Importance of Student-to-Student Interaction

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Social interaction among/between students in a face-to-face classroom has been documented to promote student learning, increase engagement, & build community [7]. Since the advent of distance education, recreating this social interaction has been a goal of online instructors.

In 1989, Michael G. Moore described three types of interaction essential for effective learning in an online environment: learner-content, learner-instructor, & learner-to-learner [9]. As the pedagogy of online teaching & learning has evolved, this type of interaction has become known as “social presence”. [11] Social presence, along with teaching & cognitive presence, comprise the elements of a learning community [4; 8].

There have been many attempts at defining the characteristics of social presence. For simplicity’s sake, Garrison’s definition has been chosen: “The ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities.” [3]

Whiteside [13; see also 12; 14] has created a Social Presence Model that identifies specific integrated elements that “affect participants’ motivation to take an active role in their own and their peers’ learning.”
Benefits of social presence

- one of the more important concepts used to determine the level of interaction & effectiveness of online learning [11; 10]
- creates a level of comfort in which people feel at ease around the instructor & the other participants [1; 12; 13]
- creates a learning environment that is perceived as warm, collegial, & approachable [1; 13]
- creates a richer & more engaging learning community [5]
- facilitates the building of trust & self-disclosure [1; 10; 12]
- increases student engagement & motivation to learn [5; 10; 12; 13; 15]
- increases the ability of students to collaborate & work effectively as a group [2]
- increases collaborative construction of knowledge [10; 12; 15]
- increases student satisfaction & perceived learning [1; 5; 8; 10; 12]
- potentially increases student performance [6]
- possibly impacts retention & persistence [8]

References (links are embedded in the citation)


Additional resources with strategies for creating & encouraging social presence


Holbeck, R., & Hartman, J. (2018). Efficient strategies for maximizing online student satisfaction: Applying technologies to increase cognitive presence, social presence,
and teaching presence. *Journal of Educators Online, 15*(3), 91–95. DOI: 10.9743/jeo.2018.15.3.6


