

# Enhancement Strategies for Visual Arts Online Learning through Community of Inquiry

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## ABSTRACT

The demands and the need to be able to learn various cutting-edge techniques and media in the creation of visual arts, require students to be able to absorb a number of information combined with an intuitive understanding of things that are relevant in every situation. Amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic, various virtual learning communities initiated a trend of visual arts learning. This study aims to reveal the online Community of Inquiry (hereinafter, CoI) learning model that takes place in virtual learning communities in Indonesia. The method of the investigation was a qualitative virtual ethnography approach involving 24 members from two virtual learning communities in Indonesia. Understanding their learning experience was achieved through interviews, participatory observation, and assessment of the participants' artworks that had been produced during the learning process. Results revealed that the experience of creating visual arts through an online inquiry learning community has positively impacted creation and appreciation activities. By studying how the visual arts learning process takes place in virtual learning communities, we can contribute to ensuring the success of the ongoing community of inquiry model for online learning and suggest comparable tactics to raise the standard of visual arts education online.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As people in Indonesia have been used to online learning since the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, several virtual learning communities have initiated the implementation of online visual arts learning. The trend of learning visual arts in online short course formats is largely mediated by social media (Aykar, 2015). This is due to the high demand for students to master various techniques and media in the creation of cutting-edge visual arts (Hafner et al., 2011). Visual arts science is growing

rapidly along with the massive use of technology in society. Unfortunately, the curriculum offered by higher education institutions has not been able to keep up with the fast and dynamic developments in the fields of art and design. Art students and learning designers prefer to access a variety of information and knowledge via the internet and join online communities that can accommodate their needs to improve their skills. The initiation of online communities for the benefit of learning positively affects the quality of students' learning, increases students' engagement, and encourages students' motivation to take online courses (Fiock, 2020). Therefore, students are required to have better digital literacy to encounter this situation.

Increasing mastery of digital literacy has encouraged the creation of non-formal visual arts learning practices in virtual spaces because the learning practice takes place dynamically and adaptively. The emergence of various virtual learning communities offers learning models initiated and organized by utilizing social media (Sun & Chen, 2016). Relying on the interaction between users as capital to maintain the continuity of learning activities, the learning space provided by the virtual learning community offers a cyber-based learning interaction space that offers a different atmosphere. This study aims to reveal the online community of inquiry learning strategy in a virtual learning community. Given that not all virtual learning communities in Indonesia are learning communities that can be a forum for the process of transferring knowledge and skills between community members. On the other hand, not all virtual learning communities that focus on visual arts position themselves as a laboratory as well as a virtual gallery that can become a place for members to produce visual arts that can be widely published through social media. The assessment in this study has its own position that shows its uniqueness.

Interaction between learning participants is one of the features that determine the success of online learning (Swan et al., 2000). Several studies have shown that learning participants assess discussions that take place in online learning as a more democratic activity compared to discussions through traditional classes (Saykili, 2018). In line with what was stated by Bonk & Zhang (2006) and Malik et al. (2017) that asynchronous discussion in cyber-based learning gives participants the opportunity to appreciate the contributions of other learning participants while encouraging participants to make their own contributions. Participants learn to think more carefully about comments, suggestions, or questions before they publish them in online discussion forums. By cyber-based learning experts, these conditions create a culture of reflection in learning (Poole, 2000; Puspitasari, 2021).

Cyber-based learning is a learning method involving technology-based applications that provide an experience for users to utilize, evaluate and maximize their potential to take effective independent learning alternatives. According to the Center for Innovative Research in Cyberlearning (2016), cyber-based learning is the use of new technologies to create new, effective learning experiences that are different from previous learning practices. The cyber-based learning movement is driving important changes in the provision of learning content by applying scientific insights, which influence how strategies and methods are used by students in transformative learning activities (Lynch, 2016). Curiosity is one of the provisions for participants to be actively involved in exploratory learning, which allows their potential to continue to grow, even though the process in a learning session has ended. The process of asking questions in a learning community focuses on learning objectives and outcomes. This process is a systematic process for defining relevant questions, conducting investigations for pertinent information, seeking alternative solutions, and implementing these solutions.

In cyber-based learning, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model is often used. Community inquiry was introduced by Lipman (Lipman, 2003). The context of online learning CoI is defined as a group of individuals who jointly engage in critical discourse and reflection to build personal meaning and create mutual relationships. Garrison states that Matthew Lipman began using the term CoI in the 1980s when he and his colleagues began to rethink educational practice from the perspective of a reflective paradigm (Garrison, 2016). Lipman (2003) described the reflective paradigm and stated that education should be focused on inquiry or the process of inquiry. The dominant assumptions of the reflective paradigm include: 1) education is the result of participation in an inquiry community of

instructors; students who are moved to think and find out when encountering ambiguous, vague, and mysterious knowledge; 2) interdisciplinary relations are well recognized; teachers/instructors who are cooperative and open to input; learners are expected to be thoughtful, reflective and reasonable; and the focus of the educational process is not on obtaining information but on a good understanding of what is being investigated (Lipman, 2003). CoI provides a context for understanding the formation of collaborative learning environments in online and mixed/hybrid learning spaces. In educational settings, communication is often focused on asynchronous written communication; but today's online learning formats often incorporate synchronized verbal and text communication. Blended/hybrid/mixed-mode formats are described as organic interactions of carefully selected complementary face-to-face technologies in online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

CoI combines three main elements; *cognitive presence*, *teaching presence*, and *social presence* (Garrison et al., 2000). Similarly, Cleveland & Campbell (2012) added one more element in CoI that is as important as the three previously reviewed and acknowledged elements, namely emotional presence. This is in line with what was stated by other cyberlearning experts that computer-mediated online learning will not be able to run solely by only relying on technical aspects (Bangert, 2009). The convergence of traditional classrooms and online spaces presents an educational model that takes advantage of the benefits of both formats (Garrison, 2017; Micsky & Foels, 2019). Understanding the numerous benefits of using CoI in enhancing students' competence in online learning, this current study aims at revealing the application of CoI in two virtual learning communities in Indonesia. This study was conducted to answer the question, "How is the implementation of CoI in increasing the visual arts online learning in two virtual learning communities in Indonesia, namely *Kelas Kreatif* and *Rizka Art Space*?" This study is expected to provide evidence about the practical benefits of CoI in improving the quality of online learning in the visual arts subject.

## 2. METHODS

This research uses a virtual ethnographic approach aimed at revealing how visual arts learning took place in a virtual space organized by the two communities. Ethnographic studies describe and interpret the culture and social structure of social groups. This approach has its roots in anthropology, which involves immersion in the particular culture of the society being studied so that life in that community can be described in detail. The ethnographer's job is to become a member of an accepted group, including participation in cultural life and practice (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Virtual ethnography is an online research method that adapts ethnographic methods to study communities and cultures created through computer-mediated social interaction. The use of a virtual ethnographic approach in this research is motivated by the social interaction between participants in the virtual learning community of *Kelas Kreatif* and *Rizka Art Space*, which then produces a natural response and creates a stimulus for community members to express it in the form of visual artworks. The process of transferring knowledge through virtual spaces in activities held online are several forms of stimulus that arise as a result of social interaction between learning participants. The qualitative research method with the virtual ethnographic approach used in this study can facilitate the research process in identifying, observing, and analyzing various things related to participant interactions in the two virtual learning communities.

Data collection techniques in this study included interviews involving 24 community members consisting of founders, learning instructors, and twenty learning participants. In-depth interviews, a conversation between researchers and participants, are used to obtain information that the researcher cannot directly observe. In addition, interviews aimed to gather information about online learning participants' views, knowledge, and values. Typically this in-depth interview is more like an informal conversation that serves as a tool for producing situational understanding from the perspective of the informant (Rohidi, 2012).

In this study, the in-depth interview technique involved the founders and members of the two virtual learning communities, which were intended to explore experiences and reveal aesthetic responses resulting from interactions between community members. The results of the in-depth interviews are expected to be a guide to finding the interests and motivations of members to join and be involved in online learning organized by the virtual learning community.

In addition to interviews, researchers also conducted participatory observations by participating in online learning activities organized by the *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space. Participatory observations were made to see closely how the implementation of a community of inquiry in learning and to track the results of the artworks produced by the participants.

To evaluate the results of learning the visual arts by implementing a community of inquiry in the two communities, the researcher involved expert validation who conducted an assessment using a rating scale on the work produced by the participants. The aspects assessed are based on the aesthetic principles proposed by Ovrick et al., (1968), which consist of balance, contrast, harmony, unity, and visual hierarchy.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Using Contextual Approach

Learners are conditioned to construct knowledge in their own minds. This kind of learning approach is categorized as a contextual approach by emphasizing the philosophy of constructivism, which emphasizes that learning is not just memorizing. In the early 20th century, Dewey convinced the world of education that knowledge could not be separated into separate facts or propositions but reflects skills that can be applied. Thus, it is ideal if the learning discussion forum can take place dynamically, always linking the curriculum or learning mechanism by reflecting on the question-and-answer discussion that occurred (Dewey, 2002). *Kelas Kreatif* is an online learning community with a large number of members, and the number of followers on social media reaches 16,600 from various cities in Indonesia. The focus of the *Kelas Kreatif* community is to bridge the gap between practitioners and visual arts learners to meet each other and facilitate learning activities in the form of online courses. Rizka Artspace is an online learning community that focuses on learning manual and digital painting. Rizka Artspace was established in 2014 and currently has 4,373 followers on Instagram. At first, before the pandemic, Rizka Artspace held face-to-face learning activities offline. Painting courses at Rizka Artspace usually take place on weekends. However, since the pandemic started in March 2020, Rizka art space has completely changed online learning platform. Learning management systems used by both communities are websites, social media (Instagram, WhatsApp), and Zoom meetings.

Based on observations of the learning process that took place in the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space, it was found that this community adopted the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model which was developed based on the collaborative and social-constructivist approach applied in the online learning model. The two virtual learning communities depend on the success of their learning on the continuity of communication and collaboration of all learning participants, both the instructors and participants (Salta et al., 2022). Communication is emphasized in the habit of learning participants to share their work experiences and views in the field of visual arts. Learning targets packaged in the form of an artwork challenge become a trigger so that learning participants can be active and focus on certain topics being raised as issues.

The spirit of constructivism in online learning by applying CoI is manifested in learning that focuses on discussion activities. The discussion activity is a process that is more than just a way to access information, but rather the activity of combining the learning process and learning outcomes into a single unit that can continue to be repeated. The process of investigating in learning activities can connect personal reflection with the material being studied, encourage learning participants to explore together and open up all the opportunities to be able to collaborate in producing artwork. The activities of asking, investigating, and exploring that is owned by learning participants must have a purpose, but

on the other hand, they must also be flexible so that interests that have not been seen from the learning process can continue to be explored.

As a Community of Inquiry, personal relationships within the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space have an important role but are not the ultimate goal. The success of the Community of Inquiry depends on the goals and relationships between participants who respect each other and the existence of an administration team and instructors who always encourage learning participants to express their opinions. Dewey suggests that from an educational point of view, interest in a particular subject or topic must be the main focus so that all learning processes that have been systematically designed can lead to the achievement of the main goal. This is what seems to be in line with what the two virtual learning communities have done so far.

*Kelas Kreatif* Community and Rizka Art Space strive to fulfil three elements of requirements for the sustainability of the Community of Inquiry model. They are 1) the existence of social relations (social presence); 2) the level of understanding achieved (cognitive presence), and 3) appropriate teaching methods (teaching presence). As a community of inquiry, both communities involve collaboration between participants, learning through active participation, and building social contexts. Collaborative learning activities in the community include organizing collaborative work activities entitled Art Jam, which motivates learning participants to participate and use critical thinking skills.

These collaborative activities encourage a shift from self-directed learning, which is a common approach to distance learning, to a pattern of interdependence between students and instructors. Garrison emphasized that distance learning does not encourage the emergence of an isolated learning space for participants, because, in reality, learning participants are always influenced by their environment, experiences, and communication with others (Garrison, 2017). Thinking and learning are often dependent on social and communication environments, encouraging exposure to perspectives, alternatives, ideas, and solutions. This explains why the visual artworks of the learning participants published on Instagram social media seem to have similarities from a technical and synthetic point of view.

The active participation of community members and followers can be seen from the responses they show when the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space organize various online-initiated activities. This is shown from the simplest things, for example, giving "like" every post of the *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space community on social media accounts, sending responses in the comments column, being involved in discussion activities, and participating in executed visual art projects collaboratively. The three elements of CoI (social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence) that are applied in *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space are interdependent. Each element has the potential to influence the other elements. For example, teaching methods will greatly impact and affect the achievement of learning participants in terms of understanding the material discussed; Likewise, social relationships that are established through virtual communication can also influence learning participants to achieve learning goals.

As social beings, the basic need of humans is to be able to interact and establish communication with fellow learning participants. An open communication model is needed in order to create a good and sustainable relationship so that mutual trust arises with one. The first element in CoI is social presence in the online learning model, having the same basic understanding. If an instructor wants to maintain good relations and communication with learning participants, a conducive situation must be created, a positive response, as well as personal connections and good communication methods. Social presence supports cognitive goals through its ability to sustain and support students' critical thinking in the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space.

Good interaction between instructors and learning participants must exist and be maintained in a Community of Inquiry and must always be projected to be developed in accordance with the demands of the times. Virtual learning community staff and instructors are responsible for creating a conducive atmosphere, fostering good interactions between learning organizers and learning participants, as well as relationships between participants. It is undeniable that this process takes quite a long time so that

learning participants can feel comfortable and trust in the online learning community in that they are participating in. However, the two virtual learning communities have proven that interactions among members can be well-established with an emotional presence. This is in line with what was stated by Cleveland & Campbell that in the Community of Inquiry, social presence would not be enough to maintain a conducive learning situation. One element attached to a social presence is an emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes, & Campbell, 2012).

### 3.2. Building emotional attachment among students and instructors

Based on the researchers' observations, the emotional attachment and friendship between participants and instructors in the Rizka Art Space and *Kelas Kreatif* communities were established very easily. Based on the results of the interviews, it is known that most of the learning participants are interested in being with the community because of their common interest in visual arts. This will strengthen social relations and solidarity within the community. A relationship like this also creates a sense of belonging to each other in learning in a virtual space held in a virtual learning community, so that feelings of mutual support and expressing responses can maintain interaction in the community (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). This confirms that the element of social presence in the Community of Inquiry cannot be equated with ordinary online discussion activities.

The achievement of the level of understanding (cognitive presence) as the second element of CoI can be seen from the transformation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of learning participants in the two communities. In general, every learning activity carried out by *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space has been accompanied by the goals and results to be achieved. Although the results and objectives of learning activities are not designed in detail as stated in the formal learning curriculum, the results and learning objectives set by the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space help them to organize effective and measurable learning activities. For example, when Rizka Art Space organized Art Jam activities, the determination of learning components related to the work method (media work that includes materials and tools, techniques used, and the process of creating) made it easier for the community to arrange time allocations so that activities can run effectively. The consideration that the learning participants come from educational backgrounds with diverse work skills is also important because each participant requires a different teaching approach (Ni, 2013). If the learning outcomes and objectives cannot be achieved optimally, Rizka Art Space will find it easier to evaluate improving the learning performance in the future.

Evaluation of the level of understanding achieved (cognitive presence) in learning activities in the *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space is iterative. This can happen when learning participants exchange information, connect ideas with each other, create new concepts, and try to share alternative solutions that are concluded together (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). It is undeniable that in the process they are required to focus more on further exploring the ideas, ideas, or solutions they specify. Cognitive presence can also be measured through the ability of participants to learn to understand the brief given by *Kelas Kreatif* when they do the artwork challenge. Understanding an actual issue that is the theme of the work, the requirements for the work, and the method for publishing the work produced by the participants are one of the benchmarks for the success of the participants in following the ongoing learning process.

The third element in CoI related to the method of delivering material (teaching presence) is a form of implementing good and correct learning methods, making it an important element so that the other two elements (social presence and cognitive presence) can function optimally. In this element, the instructor is expected and asked to design, facilitate and direct so that the learning process runs well. Instructors are also obliged to prepare material from the existing subjects, provide approaches and delivery methods, and activities, including providing directions, tutorials and focus on discussion topics and work challenges that can be accessed online. Creating materials that can be accessed online or designing effective face-to-face activities is a challenge for instructors in cyber-based learning.

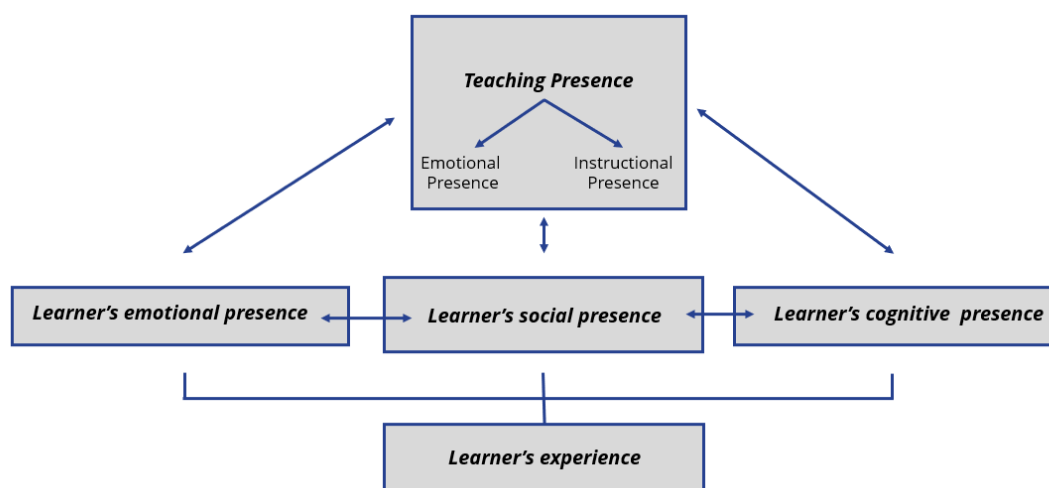
In the era of information technology today, instructors have to deal with learning participants who are accustomed to finding answers to every question through search engines. Instructors must be prepared for the fact that the learner may be someone who is more proficient than the instructor in a particular skill. This was also conveyed by one of the instructors in the *Kelas Kreatif*, who expressed his nervousness when he had to face the participants of an illustration drawing lesson entitled "Draw Cute Character" using the Procreate application. Some of the participants came from professional circles who were older than the instructors who guided the learning sessions. The following is an excerpt from an interview conducted with a learning instructor in the *Kelas Kreatif* on April 4, 2021.

"Honestly, I'm a little nervous because, in this virtual class, many participants are more professional in creating illustration images. I'm actually a beginner in illustration. So far, I have observed feeds on Instagram social media of several participants who attended this class, their works are very mature and excellent. So right now I feel nervous but excited at the same time. Hopefully, I can share my knowledge and experience in drawing character illustrations with Procreate."

What was mentioned earlier was that the situation acknowledged by the instructor was a challenge as well as a trigger for the instructor to equip herself with more knowledge and skills. As an instructor, she realized that most of the learning participants in *Kelas Kreatif* had already accessed tutorials on certain techniques in illustration drawing. When faced with a situation like this, the leading spirit of an instructor becomes an important aspect. The confidence of a leader must be owned by an instructor because then he can lead participants to achieve learning goals: increasing participants' understanding of the material and learning from the learning process itself (metacognitive). As stated by Garrison & Vaughan (2008) that metacognitive is the process of forming an understanding so that learning participants can assess what must be done and manage themselves for independent learning. Thus they can complete the tasks and challenges given.

The three elements in CoI; are social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence- supported by the emotional presence contained in the online learning of *Kelas Kreatif* community and Rizka Art Space- encourage the emergence of a reflective thinking pattern for each learner through emphasizing collaborative-constructivist-based learning activities. The four types of presentations can be found in the learning patterns applied by the two virtual learning communities. So far, various studies related to the CoI model in online learning believe that cognitive presence and teaching are two more dominant elements than social and emotional presence in determining the success of online and hybrid learning fields (Stenbom, Jansson, & Hulkko, 2016). However, in *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space, it is found that the elements of social presence and emotional presence are precisely the important aspects of successful learning of illustration work in virtual learning communities.

As stated before, emotional presence is needed for learning participants and instructors who have the authority to determine instructional learning. This shows that the presence of emotion is inherent in every component of learning that takes place in the *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space virtual learning community. The integration of the three elements of CoI and the presence of emoticons can be seen in the following diagram:



**Figure 1:** Integrated model of CoI elements and presence of Emotion in the Kelas Kreatif and Rizka Art Space community adapted from Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, 2000

To evaluate the results of visual arts learning by implementing a community of inquiry in the two communities, an assessment was carried out through expert validation. The assessment using a rating scale on the work produced by the participants was carried out twice, taken before and after online learning classes. The aspects assessed are based on the aesthetic principles proposed by Ovrick et al. (1968), which consist of balance, contrast, harmony, unity, and visual hierarchy.

**Table 1:** Assessment of the work produced by participants before participating in learning in the two virtual learning communities

Likert Scale (n)	Frequency (f)	f.n	%	Category
5	2	10	10	Very good
4	6	24	30	Good
3	5	15	25	Average
2	7	14	35	Poor
1	0	0	0	Very Poor
Total	20	63	100	
Mean			3.15	

Based on the table above, it can be seen that before participating in the learning held by the virtual learning community, the average value was 3.15 (average). This is because the learning participants come from different scientific backgrounds, and their basic illustration drawing skills are also different. The second assessment was carried out by experts on the artwork participants produced after participating in both communities' visual arts learning. The results of the assessment can be seen in the following table.

**Table 2:** Assessment of the work produced by participants after participating in learning by applying CoI in virtual learning communities

Likert Scale (n)	Frequency (f)	f.n	%	Category
5	8	40	40	Very good
4	9	36	45	Good
3	3	9	15	Average
2	0	0	0	Poor
1	0	0	0	Very Poor
Total	20	85	100	
Mean			4.25	

Table 2 describes that most artworks are in the good and good categories. In addition, it can be seen that after participating in the learning held by the virtual learning community, there are no more participants' works that are in the poor and very poor categories. This indicates that learning in a virtual learning community that applies CoI can have a significant effect on improving the quality of the work of learning participants (Chen, 2022). Based on the analysis of the results of the assessment of the work produced by the participants before and after participating in the lesson, it was found that there was an increase. The average of participants' work, which was originally 3.15 (average category), increased to 4.25 (good category) after participating in learning by applying CoI. Thus, there was an increase of 1.1 in the quality of the participants' work after participating in learning in the *Kelas Kreatif* Community and Rizka Art Space.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The application of the Community of Inquiry learning model in *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space as virtual learning communities emphasizes interactive learning strategies. Through CoI, efforts to build participants' creativity in learning visual arts, whether for knowledge, competence, appreciation, or creation, can be seen through the various interaction spaces presented by the two communities virtually. The CoI model in learning visual arts in both communities focuses on the interrelation between interactivity and creativity through art appreciation and exploration activities. It will improve the learning participants' experience, aesthetic sensitivity, and visual intelligence. Visual artworks produced by learning participants through the Community of Inquiry also play an important role in presenting tactile experiences, the experience of being directly connected to objects (illustrative works) or other beings (creators, appreciators, spectators) through the experience of seeing. The illustration images produced by the participants allow community members, sympathizers, and followers of *Kelas Kreatif* and Rizka Art Space communities on social media to experience the experience of creating and appreciating from a distance through sight, replacing the direct experience of dealing with concrete objects. This allows the two virtual learning communities to organize a Community of Inquiry learning model whose existence requires aspects of social presence, teaching presence, cognitive presence, and emotional presence. Results from this study suggest that the CoI survey holds promise as a useful and adaptive strategy for providing formative and summative feedback about the effectiveness of online courses and programs organized by the virtual learning community. Future studies are recommended to implement CoI in other subjects to see its effectiveness.

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