

Degrees of Presence:

media and “presence” in distance learning

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Backstory

Personal

Colleagues : presence as binary opposition

Tale of two students

Research literature

Short, Williams and Christie 1976

social presence = a communicator's sense of awareness of the presence of an interaction partner

Research findings

Low > group members feel disconnected

High > more engaged and involved

So: role of teacher as facilitator of such presence. (Stacey 2002)

Research findings

Cues:

text-based - like “tone”, emoticons,
self-disclosing narratives

audio – inflection, ambient sound,
paraverbal utterances

video – adds visual cues

This is argued to be a hierarchy
(Shatzer and Lindlof 1998)

Research findings

- Student approach study differently
- Entwistle's Approaches to Study Inventory
- Students interact with media differently
(Wheeler 2005)
- autonomy, surface and tenacity

- natural co-present learning space (face to face) .
 - Autonomous students (independence?) neither need nor experience much social presence.
 - Tenacious students, high levels of social presence.
- Telephone effect is reversed
- E-mail > autonomy < social (“not in control”)
 - > tenacious > perceptions of connectedness.
 - special affordances of e-mail : < immediate, but
 - > permanent (p.6)

My experience

- “blog” assignment, Positive Evaluation of quick response to emails, Discussion forums
- Adobe connect “virtual tutorial”
 - microphones
 - problems of multitasking
 - failure to encourage “social” contact
 - task oriented
 - several students commented on richer experience
 - combined with other media: online tests, forums, exercises

- I don't know if this class will get better reviews, but Aragon reports that learners who have a higher level of social presence are more satisfied with online learning. (Aragon 2003)
- I do know that the course had a higher proportion of A students, and Richardson & Swain found that "students' perceptions of social presence are a predictor of students' perceived learning in online courses."
(Richardson and Swan 2003)

Conclusions

- Quick response (esp. for autonomous learners)
- Social connection (virtual coffee bar, graffiti site)
- include different media
- facilitate interaction