

Design principles for social connectedness



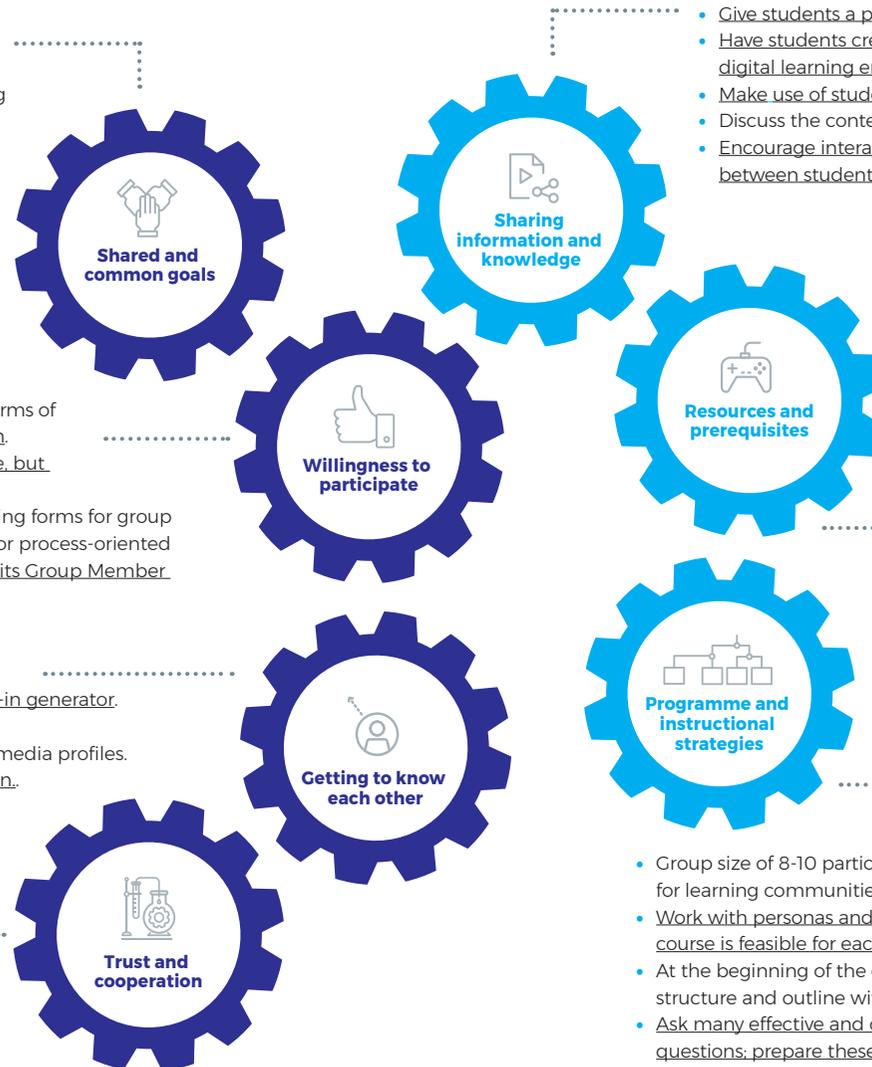
What is already known about factors that can contribute to social connectedness in online and blended learning communities was identified on the basis of a literature review. This review led to the formulation of seven design principles that can be used to foster social connectedness. Each design principle contains working forms and examples that can be directly applied in practice. This overview page contains a summary of the design principles, with some additions.

- Have students set personal and shared (learning) goals.
- Regularly make connections between the established learning goals and the course objectives.
- At the end of a course, reflect on the learning goals.
- Actively work on common goals and share them using tools such as [Padlet](#) or [Mural](#).

- Encourage all students to actively participate. Focus on activating forms of working and [formative evaluation](#).
- [Offer students freedom of choice, but provide sufficient support.](#)
- Prevent freeriding by using working forms for group work (e.g. the [JigSaw-methode](#)) or process-oriented peer feedback (e.g. [FeedbackFruits Group Member Evaluation](#)).

- Make clear agreements about communication.
- Do check-ins and check-outs, e.g. with the [check-in generator](#).
- [Use buddy systems.](#)
- Create a digital who's who page based on social media profiles.
- Focus on [activating working forms for introduction.](#)

- Have students share personal experiences, especially in smaller groups.
- Give students their own collaborative place where they can share documents, chat and co-create, e.g. in the digital learning environment.
- Make clear agreements about collaboration.
- Promote equal participation.



- [Give students a platform: work with peer instruction.](#)
- [Have students create mindmaps and share these in the digital learning environment.](#)
- [Make use of student-generated content and make this visible.](#)
- Discuss the content with students and relate this to goals.
- [Encourage interaction with the learning content and between students themselves.](#)

- Ensure that the digital learning environment is set up properly.
- Create and discuss a clear communication structure.
- Create a list of frequently asked questions about learning in the digital learning environment, make this available to students and discuss it.
- [Establish a 'netiquette' guide, or rules of conduct for online learning.](#)
- Set up an established channel where students can ask questions, such as a discussion forum or via social media.

- Group size of 8-10 participants is ideal for learning communities.
- [Work with personas and check that your course is feasible for each type of student.](#)
- At the beginning of the course, discuss the structure and outline with your students.
- [Ask many effective and open-ended questions: prepare these well.](#)
- [Organise peer feedback but provide sufficient guidance for students.](#)

 Substantive elements & attitudinal aspects

 Form and prerequisites

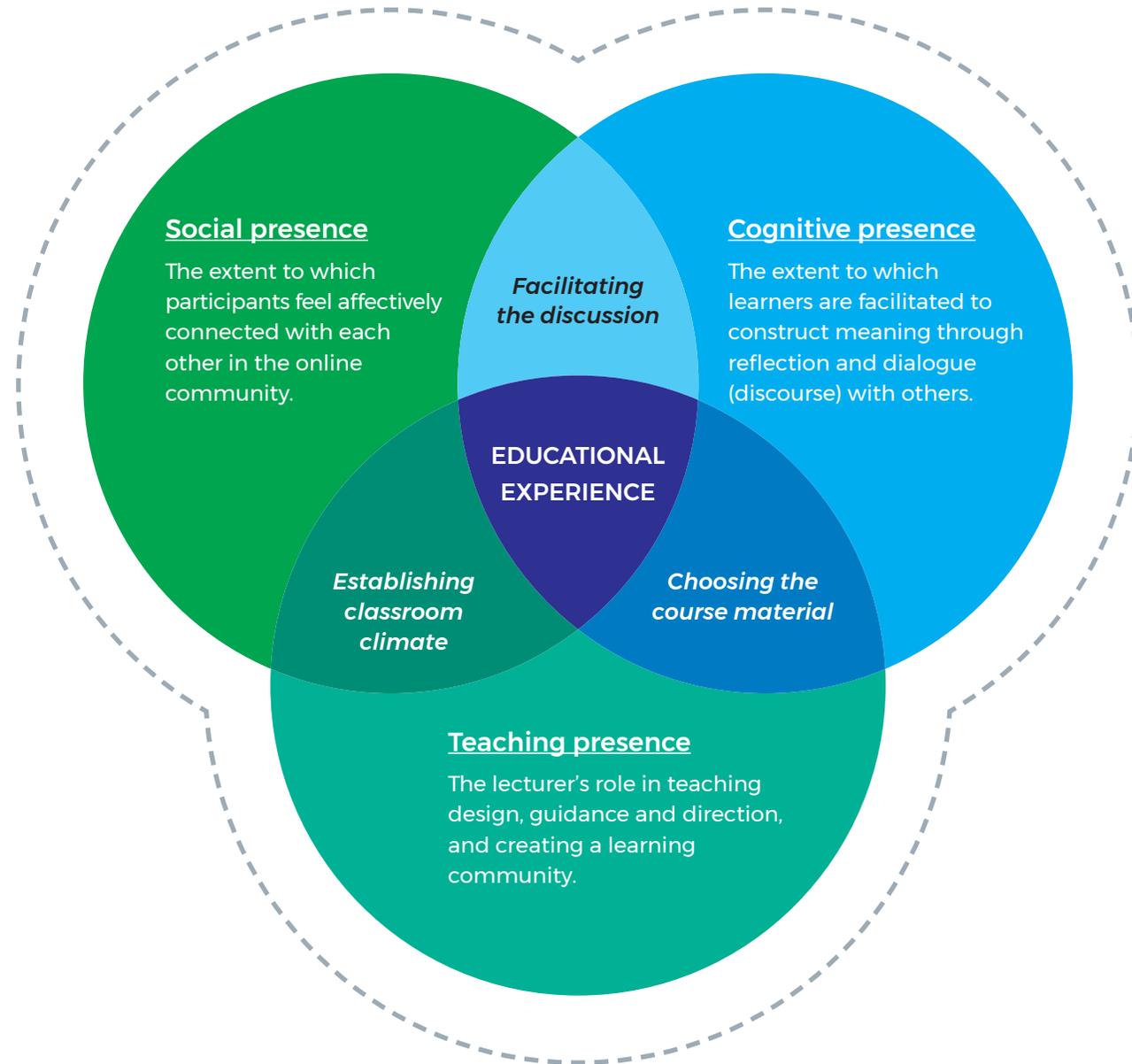


Social presence in community learning

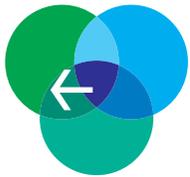
The **Community of Inquiry** framework is widely used to create an in-depth and meaningful blended learning experience using three interdependent components: social, cognitive and teaching presence.

Social presence is a prerequisite for an effective learning community, while cognitive presence ensures structured and guided activities aimed at strengthening engagement. Teaching presence refers to appropriate instruction, facilitation and guidance from the lecturer on students' social and cognitive presence. In other words, the lecturer creates a safe social learning environment and designs and facilitates an appropriate educational offer.

This infographic shows tips for enhancing any form of 'presence' within blended learning.



Social presence in community learning



Social presence

This is about designing, maintaining and strengthening a safe learning environment in which collaborative learning takes place based on trust and open communication. Relevant aspects are safety, open communication, group cohesion and emotional bonding. The following working forms and tips support and develop social presence:

Social presence

The extent to which participants feel affectively connected with each other in the online community.

Affective Expression

- Post welcome messages to the course website.
- Create a discussion board or other online space to introduce everyone:
 - Introduce teaching teams using video, images, and personal greeting remarks
 - Invite students to introduce themselves on the discussion board
- Include ice-breakers to develop swift trust (e.g. Story of your name, check in activities).
- Use multiple channels to promote communication and interaction (LMS, email, discussion board, WhatsApp, F2F Q&A, office contact hours).
- Use emoticons and humour in communication and course content.
- Encourage students to create a teacher-free space using social media tools (WhatsApp, Discord, Facebook).

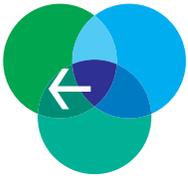
Open Communication

- Communicate course expectations clearly.
- Publish a 'netiquette' guide.
- Encourage students to share their experiences, examples, ideas and feelings to allow for multiple perspectives.
- Encourage all students to participate and respond to each other on discussion boards.
- Model & encourage the use of verbal immediacy behaviours in interactions with students, such as using students' names and valuing student contributions.

Group Cohesion

- Use activities that allow students to work in teams and collaborate on tasks:
 - small group discussion, group brainstorming and problem-solving assignments
- Develop peer-review assignments for relationship building.
- Encourage both peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher connections.
- Assign group roles but change roles among students.
- Provide opportunities for self-selecting group members.
- Reward students for supporting each other.

Teaching presence in community learning



Teaching presence

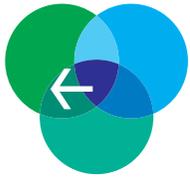
This is about designing, facilitating and giving direction to social and cognitive presence. It involves choosing the most appropriate course material, creating the educational design and selecting the most appropriate didactics. In doing so, you lay the foundation for effective student learning, support and guidance. A number of tips for developing and increasing teaching presence are given below:

Teaching presence

The lecturer's role in teaching design, guidance and direction, and creating a learning community.

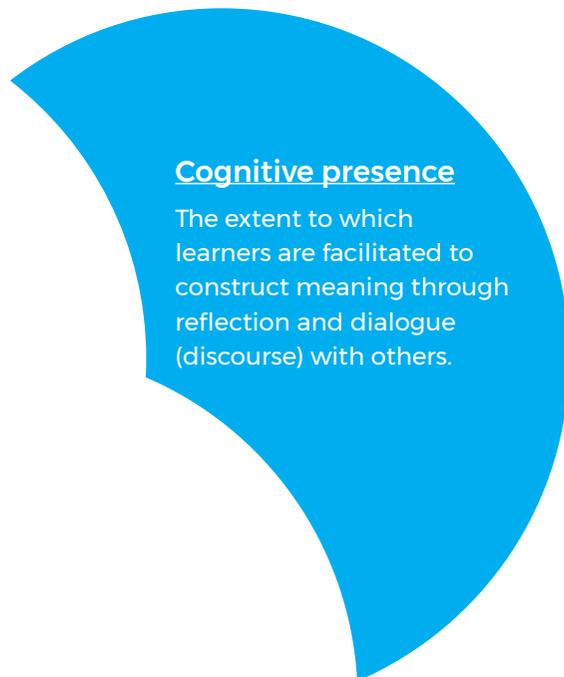
- When creating the instructional design, choose working methods in which students can work together.
- Use activating working methods and encourage students to learn interactively with each other.
- Monitor the learning process and organise plenty of feedback, constructive and timely. The fact that a student seems actively engaged does not mean that he or she is also cognitively active.
- Create space for collaboration, learning together and give students support when necessary.
- Do not only organise formal education, but also provide space for informal encounters and non-formal exchange (without fixed goals, but structured).
- Pay extra attention to those at risk of failure.

Cognitive presence in community learning



Cognitive presence

When developing cognitive presence, the lecturer develops an educational offer aimed at achieving the learning outcomes with a focus on inquiry-based learning. To this end, several models and methodologies have been developed that are well suited to this model. A number of tips for developing and increasing cognitive presence are given below:



- Offer tasks that encourage problem-solving, reflective and critical thinking skills.
- Use content- and process-oriented tools to promote dialogue among students and with the teacher.
- Provide a variety of different types of working methods and assignments such as video, quiz, audio, poll, reflection, teamwork, readings, games, etc.
- Provide opportunities for group brainstorming (e.g. by creating concept maps for groups).
- Develop peer feedback assignments with clear rubrics for assessment.

STUDENTBOARDING

From first contact to feeling at home

What: Student onboarding refers to the exchange of information between the new student and the educational institution. It is about promoting mutual feedback and connection.

Goal: Reducing student dropout or study delay by establishing social and academic integration. The aim is to have students feel at home in the classroom, programme and institution from first contact up to the first 100 days (and beyond).

Pre-boarding

Introduction:

Discovering; From open day to enrolment. Students get to know the institution and explore the different programmes and how they match their own areas of interest.

Onboarding

PHASE 1:

Connecting; From enrolment to introduction. Students get to know the culture, norms and values of the chosen programme and learn how to navigate this, both practically and organisationally.

PHASE 2:

Socialising; The introduction period. Students establish bonds with each other and with lecturers, building their first network.

PHASE 3:

Feeling at home; The first 100 days. Further bonding with the programme, with fellow students and with lecturers. There is a sense of belonging and feeling at home.

Phases and activities of student onboarding

PHASE 0 Open day - enrolment	PHASE 1 Enrolment - introduction	PHASE 2 Introduction period	PHASE 3 The first 100 days	GROWTH
Work with interactive assignments and challenges to help students discover the institution and study programme between and after their choice of study programme.	Students complete interactive assignments that focus on the culture of the programme and the institution.	Make full use of the introduction and focus intensively on socialisation. Reward participation in introductory activities.	The first 100 days are crucial for student success. Focus on challenging, educational and social activities for bonding and creating a sense of home.	Continuously focus on socialisation activities.
Discovery	Connecting	Socialising	Feeling at home	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch an online mini-lecture in advance. • Take part in a virtual treasure hunt or escape room on campus. • Get to know your city of study. • Meet a student or graduate. • Participate in a trial study day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the digital learning environment. • Go through the blended learning journey of the first course. • Search for article X in the library. • Watch a film about ... • Introduce yourself to your peer students by... • Take a diagnostic test. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take part in a pub quiz (e.g. of the student society). • Take part in a boot-camp, work in teams. • Take part in a musical bingo. • Attend workshops. • Take part in sports activities with peer students. • Create a profile in the digital learning environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a promotional video for your course in teams. • Interview a graduate. • Fill in a survey about ... • Attend workshops on how to study. • Immerse yourself in the content of the next course. • Talk to a student psychologist. 	

INTRODUCTION

Strategies and examples

All methods from the overview table have been elaborated into working form cards. See the annex to this product. Use these cards for inspiration when designing your teaching.

		Small groups (5-30 people)	Large groups (30+ people)
Students among themselves 	Face-to-face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The story of your name Two truths, one lie Common ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pub quiz This or that
	Online synchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction round Object round Location annotation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Question cards in breakout rooms Have breakout rooms continue during the break See working forms for small groups, but among themselves in breakout rooms
	Online asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post introductory text with photo on forum (who's who page) Create collaborative concept map Collaborative annotation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative assignment outside contact time Set up study groups based on interests (e.g. cats or Sci-fi) Social Café forum
With the lecturer and the course 	Face-to-face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group presentation Think-share-exchange Identify core concepts Snowball discussion 	
	Online synchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Come earlier and stay longer for small-talk Opportunity to ask lecturer questions in breakout room (1-on-1) Schedule personal contact moments (motivation, study skills, tips for lecturer) Tips and experiences from senior students (pitches) Optional coffee room (or pub) (e.g. every day from 9:00 to 9:30) 	
	Online asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction videos Social media profiles (see who's who page) Tips and experiences from senior students (clips or texts) 	
With the institution		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual tour of the department, lecturer's office, lab room, etc. (Online) escape room Interview videos with experts 	