

It's just a jump to the left... a quick introduction to my current research project

I'm taking a bit of a detour today to talk about some research I'm currently wrestling with. It seems to constantly be at the front of my thoughts and I see it rear its head at every opportunity so seems fitting that I share it here too.

The short blurb for this is I am currently researching "teaching presence" (that's the very simplistic way to describe it, and when I started this project I really thought it was going to be that simple but I have taken so many twists and kinks along the way that at one point I wasn't even sure I was going to get the answers I was looking for and if I should even carry on. I'm glad to say that perseverance won out and I'm back on track.

Let me explain.

Teaching presence, that concept of how a teacher makes their presence felt rather than just seen. Sounds simple enough? Or maybe you are thinking "really Eli, but the whole thing is that you can see the teacher in the classroom so why would you even discuss this in terms of teaching presence being felt?" And that's ok, I think that is a completely legitimate question to ask. So lets break down my thoughts around this project a bit.

Teachers come in many different shapes and sizes, as the phrase goes, some teach in a classroom with 30 students or less, some teach in a lecture theatre with 500 student, some do lots of one on one time, for some there are too many students to offer that service so need to focus on one to many. Then you have the teachers who teach online, where technically, they aren't there at all. So what are the factors that connect teaching presence with all these different teachers?

I wanted to look into this for practical purposes, I'm interested in online teaching (different form learning) and specifically I want to look into how teachers can take their experience and skills from one type of teaching (in a classroom or studio specifically) and then use this to create equal feelings of the teacher and presence in an online course.

There are two ways to look at this, you can view the perspective of the student, how does the student perceive the teacher, the teaching and their experience of both and this is probably the most common way that this has been investigated. However, I am really interested in the other way, to look at the teacher and what is their perception. I think this could make for some really interesting findings. For instance, how does a teacher perceive their identity as a teacher? What makes them say the label "teacher" fits? Again as an example, if very simplistically we talk about the teacher feeling like a teacher when they stand at the front of the class and teach their students. It could be the act of being in front of the class, or the interaction or response from their students. Maybe it's seeing the student wrestle with a problem and then overcome it.

So now if we take that teacher out of their usual classroom and stand them in an empty room with only a video camera in front of them and ask them to teach... Can you see where I am going with this? If there are no students visibly present, what cues are there that your message is getting across?

In turn this idea of visual or felt presence as why opens up to investigation into how. Are there set things a teacher does that creates presence, if there is, do all teachers do them or do them all, do teachers do different things depending on environment, class size etc? And what happens when you change on of the factors that determine the how?

It's all very interesting and could take so many paths. I'm starting with the basic concept of teaching... lets find out the why and how and I'll update you all on my findings, I promise.

I'm taking a bit of a detour today to talk about some research I'm currently wrestling with. It is taking up most of my life at the moment so seems fitting that I share.

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(You might have heard of this in connection with the [Community of inquiry framework](#) (COI)). Ok lets add in that the teacher is teaching online, so now how does this fare, the teacher is (technically) not “there” nor are the students because synchronicity is varied. So what is “thereness”? What actually is presence come to think of it? Should I have said that the teacher was “not” there?

I started out thinking the COI framework would be a great way to look at this, especially since it was written with online in mind, but when you work in an art college you very quickly realised things might not be that simple. So my research took a bit of a kink and became much more about how teachers create teaching presence in an online course, with the added twist of studio teaching. I’m very early days yet so I’m currently basking in the fun of having lots of questions I get to investigate and try to find answers to but I promise I’ll keep you up to date and share any good discoveries and conundrums along the way.