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Résumé de l'article

La pandémie de COVID-19 a nécessité un passage à l'enseignement en ligne, suscitant des préoccupations quant au maintien de la présence des enseignants et des étudiants dans les salles de classe virtuelles. L'éducation holistique, mettant l'accent sur l'amour, le soin et l'interconnexion, fait face à des défis dans le monde numérique. Les éducateurs holistiques explorent les comportements, les environnements et les outils en ligne favorisant une présence profonde. Quatre éducateurs du postsecondaire ont été interviewés, révélant une focalisation sur la gestion des émotions pour créer une atmosphère positive en ligne. Ils utilisent des états mentaux positifs et des rituels contemplatifs pour compenser l'absence de présence physique. Plutôt que de redéfinir la présence, les éducateurs utilisent des outils en ligne pour maintenir des notions traditionnelles, comme l'obligation d'être visible à la caméra. Des recherches supplémentaires sont nécessaires pour comprendre comment l'exposition des éducateurs holistiques aux technologies en ligne peut influencer les conceptions contemplatives de la présence.

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Love and the Distance: The Role of Presence in Online Learning

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a shift to online teaching and learning, prompting concerns about maintaining teacher and student presence in virtual classrooms. Holistic education, emphasizing love, care, and interconnectedness, faces challenges in the digital realm. Holistic educators explore online behaviours, environments, and tools fostering deep presence. Four post-secondary educators were interviewed, revealing a focus on managing emotions for a positive online atmosphere. They utilize positive mental states and contemplative rituals to compensate for the lack of physical presence. Instead of redefining presence, educators use online tools to uphold traditional notions, such as requiring visible cameras. Further research is needed to understand how holistic educators' exposure to online technologies may impact contemplative ideas of presence.

Keywords: holistic education, presence, online teaching and learning, educational technology

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Résumé

La pandémie de COVID-19 a nécessité un passage à l'enseignement en ligne, suscitant des préoccupations quant au maintien de la présence des enseignants et des étudiants dans les salles de classe virtuelles. L'éducation holistique, mettant l'accent sur l'amour, le soin et l'interconnexion, fait face à des défis dans le monde numérique. Les éducateurs holistiques explorent les comportements, les environnements et les outils en ligne favorisant une présence profonde. Quatre éducateurs du postsecondaire ont été interviewés, révélant une focalisation sur la gestion des émotions pour créer une atmosphère positive en ligne. Ils utilisent des états mentaux positifs et des rituels contemplatifs pour compenser l'absence de présence physique. Plutôt que de redéfinir la présence, les éducateurs utilisent des outils en ligne pour maintenir des notions traditionnelles, comme l'obligation d'être visible à la caméra. Des recherches supplémentaires sont nécessaires pour comprendre comment l'exposition des éducateurs holistiques aux technologies en ligne peut influencer les conceptions contemplatives de la présence.

Mots-clés: éducation holistique, présence, enseignement et apprentissage en ligne, technologie éducative

Introduction

Many holistic educators have emphasized the role of love and care in pedagogy (hooks, 2003; Miller, 2018), suggesting that these qualities flourish mainly through a teacher's ability to engage complexity and understanding (Flores & Alfaro, 2022) as fully embodied presence in a classroom. Among the qualities related to presence cited by Miller (2018) are openness, sensory awareness, and humility, along with an emphasis on non-dualistic being (Loy, 2019) and classroom interconnectedness (Jennings, 2015; Nhat Hanh, 1987). Miller (2018) refers to the importance of a teacher's whole presence as a unifying and potentially healing force in the classroom:

> Presence is an elusive quality, but we know it when we encounter it in another person who listens with their whole being. Genuine presence has a healing quality. Presence is critically important in teaching; the teacher who is able to be present to students creates an environment where real learning can occur. When we reflect on teachers who made a difference in our lives, it is often their presence rather than their pedagogy that made that difference. (p. 86)

The most obvious characteristic of presence is the *physical embodiment of both teachers and learners in a shared space. Embodied learning (Shonstrom, 2020) does not simply mean "being bodily present*." Still, it refers to the inclusion of the body and sensations as a mimetic (Frei-Landau et al., 2022), an immersive aspect of the learning experience (Johnson-Glenberg et al., 2016). One of the most prominent holistic schools, the Waldorf Academy, has advocated teaching stories, myths, and narratives through integrating body movement into the cognitive learning processes (Darian, 2012; Nicol, 2016; Steiner & Amrine, 2015). Recognizing and *including the body as part of the classroom is* essential to contemplative practices and learning (Rigg, 2017). Another key element of social presence is the role that supportive relationships can play in learning, both within classrooms (Battey et al., 2016) and through student interconnections outside the classroom (Lehrer, 2023).

With the increase in digital classrooms after the COVID-19 pandemic, social presence in the classroom has become problematic, particularly as students and teachers have been required to adjust their previous classroom experiences and methods to completely suit online or hybrid settings (Moroz et al., 2022). Studies suggest that the stress of the pandemic fostered negative emotions that strained students' interpersonal lives (Cheng et al., 2023). Teachers' insights from this adjustment experience can provide wisdom for future emergencies that require revised strategies to foster shared presence, contemplation, and love in the classroom. Witenstein and Thakur (2023) concur in their recent narrative study of evolving learning modalities during COVID-19:

> The mettle and well-being of the global higher education faculty core were greatly tested and needed to be reflectively considered in concert with students' needs. Their narratives and insights could provide critical knowledge for adaptively revising faculty member capacity during crisis times. (p. 4)

One question that arose throughout the transition to online teaching and learning is, to what extent can teachers build a positive, loving, caring, and nurturing presence in the online classroom, given the affordances of intelligent technologies?

Technology and "Online Presence"

The concept of *online presence has been explored in recent studies (*Glazier, 2021; Rongmuang, 2018; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009) to determine the degree to which embodiment is a necessary component of learning in digital settings, as well as how teachers can facilitate social presence in online environments (Marmon, 2018; Savvidou, 2013). Many recent studies make strong connections between embodiment and seemingly "bodiless" subjects such as history (Price et al., 2016) or physics where, as Johnson-Glenberg et al. (2018) have suggested, "learning may be more effective if it were based not so much on symbols and their manipulation, but on perceptual processes and the actions afforded in learning environments" (p. 3).

Recent research alludes to the growing significance of online presence and interpersonal communication (Miao & Ma, 2022; Stafford, 2005; Tuncay & Özçinar, 2009; Wright, 2015), noting the importance of fostering physical and emotional embodiment through digital affordances (Mennecke et al., 2011). Definitions of "online" presence tend to focus on attempting to make the experience of technology as rich in stimulus as possible so that the learner feels "transported" into a world that is close enough to a physical reality that they can see, feel, hear and touch (Balakrishnan & Sundar, 2011; Green & Clark, 2013). Hence, Lombard and Ditton (1997) have identified six characteristics of digital presence, one of which is the medium's capacity to generate precise depictions of objects, occurrences, and individuals—illustrations that resemble or mimic physical objects in terms of appearance, sound, and sensation. Online presence operates under the assumption that refining the sense of reality in online media will also create a seamless interactivity close enough to actual physical presence that the latter would not be missed (Oh et al., 2018).

Many studies have lauded online technologies for the extent to which they could potentially allow for more extensive, rich communications than physical classrooms afford (Garrison & Anderson, 2003), provide outlets for students to build trust, social identity, and rapport (Falloon, 2011; Hehir et al., 2021), or even promote students' mental

health (Ito et al., 2020; Pierce, 2009). One reason for this optimism is the ideological role that computers and technology are thought to play in dismantling hierarchical classrooms (Selwyn, 2011) by offering extended opportunities for decentralized peer-to-peer learning (De Lange et al., 2020; Dumitru & Enachescu, 2015), digital connectivity, and knowledge sharing among equals. One promise of online learning is that the role of the teacher shifts from knowledge delivery to facilitation. Underwood and Farrington-Flint (2015) note how technologies such as blogging and online discussion boards promote expanded opportunities for "engagement with unrestricted levels of communication," which in turn "allows greater freedom of expression, opportunities for collaboration, discussion and reflection" (p. 34).

However, Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005) have noted that this ability to invite peer sharing does not necessarily constitute a predefined or structured curriculum:

> Although the natural and appropriate inclination is to first direct interaction efforts to establishing social presence and creating interrelationships, this is only a precondition for a purposeful and worthwhile learning experience. Teaching presence is important for the creation and sustainability of a community of inquiry focused on the exploration, integration, and testing of concepts and solutions. (p. 134)

Facilitating peer sharing through blogs and chats does not obviate the need for teachers to cultivate a genuine online presence with their students.

Much less explored in the literature has been the effect of online learning on holistic education, especially where cultivating a shared loving presence and contemplative learning are key to the learning process (Gibbs et al., 2021; Thompson, 2017). Contemplative learning has been described by Miller (2000, 2018) as non-dualistic, emphasizing the intimate interconnection and unity of the learner and subject matter. Miller in particular has referenced the importance of a circular and mutually nurturing physical space for flourishing contemplative learning. On the other hand, not having the opportunity to connect to students in person could incite what Miller (2018) refers to as "love's shadow," which he connects with death and separation:

> Love also has a shadow side which is recognition of inevitability of separation and death…Death and separation make any love poignant as the lovers realize that the physical nature of love cannot be permanent. (p. 21)

Greater online learning threatens to lose a sense of community or interconnection, downplaying the nuanced texture of shared co-presence by making it too easy for students to succeed independently without the support of teams or groups (Samuels, 2013). Yet another obstacle to online presence is a tendency for technologies to distract the mind and divide attention. Levy (2016) suggests that even though online technologies allow individuals "to communicate instantaneously with loved ones, to read the news as it is unfolding in real time, to listen to music, and to play games" (p. 2), the mind is not always so labile to multi-task given these affordances.

Research Questions

This article reflects the findings of a qualitative, interview-based study that explored how teachers have coped with the recent shift from in-person to online teaching. Of particular importance is the impact of an online learning setting on contemplative learning, love, and teacher-student presence. The research questions guiding this approach are as follows:

1. What physical, mental, and emotional adjustments do teachers need to make to shift toward online/hybrid learning spaces?
2. What does a contemplative education *look* and *feel* like in a digital and online setting, and how is contemplative education taught and shared differently when teachers have shifted from in-person mode to online teaching and learning?
3. How do contemplative or holistic teaching and learning foster interconnection and "being presence" without physical, in-person presence? What rituals, tools, and attitudes are needed for teachers' presence to be mobilized and adapted to an online learning environment?
4. What are the challenges for teachers in observing the presence of themselves and students in an online teaching and learning context?

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the theoretical framework posed by Whiteside (2015), which describes how "social presence involves five integrated elements—Affective Association, Community Cohesion, Instructor Involvement, Interaction Intensity, and Knowledge and

Experience—that together affect participants' motivation to take an active role in their own and their peers' learning" (p. 63). This model robustly addresses core areas of social presence as follows:

a) **Affective Association** is described by Whiteside (2015) as addressing the emotional associations that arise in online learning environments, including "emotion, humour and self-disclosure related to personal emotion" (p. 63).

b) **Community Cohesion** refers to factors such as "sharing additional resources and information with the group and perceiving the group as a unified entity" (Whiteside, 2015, p. 64) and "being an accessible member of the group" (Whiteside, 2015, p. 64).

c) **Instructor Involvement** pertains to the level and magnitude of instructors' engagement in shaping presence, including organizing particular activities to encourage social presence and their impact on motivating students to become more engaged learners and contributors in online learning settings.

d) **Interaction Intensity** refers to "the level of interaction between participants" and can include "agreement, disagreement, compliments, and questions" (Whiteside, 2015, p. 65). Interaction Intensity dovetails with Community Cohesion in describing presence as an interactive quality that relies on active dialogue and communication.

e) **Knowledge and Experience** refer to many ways in which "prior knowledge and experiences play an essential role in building social presence" (Whiteside, 2015, p. 60). This includes social and technological knowledge that might facilitate teachers' new roles as online instructors.

Whiteside's Social Presence model was used to help thematically categorize references in the coded interviews without necessarily limiting the scope of the research findings.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) to interview post-secondary instructors in Canadian schools who are teaching online and have attempted to implement holistic approaches to presence in their curriculum. These participants were recruited based on their prior backgrounds and experience in teaching holistically

online, using an email flyer and invitation letter explicitly outlining the time commitment and benefits of the study. Ideally, the teachers were in transition to adjust their classes to an online environment fairly recently, particularly in light of the recent pandemic.

Participants were allowed to opt out of the study at any time before, during, or after the interview. Teachers were also notified that the interview questions would focus on pedagogical approaches to adjusting to the pandemic. Therefore, they would not be touching upon any sensitive or emotionally triggering experiences related to the pandemic. One benefit that was communicated to the teachers before the study was to serve as a form of self-inquiry for teachers to explore their coping methods while transitioning to an online format. Data gathered from the study would also help us, as researchers, to formulate new recommendations for how online teaching could be more emotionally engaging and fulfilling for teachers and students alike.

Each teacher was interviewed once, using a semi-structured interview guide based on the questions cited in the "Research Questions" section above. Due to the open-ended and multivariable nature of the teacher reflections on the pandemic and their teaching styles, the interview method focused more on depth and descriptive thickness than statistical analysis of predetermined factors. At the same time, however, a strictly phenomenological or theoretical lens was avoided to capture a wide range of themes in the teachers' data, ranging from emotional coping skills to pandemic educational policies and technology impacts in the classrooms. As such, content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) was used to categorize and group together key themes and patterns that are found across the interviews. While some forms of content analysis focus exclusively on the systematic classification of key themes based on counts of frequently used words and phrases, the researchers extended the content analysis to include interpreting teacher statements in terms of underlying or implied meanings rather than sticking to literal phrases and their stated meanings. After transcribing the interviews, NVIVO software was used to help the researchers take note of and group together key themes while reviewing the data and tracking the frequency and universality of each theme noted in the transcripts.

The study participants have all consented to have their real names removed from the data collected, electronically stored, and published research findings. As such, only pseudonyms have been used for this article, and any identifying information about the teachers has been removed.

Finally, the authors of this article self-identify as both teachers in secondary and post-secondary contexts as well as educational researchers with an emphasis on incorporating holistic education methods into areas such as mathematics, technology, and language education. Throughout this study, we have been mutually grappling with the notion of social presence online and how contemplative learning in particular is played out in the classroom.

Participant Backgrounds

Table 1 shows the participants' backgrounds, including the courses taught online during the study and the various technologies they used.

Table 1

Participant Backgrounds

Participant Name	Grade Level(s)	Course(s) Taught Online	Online Software/Platforms
Cindy	Graduate (MA)	Mindfulness in Education	Pepper, ZOOM, Jamboard/Google space, Padlet, Podcasts, Webinars, YouTube
Darla	Graduate (MA and PhD)	Theology/Justice and Reconciliation	ZOOM
Linda	Graduate (MA)	Contemplative Education	ZOOM
Samantha	Graduate (MA)	Education and Technology	Quercus

Findings

Table 2 illustrates how the study findings were categorized in accordance with Whiteside's five-fold model of social presence:

Table 2

Core Themes and Findings Summarized

Core Theme	Main Findings
Affective Association	42% of all thematic references lie within the category of affective association, meaning that the teachers most often referenced the feelings they needed to manage, both within themselves and the classroom, to induce a sense of social presence. The three major sub-themes in this category are trust (19 references), navigating vulnerability (18 references), and emotional management (15 references).
Community Cohesion	22% of the thematic references lie within the area of "community cohesion," which refers to the degree to which participants in an online classroom see the class itself as a "community." Of these responses, roughly one-third (14 responses) refer to "Building Social Rapport," while "Avoiding External Distractions" (7 responses) and "Establishing Class Rituals" (6 responses) ranked second and third.
Instructor Involvement	20% of the thematic references referred to "Instructor Involvement"—that is, the extent to which the instructor is active and invested in the learning community. Many of the references in this category stressed the tricky balance between instructor exertion of control and allowing spaces for students to exert personal agency.
Interaction Intensity	10% of the responses centred on Interaction Intensity, or, level of interaction among participants.
Knowledge and Experience	Only 4% of the total thematic responses related to knowledge and experience, or "sharing of additional experiences and resources."

A more detailed analysis of the findings is described below, using the Core Themes from Whiteside's (2015) model as an organizing tool.

Affective Association

The majority of all thematic references lie within the category of affective association, meaning that the teachers most often referenced feelings they believed they needed to manage, both within themselves and the classroom, to foster a sense of social presence. A significant number of the responses lean toward affective management, which suggests that teachers were most focused on managing emotions in their classroom, particularly around safety and trust. The teachers gauged student participation and engagement in terms of their ability to create open spaces for students to safely and authentically self-disclose.

Of all the forms of affect mentioned by teachers throughout the interviews, it is perhaps not surprising that the teachers focused on trust and vulnerability, as they ba-

lanced the difficult tensions between wanting to foster a shared learning community while still preserving individuals' privacy because they accessed the virtual classroom from a personal space. This suggests that teachers and students alike negotiated their sense of physical presence and identity even when they felt compromised in their ability to foster visibility or chose not to make themselves visible when it felt needed.

a) Trust. All the teachers referenced the need to trust their students as well as create spaces where students feel safe to express themselves and raise questions as needed. Darla noted how, even prior to teaching classes online, she valued "getting to know students in their individuality and then developing a relationship where they feel like they have enough trust with me that they can expect that they can share questions," adding that the move to online post-pandemic only highlighted its importance ("it becomes even more important in these spaces"). Darla positions trust not just as a safety need but also as an essential part of inquiry-based pedagogy, because trust appears to allow students to ask meaningful questions and extend dialogue with their teachers. Conversely, lack of online visibility appeared to compromise (or render problematic) their sense of trust in their students. Linda notes:

> What frustrated me is that there were a few times where I put them in breakout rooms, and they were not there. So now they are supposed to share with somebody, and that person is not there…or sometimes they will share and like I am talking to a black screen; I do not know where to look.… It does not feel natural.

Linda's discovery that her students weren't always following proper protocol, such as skipping breakout room attendance, led her to lose trust in her students. She defines "natural" as a locatable and visible student body, assuring her that she is talking to "someone" and not just a blank screen. But it also introduces a theme of the vicious cycle, wherein lack of visibility causes students to foster less trust in their fellow students' receptiveness, which reinforces an absence from participation in key online platforms such as breakout rooms. Linda hints that the online classroom is far less secure than in-person, alluding to how some people who do not attend the class might lurk in the background during classroom sharing.

b) Vulnerability. The teachers explored navigating the delicate line between respecting their students' privacy online and inducing an atmosphere conducive to emotional trust and disclosure. Traditionally, it's been held that most holistic environments involve some authentic sharing, which requires a sense of safety and trust (Brant, 2017; Palmer, 2017). Teachers often had to skillfully recreate a sense of safety in online environments that is analogous to in-person sharing. Darla shares how the online environment offers more chances for the students to avoid vulnerability than an in-person physical presence:

> Most of what I teach has to do with what faith looks like in daily life. Whether it is working with media, or it's a justice course, or it's a course on Environmental Education, all of those things have to do with what it looks like to practice religion. And some of the things I am trying to evoke for students are pretty deep questions that involve some vulnerability. But I think if you are in an online asynchronous space, and you do not want to be vulnerable, there are more ways to avoid doing it. Whereas, when somebody is in front of you in person, and they are asking you a question, and they are looking at you deeply, and they are saying please respond, it is a little bit harder to deflect.

Darla suggests that creating a safe space for people to share becomes more difficult when students can easily deflect or avoid knowledge of co-presence. This creates the added difficulty of fostering an effective sharing space when not all students are as committed to creating a safe zone of vulnerability. She references how being able to see the deep gaze of another student in the classroom exerts greater pressure on the student to respond, underscoring the importance of seeing and being seen as prerequisites to reciprocity in classroom settings.

Other teachers alluded to the challenges of encouraging students to feel comfortable with their cameras turned on. Linda, for example, mentions how she ultimately ended up having to enforce a "cameras on" rule despite her students' evident reluctance to turn their cameras on:

> And so, this last course…I would say, OK, it is really important to have your cameras on all the time. And I really sell it, I explain it to them [that] this is a course about presence. This is a course where we are sharing stories that are experiences that we're having that are personal and vulnerable.

> And we need to be able to see each other and we do not know who is in the room. And so, I kind of gave some rules around it to make sure that they did it. So, I was not super strict in the beginning. And then I realized that when one student does it, they all do it.

Notably, the students navigate vulnerability by following the one or two students who are brave enough to turn on their cameras. Ultimately, however, Linda has to enforce a rule around turning on cameras, arguing that personal disclosure and sharing common to contemplative learning requires greater visibility. Linda alludes to the tricky practice of using rules to foster a safe space for vulnerable sharing without alienating her students or compromising their sense of choice and privacy. Not knowing her students' home situations makes it more problematic for Linda to enforce a camera policy for her students, yet she still needs to foster some collective classroom presence in her capacity as a contemplative educator. Without this, a compassionate pedagogy becomes more tenuous and harder to create, which emphasizes the socially constructed and consensual nature of holistic learning.

c) Emotional management/centring. The teachers reported having to use various centring practices, such as breath awareness and prayer, to foster an undistracted mental environment, as well as leveraging technologies such as emojis to motivate students to express supportive and positive feedback. Cindy describes a centring experience that brings students fully into the classroom:

> At the beginning of every class, as students come in, I invite them to have a moment of presence where they feel their body, bring attention to their body, as it is sitting in the chair, or to look around the room to bring into their awareness, the walls or the colors. They might see the sights available to them or what they might hear in their environment. And so I will do that, so that when they are present, they are more aware that they are in a virtual classroom.

Cindy uses the sensations of the classroom to take her students beyond their cognitive awareness, thereby inviting a greater sense of the shared space. What's most impressive is how this ritual can still be conducted as the students enter the Zoom space, effectively reframing their diverse spaces and environments into a shared one that appears to

transcend distance considerations. Cindy also emphasizes the role of centring in the students' practice of becoming present in the classroom, noting how "I talk about it as we have a collective nervous system of the classroom. And as the teacher, educator, lecturer, or professor, whatever you want to call it, we are at the helm of that." Cindy powerfully references the term "collective nervous system" to inject a scientific discourse into the notion of a shared presence that arranges students to flow together through shared centring activities and rituals. However, it should be noted that the notion of the "collective nervous system" may not account for individual differences in how the students experience centring, which was not captured in this study.

Community Cohesion

The second-highest number of thematic references lies in "community cohesion," which refers to the degree to which online classroom participants see the class as a "community." Of these responses, roughly one-third refer to "Building Social Rapport," with "Avoiding External Distractions" and "Establishing Class Rituals" ranking second and third, respectively.

a) Building social rapport. Many teachers tended to associate "community cohesion" with something akin to the physical and embodied. They, therefore, tended to view technologies as virtual substitutes for a vital social experience that they observe unfolding in a physical classroom. The physical classroom here became the implied "standard" through which they adapted existing technologies. Linda describes how the rapport that students might have established outside of classroom time is mimicked through the informal interactions that students leave on Quercus, noting:

> On the outside of the classroom when they're in discussions on Quercus, I have seen a lot of supportive comments towards each other—it is just much more connected. I can see you and I guess maybe what I am wondering is, if it is the students who are not as comfortable sharing in the class, but they're feeling that same feeling of community and have support and connection to their classmates, but they are not as comfortable sharing in classes, and they have these opportunities to do it in writing. And that is where it comes out in that way. So, in some ways, it is almost like taking the chat from the in-class, having it kind of in its own place in its own time, and still working really well to [be] supportive.

Linda hints at the importance of using technologies such as chat to create sharing spaces that contrast with traditional classroom dynamics, where the latter tends to privilege verbal sharing as opposed to more reflective writing.

b) Establishing class rituals. Because of potential interruptions that could occur unexpectedly and disrupt the class flow, teachers felt a need for explicit rituals that define and set the mood for the online classroom. Personal rituals that teachers enacted included prayer and some forms of meditation. In addition, these "rituals" would take the form of a routinized structure that lets the students know what is expected of them in the coming class, including turning cameras on when students are engaged in personal sharing or disclosure. Darla refers to the rituals as "a rhythm that stays the same for most of my asynchronous classes [that] function as modules, like this week, this is what we are doing." Other times, however, rituals were designed to address communication issues the teachers had experienced in prior semesters. Linda, for instance, notes how she establishes ground rules about using cameras in her classes, which sets a precedent for how the students can engage the class:

> Then when I taught again, in September, I made it very kind of strict and said they had to have their cameras on and if not, then this is not the right time to take the course. I really made it like a requirement. I said if there is a reason why you have to have your camera off to email me beforehand and explain to me the reason and we can try to figure it out.

Linda skilfully incorporates rules into her email and initial class. She later notes the importance of having "a more honest and explicit conversation" about how turning the camera off impacts "everybody" and not just the individual student. This approach positions turning on the camera away from an act of objective surveillance and toward a "co-created" collaborative act or "conversation" that is thought to remind students of their interdependence in the classroom, a point that arises in many holistic curricular theories (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

At times, the teachers need to use mindfulness to transform the act of using technology into a kind of ritual that connects to mindfulness practice. Cindy, for example, remarks how

> at the beginning of every class, as students come in, I invite them to have a moment of presence where they feel their body, bring attention to their body, as it is sitting in the chair, or to look around the room to bring into their awareness, the walls or the colours.

Cindy suggests that the students must be guided to see various technologies as starting points for mindfulness practice (Levy, 2016; Pang, 2013). This also apparently helps Cindy's students to cohere together and work to make the classroom more conducive to group sharing.

Instructor Involvement

In total, 20% of the references describe "Instructor Involvement," or the extent to which the instructor is active and invested in the learning community. Many references in this category stressed the tricky balance between maintaining a sense of control and allowing students to exert personal agency. Linda refers to herself as *facilitating* the order in which the students will put up their hands and participate, while Samantha refers to herself more as a *guide* than as a central lecturer or disseminator in an online classroom.

When referencing the pandemic, the teachers tended to refer to themselves as *not in control* or somehow *thrown* into the situation and having to make do with little predictability. While the pandemic offered an opportunity for students to draw closer to the teacher for support and care, other students drew further away, which suggests that the teachers viewed themselves as having less influence on students who are simply less engaged. Most teachers leveraged online affordances to create a sense of personal agency and creativity. Cindy was one teacher who encouraged students to be more aware of their environment and physical sensations and permitted them to utilize the communication tools they were most comfortable with:

> When they are present, they are more aware that they are in a classroom. In a virtual classroom, they are more aware of where they are in the moment. And then I will invite them to…share in the chat and to use emojis. So really, just rather than being passive, you are moving past that. There is this kind of interaction that they might be used to, in a classroom where we're in person.

Cindy blends the practices of mindfulness, which involve slowing down and being more aware, with the familiarity of technologies and forms of interaction that the students are accustomed to. By customizing the technology to suit their special classroom needs, the teachers demonstrated a move to "humanize" the online experience.

Interaction Intensity

In total, 10% of the responses centred on "Interaction Intensity," or level of interaction among participants. Cindy reports how Interaction Intensity increases through breakout rooms and smaller groups, where the students can get a sense of themselves as individuals interacting with each other:

> We do whole group conversations, but we do get the classroom into paired breakout rooms, triads. [For] small groups, we do seminars, so there will be a seminar on a particular topic and groups of four or five…so lots of opportunity for conversations or more intimate conversation. So, it feels less like a giant abyss of the virtual classroom where there might be 25 people on the screen.

Cindy maintains that the smaller rooms can mitigate the anonymity of being in a large virtual classroom in front of others on a screen. This goes against the common characterization of online classrooms as anonymous spaces where students don't easily disclose themselves or feel close to their colleagues. Cindy's discussion on the breakout rooms suggests one key advantage of allowing students more time to speak in depth about a topic without the intrusive gaze of an "all-seeing" teacher.

Surprisingly, many teachers deferred to the student's personality as a gauge for interaction intensity, suggesting that some students are more suited for online classrooms simply by virtue of their personality traits. Darla referenced "introspective" students as more likely to succeed in asynchronous online environments due to the greater room for students to "ponder before they share something." This suggests teachers' diminished sense of agency, since they sometimes attribute success online to specific personality characteristics rather than a class plan or technology that works effectively for all online students.

Few teachers saw technologies themselves as motivating or "policing" Interaction Intensity. Some pointed out how easy it is for students to "appear" engaged according to

online metrics of documents accessed, but this could not measure the depth of learning or understanding. Although the teachers did report more engagement when interactive technologies were introduced, some concerns were raised about how much control the teacher surrenders when students are given full access to these tools to use as desired. Teachers expressed fear that Interaction Intensity conflicts with keeping the class on track or on topic, especially when learners became distracted by interactive tools such as chat.

Knowledge and Experience

Only 4% of the total thematic responses related to "Knowledge and Experience," or "sharing of additional experiences and resources." Teachers tended to reference becoming more skilled in using online technologies over time. Linda notes how she became more acclimatized to Google Classroom as she developed a greater sense of the advantages, such as reduced administration and paperwork. Darla similarly notes how many staff could not adapt their previous ways of teaching to online settings, and as a result, they felt somewhat disadvantaged by the new online classroom environments. When the teachers reference personal experiences in working with online technologies, they tend to refer to themselves as *fellow learners,* rather than as technology *experts* who can adjudicate or bring technological expertise to the classroom experience. Notes Samantha:

> You need to make sure that you understand the students who are going to be taking your course. So you need to have been a student yourself. And it is really helpful if you have taken an online course, and one that you believe was taught by someone who knew what they were doing.

Samantha suggests that some background knowledge of online affordances is helpful for teachers to navigate the technological choices available, which in turn positions online navigation as a craft (Levy, 2016) or skill that can be honed with time. The teachers could not leverage a lot of previous skills and experiences to create a greater online presence, but were forced to learn new skills, which took more time and experience. This affected how the teachers could be present to their students, especially when needing to take on new approaches such as facilitating student discussion online and making two-way conversations happen when the content consists mainly of lectures. In the case of Samantha, positioning herself as a *fellow* student allows her to potentially empathize with students' difficulties in using technologies.

Discussion

Whiteside's (2015) five-fold model of social presence helped shed light on what was most emphasized in building a sense of presence in the online classroom. Analyzing the frequency of responses for each model component reveals how the teachers were most heavily focused on how they felt and expressed their feelings to induce a state of presence, positive mood, and emotional uplift in the online classroom. For most teachers, not seeing students turning on their cameras became a source of uncertainty and anxiety, which motivated the teachers to spend more time focusing on their own presence or, alternatively, augmenting existing technologies to foster positive mood states.

Throughout their transition from in-person to online teaching, the teachers often had to wrestle with pre-existing ideas of presence inherited from holistic education theories. Two cornerstones of a holistic notion of presence—undivided attention and embodiment—were challenged by how technologies physically distanced students and could often pose distractions in an online learning environment. On the one hand, the teachers tried to bring a spirit of open sharing into the online learning environment by encouraging students to use chat to express their views. On the other hand, too much emphasis on multi-media interactivity interfered with the teachers' most cherished concepts about undivided presence and attention.

Teachers in the study referenced Instructor Involvement and Interaction Intensity much less. The teachers seemed less able to influence, let alone monitor, the intensity of their students' interactions, particularly in the absence of visual cues that could gauge student involvement and participation. Breakout rooms made it difficult for teachers to observe their students' participation, on the one hand, while the use of tools such as chat rendered the teacher little more than a facilitator of pop-up messages, many of which repeated the same answer to a question by several students. Teachers expressed how the lack of security in some online classrooms, coupled with the tendency for students to hide themselves or lack visibility and participation, made it hard for teachers to exert influence, correct students, or even gauge whether some students were struggling. Yet the tendency to view the lack of visibility as a sign of disengagement may be based on a particular standpoint of presence as "visible" and "audible," which is problematic. The teachers were challenged to craft a new identity based less on surveillance and emotionally regulating the classroom and more on a sense of trust.

Finally, it is surprising that Knowledge and Experience played a very minimal role, if any, in the teachers' accounts of presence in the online classroom. Teachers seemed to place less value on their own growing knowledge expertise when navigating different online affordances, opting instead to describe their technological skills more in terms of contingent and skillful means that would engage students emotionally at the moment. One way of explaining the dearth of references to teachers' Knowledge and Experience is the relative newness of working with online environments. It threw some teachers into situations where they had to learn quickly how to adapt their in-person classrooms to very new environments.

Situating the Findings in Literature/Study Limitations

The tensions and contradictions that teachers experience when teaching online are not entirely new. Many of the teachers' struggles echo a common theme in Parker Palmer's writing (2017), namely the struggle between allowing students' individual voices and maintaining the integrity of the classroom as a community in which "the group's voice is gathered and amplified" (p. 78).

The tension between individual and community is most evident when the students push back against the teacher's request for visibility and attempt to control online communication tools, such as chat. Teachers such as Linda, who most stressed the contemplative nature of the interaction, felt compelled to control or limit the online affordances that detracted from, or even trivialized, contemplative space, such as chat and emojis. The downside of this strategy is that it leaves students feeling hemmed in by the rules set by teachers since their use of chatroom is considered "second nature" and has become an integral part of how they authentically express themselves.

Managing affective states in the classroom is one difficulty that teachers face when many of their students are not as visible as they would wish them to be, which can raise issues of trusting that students are not taking advantage of technologies to hide their identities or submit unoriginal work (Harwood & Asal, 2007; Mallon, 1989). Trust especially becomes a crucial element in a holistic curriculum that values multisensory communication, interconnection, and sharing personal stories. All of the teachers in this study shared their challenges in making the online space somewhat analogous to a contemplative space, which tends to incorporate sharing circles (Anderson et al., 2017), person-to-

person communication, shared "silence," and building trust through an atmosphere of calmness, love, and acceptance.

Conclusion

This interview study has attempted to show how teachers foster social presence in online learning environments. Using Whiteside's (2015) Social Presence model, this study suggests that teachers are most focused on bringing elements of Affective Association and Community Cohesion into the online classroom to foster and encourage a sense of presence for both teachers and students alike. This study hints at the burgeoning need to adapt existing technologies to incorporate traditional elements of the holistic classroom, such as mindfulness (Levy, 2016). In addition, it highlights the importance of extending the notion of presence to "non-traditional" technological contexts, such as texting and surfing the Internet, to show that holistic qualities of presence need not be exhibited exclusively through physical, in-person classrooms.

The findings in this study are consistent with Goos et al. (2000), who note how, in their study, "computer technology was being used essentially to enhance preferred teaching methods—that is, the technology, although freely available, was utilized in a conservative way" (p. 304). Similarly, many teachers in this study adapted the online technologies according to their preferred ways of inviting presence, rather than using technologies to challenge their pre-existing philosophies and notions of presence.

It remains to be seen if, over time, contemplative notions of presence are challenged, shaped, or even transformed through holistic educators' growing exposure to online technologies. This aligns with the possibility, as Mayadas et al. (2009) suggest, of refining the notion of a contemplative classroom, just as physical presence is being subject to "novel interpretations" (p. 52), including the ability for exams to be adjudicated in one physical space for online students. According to this view, technologies can change the way students experience contemplative presence.

Due to the relatively brief time between when the study was conducted and the COVID-19 pandemic ended, more future studies would be needed to show how social and institutional conditions unique to each participant shape how they respond to the online classroom. This is a future study we both look forward to engaging in.

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