

Learning Communities and Their Effect on Deep and Surface Approaches to Learning

By Patti Dyjur

About Me

- Instructional Designer
- Curriculum mapping
- Worked for 9 years on course design, curriculum development, workshops, faculty development in higher education
- Finished my PhD about a year and a half ago

Purpose of the Study

To investigate how the role of the learning community, both online and face-to-face, affected participants' approaches to learning in a blended faculty development workshop

Research Questions

Research Questions 1 & 2:

1

In what ways do workshop participants take a deep approach to learning in a blended faculty development workshop?



2

In what ways do workshop participants take a survey approach to learning in a blended faculty development workshop?



Research Questions 3 - 5

3

How does the role of the face-to-face learning community affect the approach that participants took to the workshop?



4

How does the role of the online learning community affect the approach that participants took to the workshop?

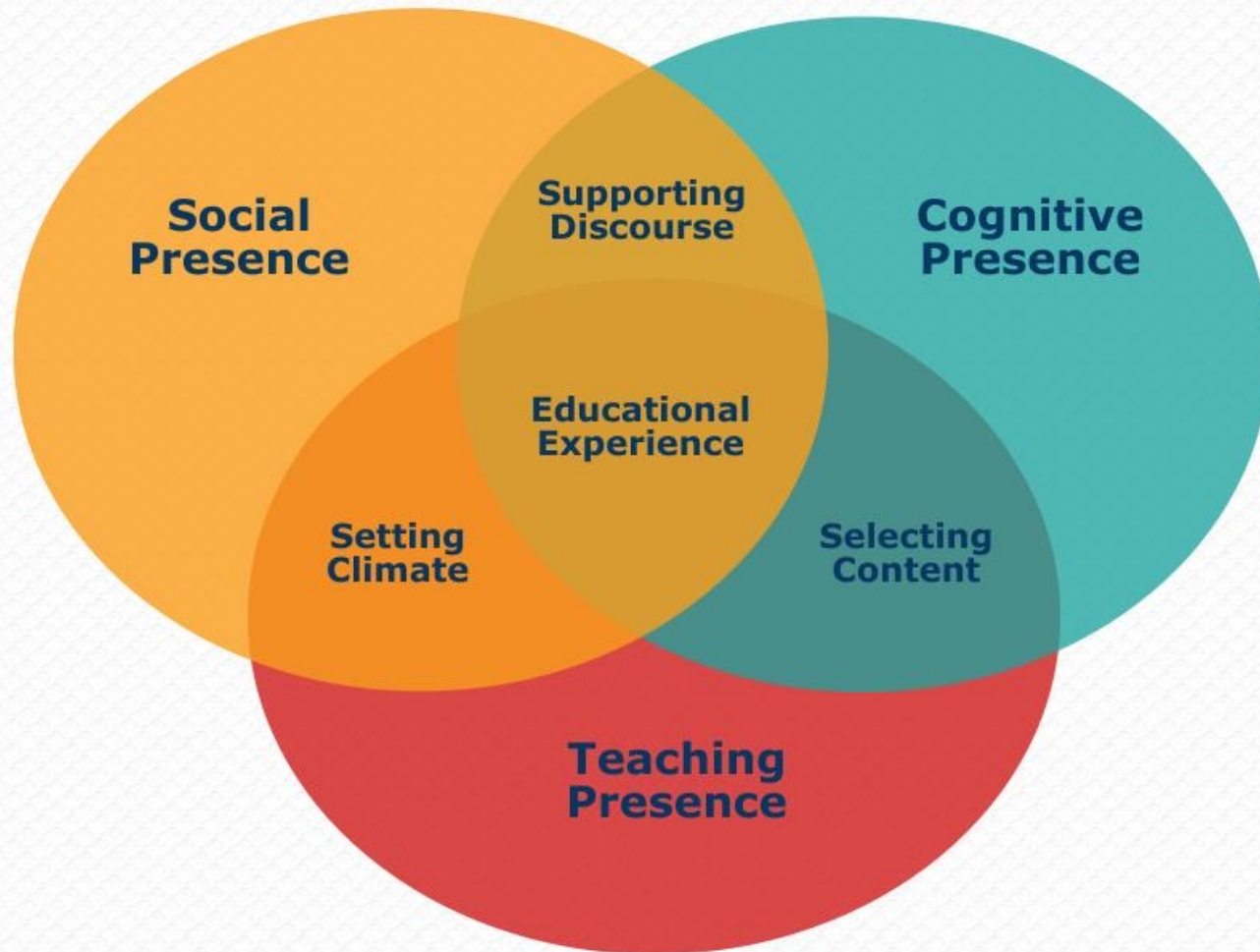
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5

What is the relationship between the Community of Inquiry model and the effects of the learning community on learning approach taken by participants in the workshop?



Community of Inquiry Framework



Source: Garrison et al., 2000.

Deep and Surface Approaches to Learning

Deep Approach	Surface Approach
Learning for understanding	Rote memorization to reproduce information
Intrinsically motivated	Extrinsically motivated, doing the minimum amount of work
Making connections	Discrete learning
Focus on the big picture as well as the details	Focusing on isolated facts
Asking questions, thinking critically	“Just tell me what I need to know for the test”

Sources: Marton & Saljo, 1976; Biggs & Tang, 2011

Case Study

- Mixed methods case study
- Blended faculty development workshop on course design
- About half f2f and half online
- Offered by a Teaching and Learning Centre at a Canadian university
- Participants work to design or redesign a course they are teaching throughout the workshop
- Participatory with small and large group discussions, applying concepts, peer feedback

Participants

- Faculty and grad students from all faculties
- All had taught in higher education in the past
- 34 participants in both the pre and post survey, 10 participants did both the first and second interviews

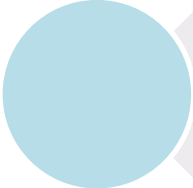
Research Design

- Case study approach
- Mixed methods:
 - Surveys
 - Interviews
 - Online discussion transcripts
 - Observation
- Methods of data analysis
 - Thematic coding
 - Community of Inquiry coding protocol (online transcripts) (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000)
 - Descriptive statistics

Findings – Research Question #1



Considerable learning




Longitudinal showed considerable learning over time



Specific teaching and learning issues



Learning theories

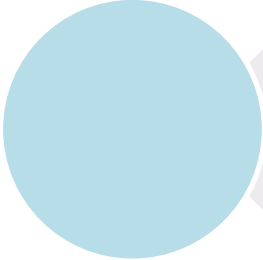


Approaches and strategies such as large enrolment courses


Highly interested or engaged

Demonstrated by doing further reading or activities after the workshop, such as how to implement an activity in their course, strategies to engage students, or having conversations with others

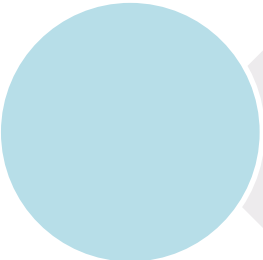
Applied to own context



Applied concepts and ideas from the workshop
to their own practice

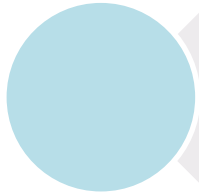


For example, applied theories such as Bloom's
Taxonomy

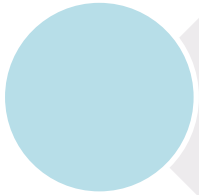


“Perspectives from other faculties allowed me to
make connections and understand differences in
my own discipline” (P9, first interview)

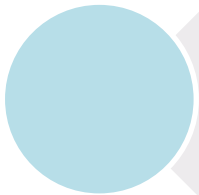
Desire to excel or improve



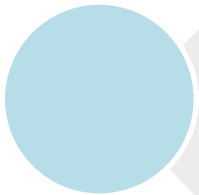
Improve their courses



Further their understanding of concepts

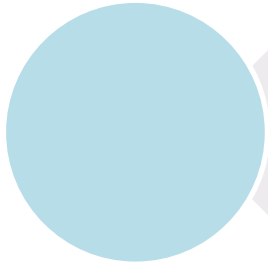


Create a better learning experience for
students

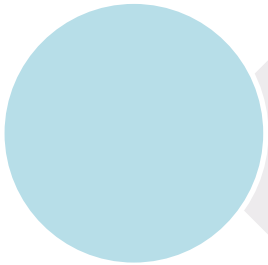


Become better teachers

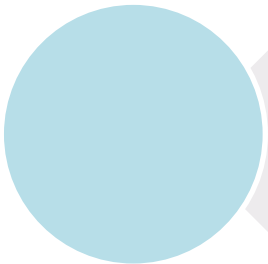
Made connections



Connections between new learning and prior learning

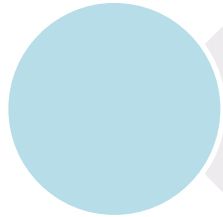


Between their own course and other people's courses

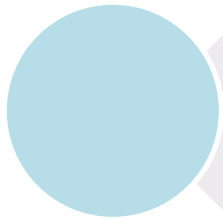


Between their own discipline and other disciplines

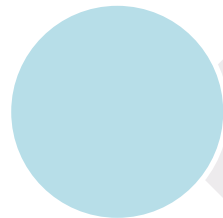
Reflected on learning



Digest issues and strategies



Participants identified the online environment as more helpful for reflection



“Online, it gives you time, it’s documented so I can always refer back. And of course the online part gives you space and time to elaborate your thoughts... You cannot think promptly on course design in the class” (P9, first interview)

Sense of Satisfaction or Confidence

About half of participants said they were either satisfied with what they got from the workshop, or felt more confident in their ability to design a good course

Q2: Surface Approach to Learning



Low participation



Most participants worked hard in the workshop



Effort was not always uniform: Certain tasks were not done as well



Role (faculty or grad student) did not have an impact on participation



Most commonly: low participation in online discussions



Most common reason: Lack of time

Barely met requirements



Theme emerged from documents submitted



Some participants did not seem to invest much time or energy in completing course plan



Some comments on the open-ended survey questions supported the theme



One participant noted he or she did the online discussions to receive the certificate, not out of interest

Forgot quickly

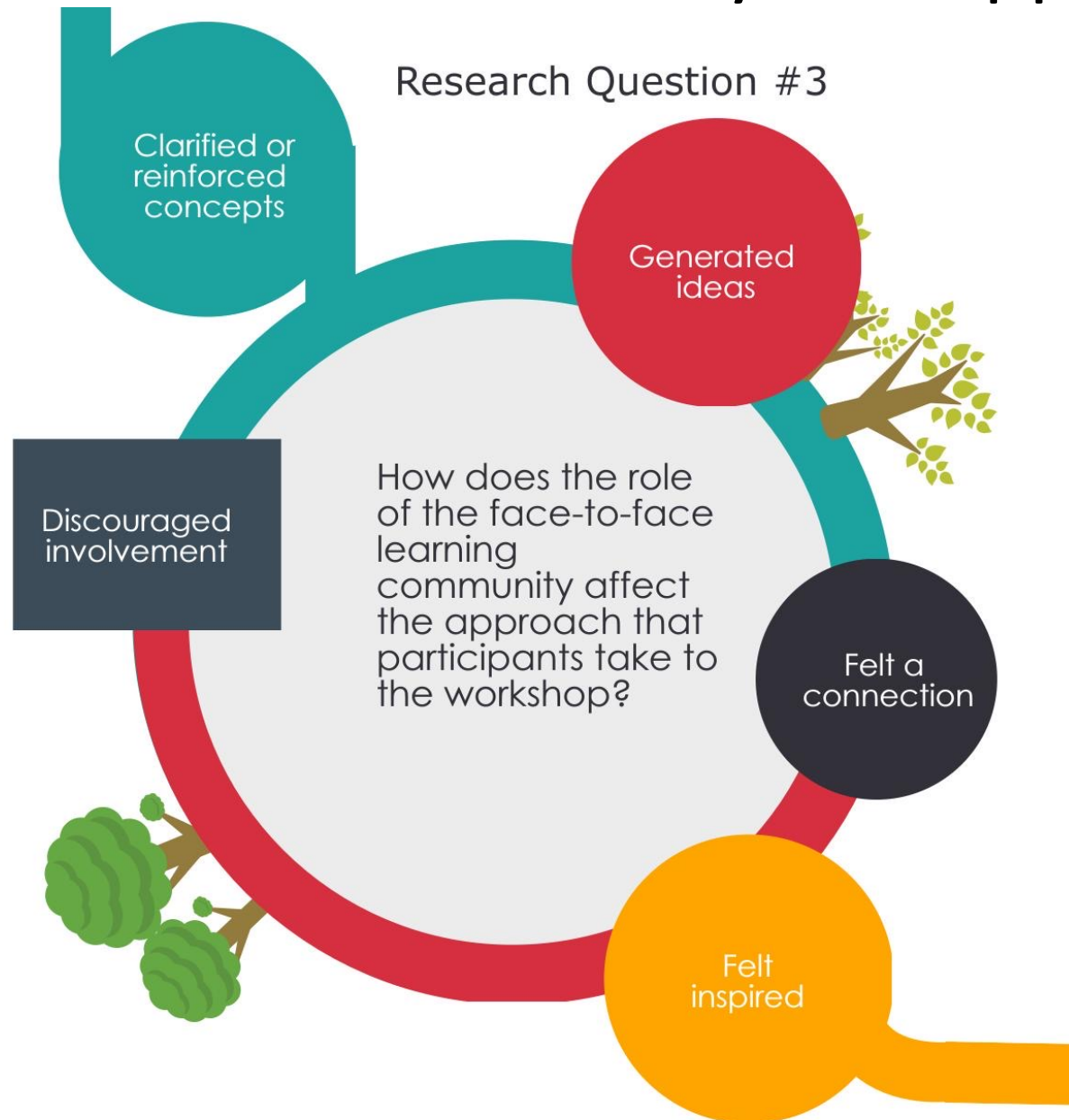


Most participants forgot some details



However some could not remember essential concepts or stated they forgot many things

Q3: Role of F2F Community and Approach



Clarified or reinforced concepts

- ✓ Discussions helped to clarify concepts
- ✓ Looking at how other people approached tasks such as writing learning outcomes provided good examples
- ✓ Immediate clarification and feedback was helpful

Generated Ideas

- ✓ Brainstorming
- ✓ Looking at other people's examples of course design sparked their own ideas
- ✓ Diversity in disciplines was helpful – see other approaches

Felt a Connection

- ✓ Most felt a sense of community in the workshop
- ✓ Felt comfortable suggesting strategies and that their ideas would be taken seriously
- ✓ Said they were treated with care and consideration
- ✓ A couple were surprised that they felt a connection with people from other disciplines

Felt Inspired

- ✓ Community inspired them to do good work
- ✓ Creativity and innovation they saw in others was inspiring
- ✓ Reassured by positive comments from peers

Surface: Discouraged Involvement

- Two survey participants and one interview participant stated that in-class discussions were sometimes dominated by certain individuals, making it hard for everyone to contribute to discussions.
- Resulted in lower participation, aligned with a surface approach

Surface: Discouraged Involvement

“At some points some participants were too loud. Even before the instructors were done they began talking. Almost taking over the whole thing. It was almost like the other voices were being drowned out. You know, we also have stuff to say and it’s not all about your discipline... I just feel like, oh come on, can you just let other people speak” (P41, first interview)

Q4: Online community and approach



Generated Ideas



Gain strategies for course design

Online allowed them to examine people's ideas and examples in more depth

Compare multiple approaches, whereas in f2f discussions held in small groups they always missed some of the discussion

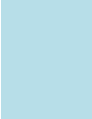
Promoted Critical Thinking



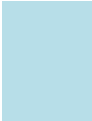
Greater time to think through facets of a course



More time to consider feedback from peers



Comments could be accessed multiple times; more permanent than f2f discussions




Wanted to give quality feedback to others, therefore put a lot of efforts into written discussion



Some did research or further thinking before posting

Promoted Reflection



Participants took time to read through comments and feedback

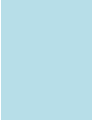
Compared their course design to that of others

Some stated they got more feedback, and more thorough feedback, online

Encouraged Equitable Participation




Equal opportunity to participate, unlike f2f discussions



“The online discussion board helped to even things out a bit because... there’s only so much you can say in writing, right? The online discussion diffuses the tension that builds up in class. It’s harder in writing to be overbearing, but in class I think that’s what it is” (P41, first interview)

Impacted on F2F Learning



Promoted completion of work: Everyone can see if you completed the homework or not

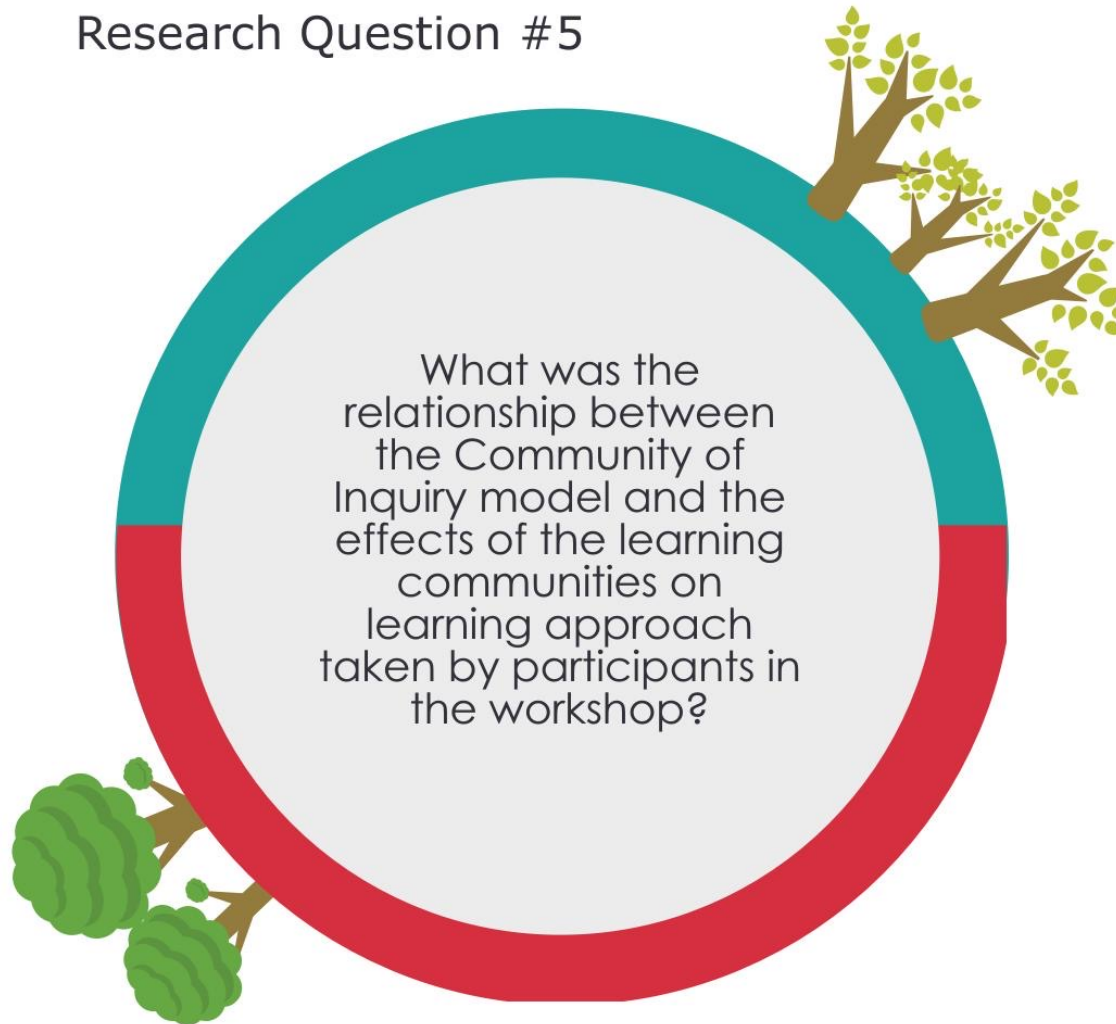
Foster richer in-class discussions: Kept up up the momentum with discussions started in class and uncovered new topics for discussion

No surface themes: Online learning community

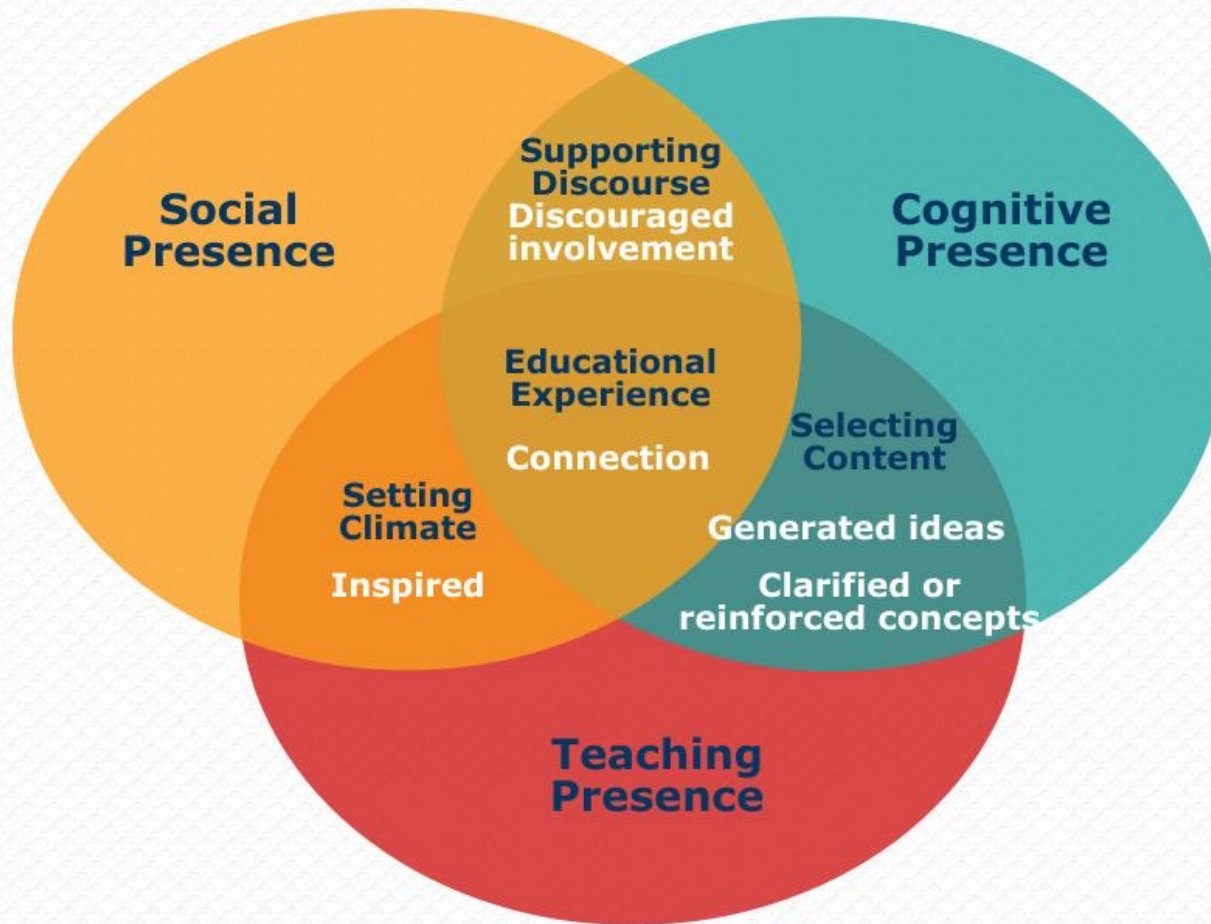
- Why? Any thoughts?

Q5: Col and Learning Approach

Research Question #5



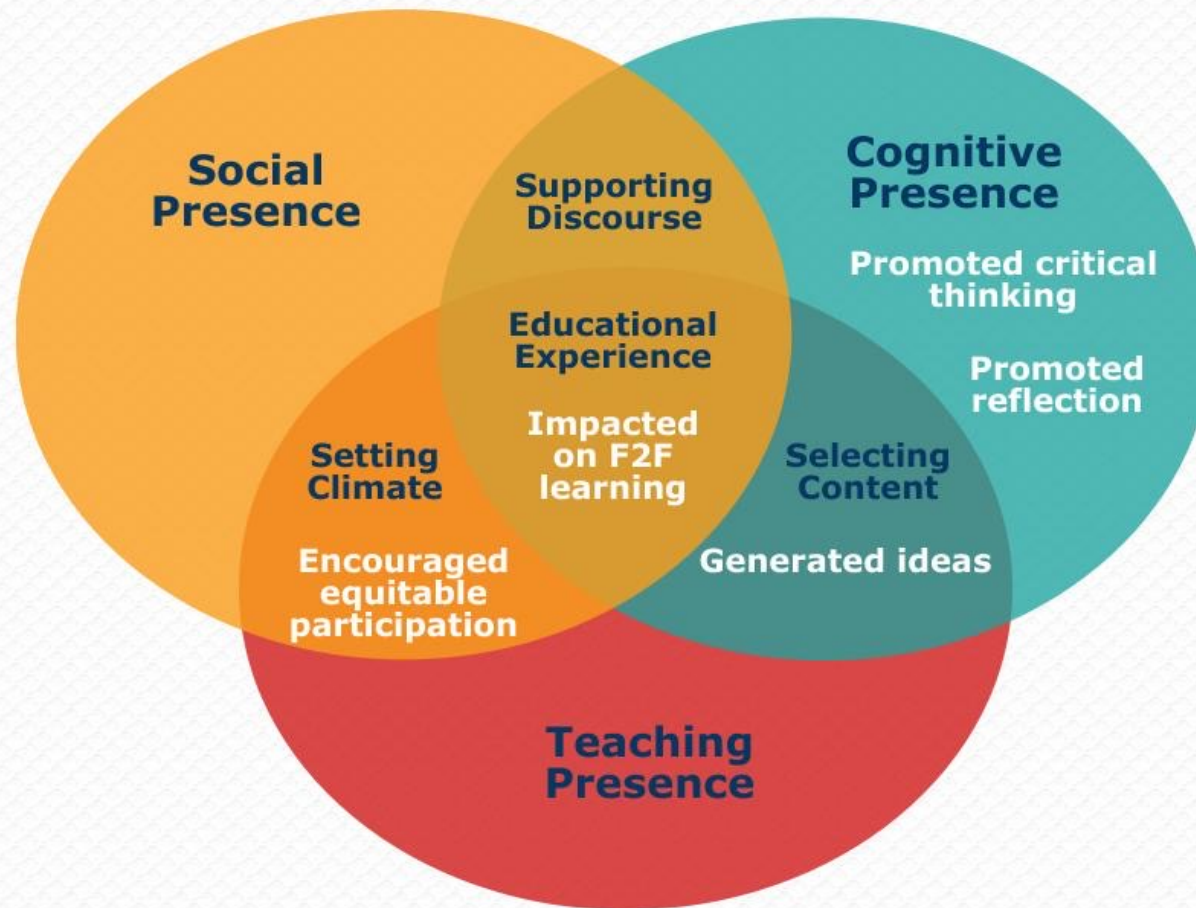
Salient Findings: F2F Themes



Face-to-face themes as they relate to the Community of Inquiry model.

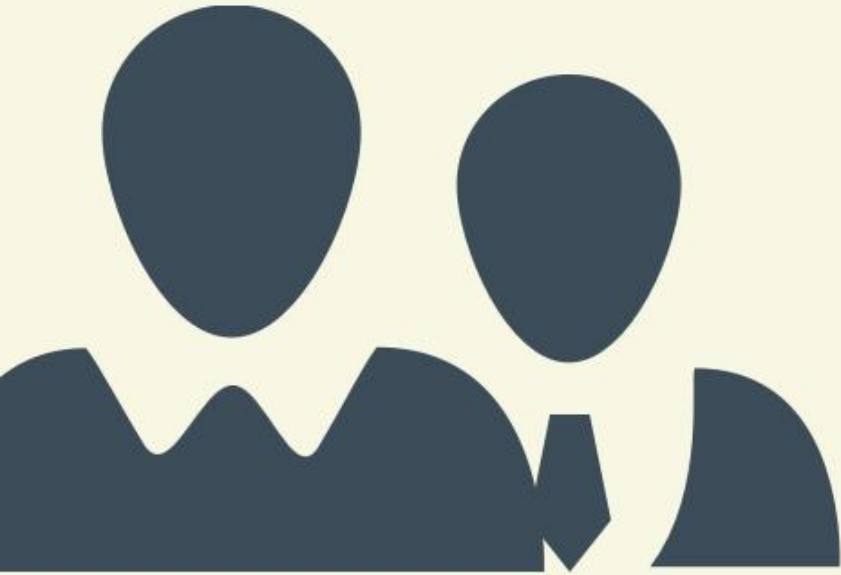
Source: Garrison et al., 2000.

Salient Findings: Online Themes



Online themes as they relate to the Community of Inquiry model.

Source: Garrison et al., 2000.



Do these findings
resonate with your
experiences?
Is there anything here
that surprises you?

Discussion Questions

Implications for Practice

- The findings were limited to the study of a particular faculty development workshop, offered in a blended format
- Comparison to the literature suggests that the study may have implications for practice for other PD programs in higher education

Implications for Practice

Implications - Deep Approach

- Participatory workshop activities
- Keep presentations short
- Increase engagement
- Apply new learning
- Provide opportunities to make connections, reflect

Implications - Surface Approach

- Convey the purpose of activities
- Align teaching and learning activities to learning outcomes
- Participants: set aside time to fully commit
- Participants: apply new learning quickly

Implications for Practice: Blended Format

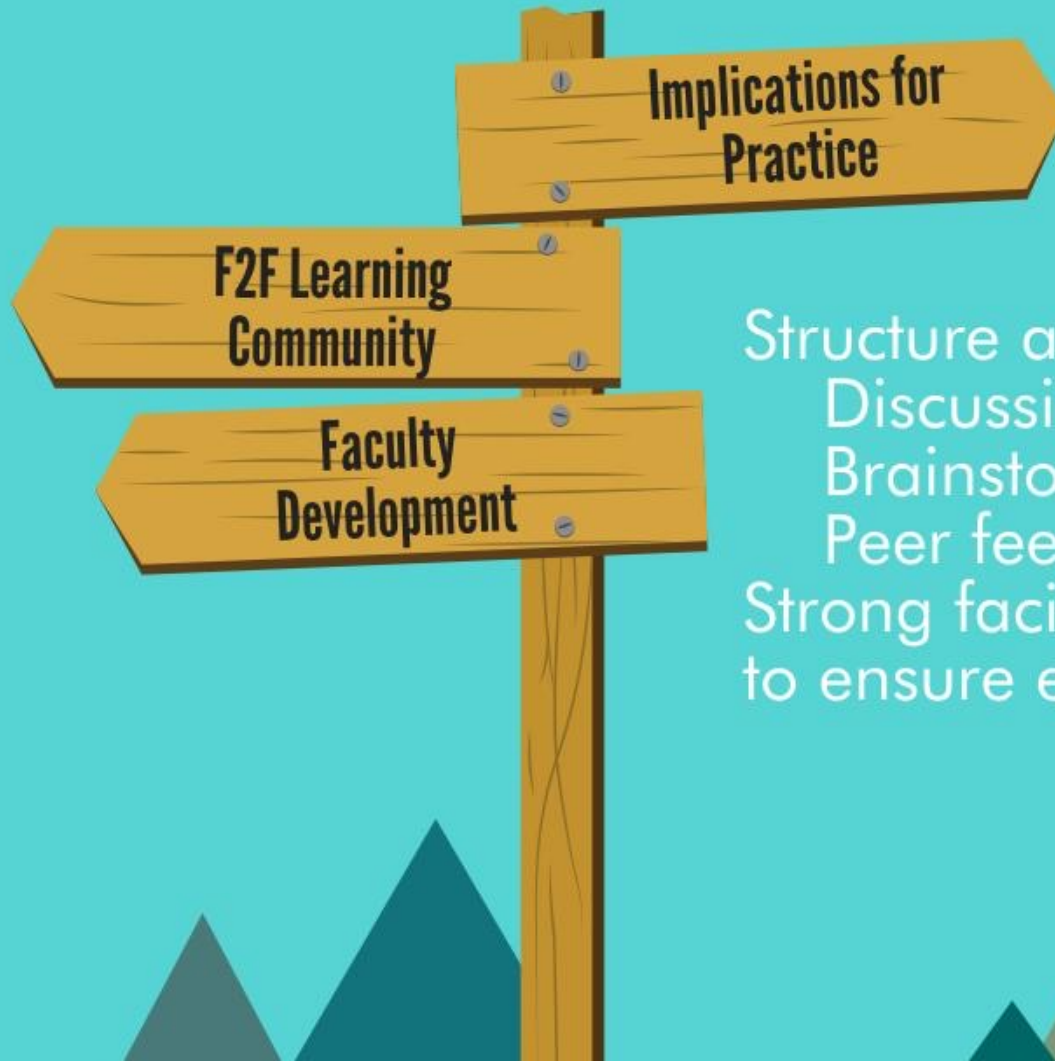
Both have a place in faculty professional development.

Use the strengths of each delivery mode to offer what each one does well:

Face-to-face: clarifying or reinforcing concepts

Online: Equitable participation, reflection

Implications for Practice: F2F Learning Community



Structure activities such as:

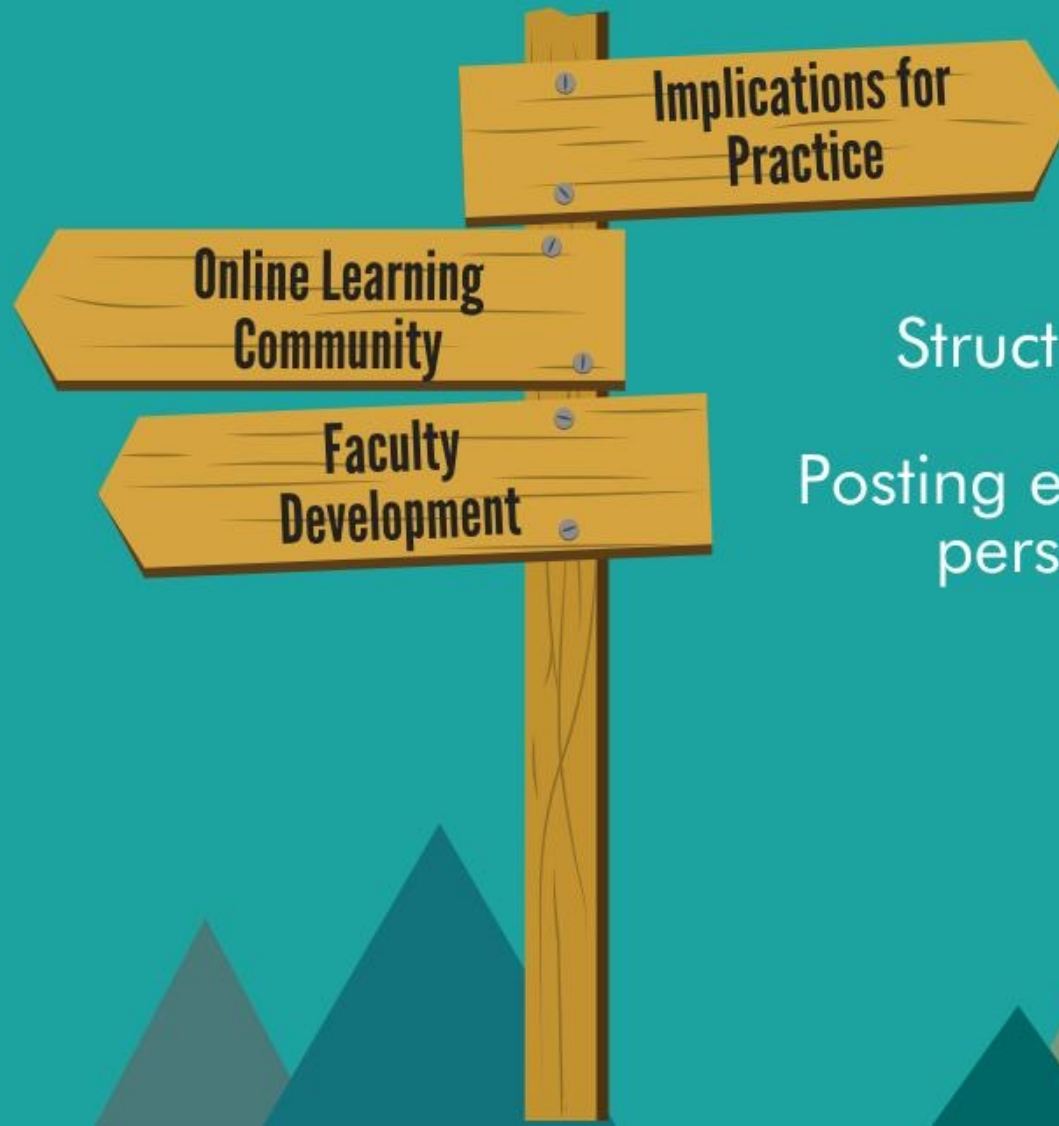
Discussions

Brainstorming

Peer feedback

Strong facilitation skills are needed to ensure equitable participation

Implications for Practice: Online Learning Community



Structure activities such as:
Discussions
Posting examples from one's own
perspective or discipline
Peer feedback
Reflection



Questions?

Comments?

References

- Biggs, J, & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2(2-3), 87-105.
- Marton, F., & Saljo, R. (1976a). On qualitative differences in learning: I – outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46(1), 4 – 11. doi: 10.1111/j.2044-8279.1976.tb02980.x