When Teachers and Students are Separated
Strategies from research on social presence for teaching at a distance

Research on increasing student engagement has largely been conducted in traditional classroom contexts, but over the past fifteen years, researchers have been working to build and test a framework for increasing student engagement and connection with strategies that can be applied in face-to-face classrooms or when teachers and students are physically separated in the context of online courses.[1] In response to the COVID-19 crisis, this interactive infographic gives an overview of this "social presence" framework and how experts in virtual learning are applying it to their work and digging deeper.

Introduction and Research

The audio portions of this infographic were taken from a conversation between Amy Clark and April Fleetwood from Florida Virtual School, Diana Sharp from REL Southeast, and Aimee Whiteside from the University of Tampa.

Key Challenges for K-12

- ✓ Understand the importance of communication with students.
- ✓ Create a classroom-feel in group online lessons.
- ✓ Make lessons culturally relevant.

Key Strategies for K-12

- ✓ Build strong relationships with students.
- ✓ Develop engaging online group lessons.
- ✓ Work with parents and students to create a schedule.
- ✓ Use checklists with younger students.

- ✓ Help young students take "brain breaks."
- ✓ Check in with older students on their progress.
- ✓ Use grace and compassion related to students' COVID-19 struggles.

Social Presence Model for Building Learner Connections[1]

Click on a circle for details.

[1]   A. L. Whiteside, A. Garrett Dikkers, & K. Swan (Eds.) (2017), *Social presence in online learning: Multiple perspectives on practice and research*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

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Introduction and Research

Social presence is the term researchers use to describe emotional attachments that play a role whenever teachers and students work together. Key concepts in theories of social presence include human connectedness, relationships, engagement, a sense of belonging, kindness, and compassion.

Research on social presence is in an emerging stage, driven by the growth of online learning and the need to understand how to foster social presence when teachers and students are physically distant. Researchers investigating social presence have been conducting case study research for almost two decades in the context of online and blended courses.

Much of the research on social presence has focused on university-level courses. Differences between online learning at university levels and K-12 levels highlight the need for more research on social presence for K-12 courses, especially given the new need for more remote learning with the COVID-19 crisis.

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Affective Association
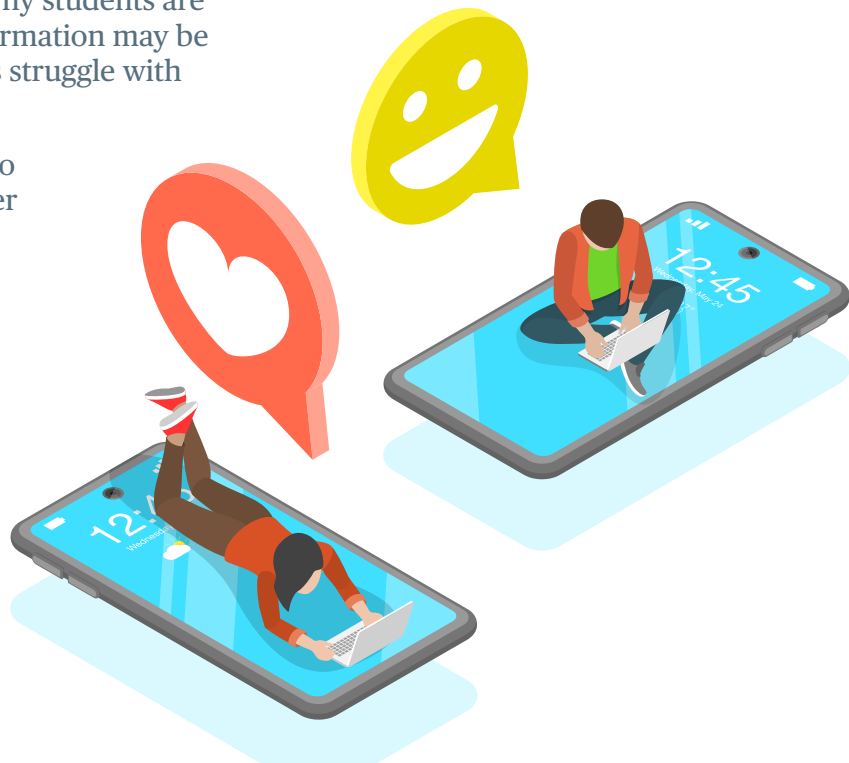### Establishing emotional connections

Strategies

Recognize that the amount of emotional support needed can vary at different points in the course. Students may need more affect from teachers at the beginning of a course or even before it begins.

Discover and understand why students are taking the course. This information may be especially useful if students struggle with the course.

Consider introductory video course tours, with scavenger hunts to find key course elements.

High school teachers can consider sharing experiences from their own high school years and incorporating humor from current music or Netflix shows aimed at teens.

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Community Cohesion
Creating positive social connections and interactions

Strategies

Intervene immediately if students do not understand or violate appropriate class discourse conventions.

Model appropriate responses for students to make to each other and the teacher.

Create and refer to clear guidelines about what it means to be a member of the course community.

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Instructor Involvement
Actively engaging your students with instructional decisions

Strategies

Recognize that every decision teachers make may impact the level of social presence, positively or negatively.

Give timely and regular instructor feedback.

Make choices that align with students' goals when designing activities or discussions

Increase social presence with adult learners by choosing instructional materials and activities that relate to real challenges adults have in the workplace.

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Interaction Intensity
Strengthening how students interact with and support each other

Strategies

Model how students should respond to each other.
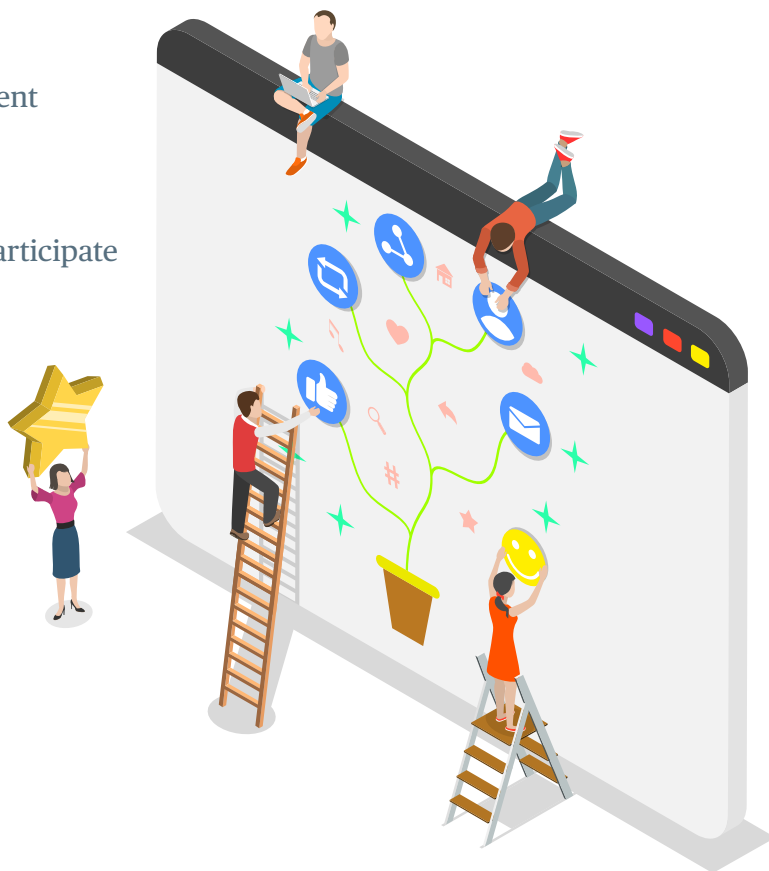
Encourage participation.

Be present and alert during student discussions.

Ask questions.

Respond more to student who participate less.

Help students understand that they have responsibilities for interacting with each other and helping each other.

For older students, support their interactions with each other in discussion boards. For younger students, encourage their interactions with each other in live lessons.

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Knowledge and Experience
Connections to students' unique backgrounds

Strategies

Ask students about their prior knowledge and experience.

Help students draw on their past knowledge and experience to share resources and lessons learned with classmates.

Give students opportunities to learn more about each other's background, coursework, and work experience.

Encourage students to recognize their own knowledge and see it as an accomplishment they can build on.

Help students abandon fixed mindsets (e.g., "I'm not a good writer") and adopt a growth mindset.