the preparation and training of moderators for e-communities

- As new technologies emerge, additional study of the relationships between moderator preparation and establishing social presence may be suggested

Questions?

Contact information

- Robert K. Caples Ph.D.
  - Assistant Supervisor of Educational Technology
    Carroll County Public Schools
    125 North Court Street
    Westminster, MD 21157
    410-386-4423
    rkcaple@k12.carr.org