

Chapter I. Introduction

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework is a data-driven theory of instructional design that was developed by online learning researchers in 1999 (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999). The framework has been widely adopted by online learning scholars and teachers across all disciplines of higher education. This book applies the framework to the design and delivery of hybrid and online first-year writing (FYW) at institutions of higher education in the United States. We argue that the CoI framework is particularly applicable when designing and delivering online and hybrid writing courses as well as face-to-face courses with digital components.

Throughout this book, we concentrate on peer review as a site where writing classrooms function as communities of inquiry. Our focus on peer review is a result of our previous research. In 2017–2018, we surveyed 669 FYW students and conducted 81 follow-up interviews. When describing how they learned from their classmates, students were most likely to mention peer review (Stewart et al., 2022; Cunningham et al., 2022). Consequently, we focus on peer review as an example of how to apply the CoI framework to writing studies. However, our goal is not to recommend one ideal way of designing digital peer-review workshops; instead, we present the CoI framework as an instructional design strategy. Our hope is that our readers will use our writing studies version of CoI as a heuristic to develop and evaluate a wide range of collaborative learning activities in various modalities.

Our anticipated readers are (a) writing instructors who will adapt the strategies we present for designing and facilitating peer review and other collaborative activities; (b) writing program and writing center administrators who will use the CoI framework to create training and professional development programs for graduate student instructors and faculty; and (c) fellow online writing instruction scholars who will replicate, extend, and/or critique this area of research.

Community of Inquiry Framework

The CoI framework, theorized by D. Randy Garrison et al. in 1999, is a social constructivist model of online learning. Founded on the precept that effective online learning must develop a sense of community among classmates, the CoI framework is comprised of three elements: *cognitive presence*, *social presence*, and *teaching presence*. Adapted from Garrison et al. (1999), Figure 1.1 visualizes the presences as components of a Venn diagram.

Cognitive presence is the goal of a community of inquiry. As Garrison et al. (1999) defined it, *cognitive presence* is the ability “to construct meaning through sustained communication” (p. 89). CoI researchers have characterized *cognitive presence* in terms of John Dewey’s (1910) four phases of practical inquiry:

*triggering event*¹, *exploration*, *integration*, and *resolution*. Students encounter a *triggering event* (typically created by an assignment or a comment made by the instructor or classmates), which encourages them to *explore* their own prior and emerging knowledge of the concept. Conversations with course participants prompt *integration* when students negotiate multiple perspectives and construct new knowledge. Finally, students achieve *resolution* when they apply what they have learned. In our model of peer review as an example of a community of inquiry, we examine how students in FYW courses experience these phases when they revise in response to feedback.

Social presence was first defined by John Short et al. (1976) as the “degree of salience of the other person in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions” (p. 65). In 1992, Joseph B. Walther expanded the concept of *social presence* to include whether people developed visual interpretations of others in online environments through text-based communication to create a sense of intimacy and identification.

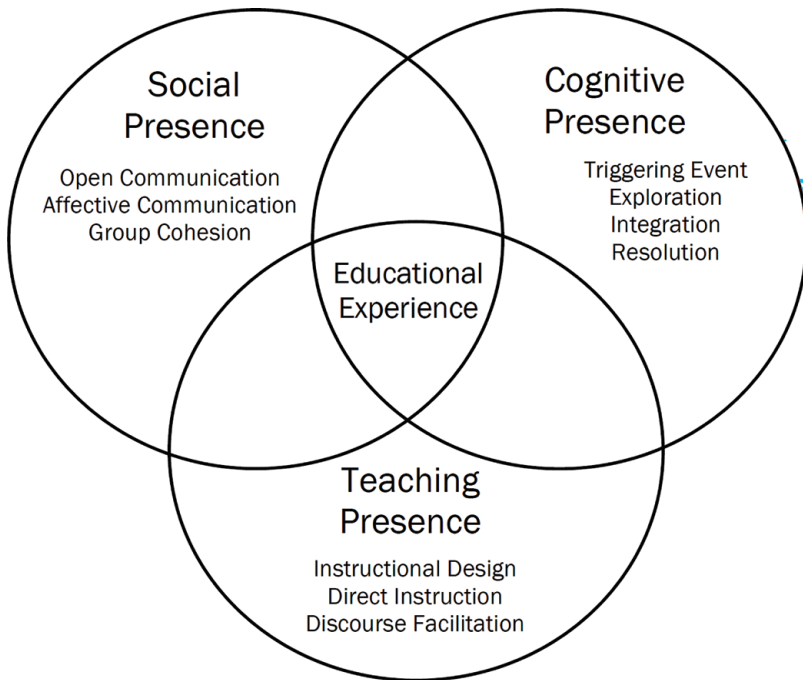


Figure 1.1. Venn Diagram of the COI Framework.
Adapted from Garrison et al. (1999).

1. In the decades since Dewey’s discussion of these terms, “triggering event” has taken on a new connotation related to trauma. We maintain the original terminology because it is used consistently throughout CoI scholarship.

By 1997, Charlotte N. Gunawardena and Frank J. Zittle added the idea that *social presence* related to whether someone felt as though they were interacting with a “real” person. This is closer to the definition first employed by Garrison et al. (1999) in their CoI framework, where they defined *social presence* as “the ability of participants in the CoI to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as ‘real people’” (p. 89). Garrison et al.’s (1999) definition included three sub-categories—*group cohesion*, *open communication*, and *affective communication*—that have been critiqued (Annand, 2011, 2019) and reconceptualized (Christen et al., 2022; Wertz, 2022) over time. Our project similarly calls for a reframing of *social presence*, proposing *social perceptions* and *social learning* as sub-categories and calling for more research to account for *social comfort* and students’ *attitudes* about online learning.

Teaching presence is the foundation of a community of inquiry. It relies on the instructor’s pedagogical choices, which ultimately create opportunities for *social presence* that facilitates *cognitive presence*. CoI scholars group those pedagogical choices into three categories: *instructional design*, *direct instruction*, and *discourse facilitation*. *Instructional design*, as explained by Garrison et al. (1999), “includes the selection, organization, and primary presentation of course content, as well as the design and development of learning activities and assessment” (p. 90). *Direct instruction* is another element of *teaching presence* that typically occurs when instructors provide feedback or offer additional resources to guide students’ learning—when instructors directly address or interact with students. The third element of *teaching presence* is *discourse facilitation*, by which instructors encourage student participation and interaction. We maintain the original sub-categories of teaching presence in our writing studies model of CoI and particularly emphasize the importance of *discourse facilitation*, arguing that discourse doesn’t just happen and needs to be facilitated.

Our previous research indicates that the CoI framework is an effective heuristic for designing and assessing hybrid and online writing classes (Cunningham et al., 2022; Hilliard & Stewart, 2019; Stewart, 2017; Stewart et al., 2021; Stillman-Webb et al., 2023). It is particularly appropriate for FYW because it shares many of writing studies’ own theoretical assumptions about writing and learning as fundamentally social processes (Stewart et al., 2022). In this book, we specifically examine peer review as one social activity to which the CoI framework saliently applies.

The Community of Inquiry Framework and Peer Review

We argue that the CoI framework can and should apply to any collaborative learning activity, but we focus on peer review in this book because it is a site

where communities of inquiry noticeably appear in writing classes. As Jason Wirtz (2012) has argued, peer review is a central activity that builds community and defines writing as a social activity in FYW. Kay Halasek (2023) has similarly described peer review as a “connective practice” that “occupies a particular niche in the [course ecology] but also extends across and throughout a course” (p. 83). The social, connective nature of peer review creates a space where students can form a community of inquiry that extends to the rest of the course.

Peer review in writing studies is a well-researched topic. Early scholarship, such as that by Peter Elbow (1968; 1998), showcased peer review as a strategy for emphasizing peer learning in a student-centered classroom. Kenneth A. Bruffee (1984, 1999) and Anne Ruggles Gere (1987) built upon this work and shifted focus to teacher training when designing and facilitating peer-review workshops. Steven J. Corbett et al. (2014) turned their attention to bringing students into the peer review process, with Hannah Ashley et al. (2014) suggesting this could be achieved through student-generated rubrics. More recently, Phoebe Jackson and Christopher Weaver’s (2023) edited book provided a comprehensive look at peer review as a historically and rhetorically situated collaborative practice.

Our project is particularly concerned with peer review as a digital activity, which has been a prominent conversation in writing studies literature. In 2000, Beth L. Hewett compared online peer feedback—what she called “computer-mediated peer group talk”—with oral feedback, suggesting that online peer discussions resulted in the direct inclusion of peers’ ideas and that oral feedback resulted in less direct revision and more sharing of ideas. Ellen Strenski et al. (2005) examined the benefits of using email for small group peer review, finding that small group exchanges were effective, as were one-on-one emails with students and peer tutors. Christopher W. Dean (2009) focused on research writing in a hybrid FYW course with the larger goal of creating a system of assessment and found that online peer review was effective in part because it allows students to multitask. Ruie Jane Pritchard and Donna Morrow (2017) compared face-to-face and online peer review for a group of K-12 student teachers. They found that online peer review helped the teachers to be more open to online teaching and recommended a combination of face-to-face and online opportunities for peer review. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch (2005) discussed potential student benefits of asynchronous peer review, such as affording more time to provide feedback, providing quieter individuals a more comfortable environment, and encouraging more directive feedback.

This previous scholarship has consistently concluded that there is tremendous potential for online peer review to result in collaboration and learning. Prior studies have also tended to explore specific tools (e.g., email), compare face-to-face and online peer review, or conceive of digital peer review as asynchronous only. We depart from this trend: instead of comparing face-to-face and online designs with the goal of determining which is more effective, we seek to describe strategies for designing peer-review workshops that can be applied across modalities.

We also differentiate between asynchronous and synchronous peer review, as we have in the past (Cunningham et al., 2022), as opposed to differentiating between hybrid, online, and face-to-face peer review. This distinction helps us argue that peer review is often already digital and can take place synchronously and/or asynchronously. Students can benefit from reading each other's texts in either or both communication modalities and can engage in both modalities whether online or face-to-face. The three presences of the CoI framework—*cognitive presence*, *social presence*, and *teaching presence*—create a modality-agnostic vocabulary for designing peer-review workshops in diverse learning environments.

Peer Review and Cognitive Presence

The four phases of *cognitive presence* as defined by CoI researchers can be used to analyze the learning that students experience during peer review. Our study specifically examines peer feedback as a *triggering event* that prompts students to reflect on their own writing (*exploration*) and make decisions about how to revise (*integration*). We look for evidence of *resolution* in the revisions students make between drafts. In this way, we explore *cognitive presence* as a cycle that is completed within a single workshop session. *Cognitive presence* can also be understood as the ability to transfer writing concepts and peer review techniques beyond FYW (Yancey et al., 2014). We focus on the within-workshop form of *cognitive presence* because our larger goal is to demonstrate how instructors can use the CoI framework to design specific activities. That design process involves understanding *cognitive presence* as just one of three elements of the CoI framework: applying knowledge must be understood in the context of the knowledge being taught (*teaching presence*) and the extent to which knowledge was intended to be collaboratively constructed (*social presence*).

Peer Review and Social Presence

Social presence is of particular interest to us as writing studies scholars because writing is, itself, a social action. Traditionally understood, *social presence* purports that online and hybrid classes must establish a feeling of belonging or trust to create a true community of learning. Without *social presence*, learning can and often does occur individually. Courses that aim to function as communities of inquiry must deliberately create activities and assignments that not only invite student interaction but also require collaboration and knowledge co-construction. Peer review is a clear example of such an activity. Students read and respond to one another's writing, often with the goal of revising their writing in response to peer feedback.

While not employing the CoI framework or terminology, Beth Brunk-Chavez and Shawn J. Miller's (2007) research pointed to *social presence* when they differentiated between collaboration and cooperation. The authors explained that

collaborative learning empowers students because “the authority over both the process and the product is transferred to the groups” (Collabor...co-oper-what section). In a direct application to peer review, they noted that collaboration “takes several forms in composition courses including ... detailed critiques of each other’s writing” (Collaboration in Action section). In their surveys with six sections of composition students, they found that students’ online discussion “posts were thoughtful and interesting, but there [was] little or no indication that they were aware of their fellow classmates’ postings or even their existence” (Decentered, Digitized, but not Disconnected section). In that case, students engaged in peer interaction (cooperation), but didn’t experience *social presence* (collaboration) as the CoI framework conceives of it.

Existing OWI scholarship on *social presence* in FYW has presented similar findings, illustrating that learning with and from peers isn’t as straightforward as it may seem. For example, Jennifer M. Cunningham (2015) investigated whether Voki avatars might create a sense of *social presence* across a range of activities in online FYW courses, finding instead that students preferred simpler, straightforward tasks; they found avatars were “less ‘real’ than directly communicating with other students ... via ... peer workshops” (p. 45). However, while students preferred direct communication with peers, they didn’t place high value on establishing relationships with their peers. This study illustrated an important disconnect between online writing instruction theory and online writing students’ experiences. CoI and OWI scholars have maintained that *social presence* is critical to collaborative learning activities like peer review, but students may not see the same benefit of the relationships that *social presence* is intended to build. Our study adds to this conversation by differentiating between interacting versus building relationships with peers.

The work of Dylan H. Retzinger (2018) and Kimberly Fahle (2019) has further complicated *social presence* by arguing for the importance of accounting for power dynamics. Retzinger (2018) described instructors and students creating online personas that reduce or ignore ways of being in the physical world. Fahle (2019) explored how student underlife, rather than undercutting or interrupting instruction, influences the potential for creating community in a synchronous online writing course. Our study builds on this work in two ways. First, we reconceptualize *social presence* as containing four components: *social learning*, *social perceptions*, *social comfort*, and *attitudes*. Second, we question the theoretical concept of *social comfort* and call for more precise measurements of *attitudes* in future research.

Peer Review and Teaching Presence

Teaching presence, which includes both the design and facilitation of the educational experience, relates to the ways instructors structure peer review in their classes. Many OWI scholars have discussed elements of course design that are

part of *teaching presence*, even though they may not use that term. Heidi Skurat Harris and Michael Greer (2022), for example, have emphasized purposeful, pedagogy-driven course design. Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle (2019, 2023) have applied the Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic (PARS) framework, which itself is a framework for *teaching presence* and online course design. And Amy Cicchino and Troy Hicks (2024) have explored the ways practitioners respond to and apply “best practices” recommended by researchers, showcasing important examples of how *instructional design* is theorized versus how it is applied.

Scholars of OWI who have studied *teaching presence* specifically as a component of the CoI framework have tended to focus more narrowly on particular course elements. For example, John Steele et al. (2017) investigated students’ perceptions of *teaching presence* via video lectures in online classes, discovering that students in online courses may experience a stronger sense of community if instructors include personalized, supplemental videos. Similarly, Anna Grigoryan (2017) studied *teaching presence* as it relates to student preferences for text-only or audio-visual feedback, finding that most students prefer both and consider audio-visual feedback to be more personal. In our research, we focus on how the three elements of *teaching presence* can facilitate course design, emphasizing the importance of *instructional design* and *direct instruction* to facilitate discourse.

Across the literature in both CoI and OWI, scholars have consistently concluded that *teaching presence* is crucial to facilitating any type of collaborative learning, including peer review. As Brunk-Chavez and Miller (2007) asserted, “unless the instructor purposefully sets out to design it, the course will lack a space for genuinely collaborative activities” (Decentered, Digitized, but not Disconnected section). Understood through a CoI lens, Mary K. Stewart (2017) explained, “*teaching presence* plays a critical role in facilitating this relationship between *social presence* and *cognitive presence*, because students must be put in situations where interaction is required for learning” (p. 46). More specific to peer review, Pritchard and Morrow (2017) found “that training students HOW to respond, whether f2f [face-to-face] or online, is essential” (p. 101). Our study contributes to this conversation by understanding *instructional design* as just one of three components of *teaching presence*. Differentiating between all three—*instructional design*, *direct instruction*, and *discourse facilitation*—will help instructors navigate the complex task of design in their local contexts.

Our Contribution

Our large-scale, multi-institutional research responds to Davida Charney’s (1996) call for empirical research in writing studies while avoiding what others have pointed out as limitations that can accompany studying our own courses as teacher-researchers or comparing classes in different modalities (Russell, 1999; Warnock, 2013). Further, our examination of peer review through the CoI framework combines theory and practice, offering scholarship that is both data-driven

and pedagogically pragmatic. While the CoI framework was developed as a theoretical framework for online learning, now nearly all learning—including peer-review workshops in hybrid and face-to-face courses—incorporates digital environments, making our research applicable to multiple modalities. Our book offers the CoI framework as a theoretical and practical way to navigate the complicated pedagogical task of designing and facilitating effective collaborative activities like peer review. Overall, we advocate for the CoI framework as a heuristic that can be applied to a variety of modalities and activities.

Drawing upon and extending the original CoI Venn diagram, we also offer a writing studies-specific version of CoI in Figure 1.2. Unlike the original CoI Venn diagram (see Figure 1.1), our heuristic (see Figure 1.2) presents the three presences as an iterative sequence, wherein *teaching presence* creates opportunities for the *social presence* that is necessary for students to experience *cognitive presence*. This organization reinforces a key finding of our research: in order for a course to function as a community of inquiry, instructors need to intentionally and transparently articulate (*teaching presence*) the purposes and goals of student interaction (*cognitive presence*), including why the learning needs to be collaborative instead of individual (*social presence*).

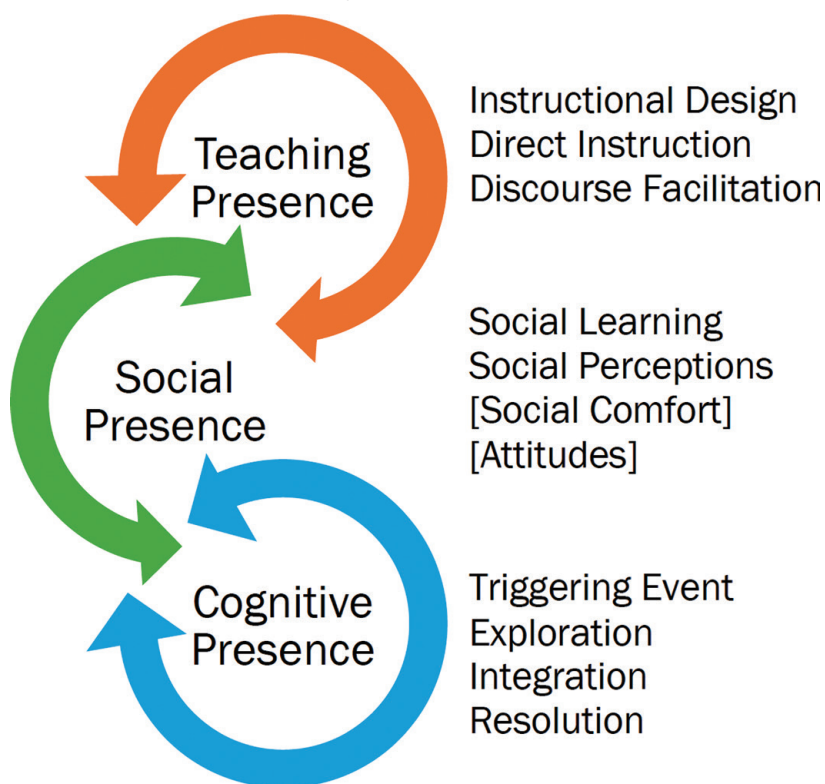


Figure 1.2. CoI in Writing Studies Heuristic

While it's useful to understand the presences as a sequence, they aren't purely linear. Instructors need to know the *cognitive presence* goals for the course before they begin the design processes required by *teaching presence*, and their observations of students' *social presence* can and should impact how they approach both *teaching* and *cognitive presence*. On the right side of the diagram, we have maintained the original CoI researchers' sub-categories for teaching presence (*instructional design, direct instruction, discourse facilitation*) and cognitive presence (*triggering event, exploration, integration, resolution*) but propose our own sub-categories for social presence (*social perceptions, social learning, social comfort, attitudes*). Two of the four *social presence* categories in Figure 1.2 are bracketed to visualize our call for more research related to *social "comfort"* and student *attitudes* about online learning.

Chapter Organization

Chapter 2: Methodology. In our next chapter, we'll discuss our research questions, participant recruitment and selection, data collection, coding, analyses, and limitations. We also include a table of participant demographics and additional information about specific instructors we chose to include as case studies in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: Cognitive Presence. Our discussion of *cognitive presence* applies Dewey's (1910) four-phase Model of Practical Inquiry—*triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution*—to peer review. We first provide a broad overview of our participants' beliefs about the goals of peer review, identifying three most frequently anticipated *resolutions: gain fresh perspective, learn from seeing peers' writing, and improve text*. Then, we triangulate the feedback students received with the revisions they made to look for evidence of students experiencing the four phases of *cognitive presence*. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates that peer review *can*, but doesn't necessarily, function as a community of inquiry, providing a foundation for the rest of the book.

Chapter 4: Social Presence. In the fourth chapter, we delve further into our interview data to question traditional conceptualizations of *social presence*, focusing on *social learning, social perceptions, social comfort, and attitudes*. In what we hope will be a helpful contribution to CoI scholarship and writing studies, we discuss the complicated nature of terminology such as "relationships" and "comfort" in relation to the importance of building a supportive and inclusive learning community. We ultimately argue that *social presence* is undertheorized and call for more research that differentiates between *social perceptions* and *social learning* and that reconceptualizes the concepts of *social comfort* and *attitudes*. By investigating the dynamics of *social presence*, we unlock the potential for better understanding and for creating opportunities for student interaction, which leads us to *teaching presence*.

Chapter 5: Teaching Presence. In our fifth chapter, we discuss *teaching presence* as course design with the potential for creating *social* and *cognitive presence*.

We examine participant interviews along with artifacts such as instructor assignments, activities, and discussion forums to explore the ways instructors leverage *instructional design*, *direct instruction*, and *discourse facilitation* to create opportunities for our participants' stated learning goals (*gain fresh perspective*, *learn from seeing peers' writing*, and *improve text*). We conclude this chapter by emphasizing the importance of articulating learning goals, intentionally facilitating discourse, and engaging in individual and whole-class communication to optimize the potential for *social* and *cognitive presence*.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. In the final chapter, we offer the Community of Inquiry Framework in Writing Studies as a heuristic applicable to instructors, writing program administrators, writing center professionals, and scholars. Our hope is that this book and heuristic will inform course design, professional development, and future research. Specifically, we hope that instructors will find this heuristic useful as a way to parse course design into manageable phases; that administrators and those in similar roles will share recommendations offered throughout this book; and that researchers will continue to examine the complicated concept of *social presence*, particularly *social comfort* and *attitudes*.