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(DIS)EMBODIMENT IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM. REFLECTING ON ASPECTS OF TEACHER PRESENCE IN THE SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE LANGUAGE CLASS

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СЪС ИЛИ БЕЗ ОТЕЛЕСЕНО ПРИСЪСТВИЕ ВЪВ ВИРТУАЛНАТА КЛАСНА СТАЯ. САМОРЕФЛЕКСИЯ НА ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛСКОТО ПРИСЪСТВИЕ В СИНХРОННИЯ ЕЗИКОВ ЧАС ОНЛАЙН

*The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.
Sydney J. Harris*

In a broader, non-scholarly context, teaching presence is manifested through the instructor's ability to build rapport with their students, which, in turn, is reported to have a positive effect on students' engagement with the content, the environment and the community. The article explores the author's teaching pattern online, or the way her presence and persona compensate for the lack of physical space and belonging, and provide the social and cognitive circumstances needed for learning to take place, according to the constructivist stance. It intends to find an answer to the question "How does one build a teaching persona to feel comfortable within online?" Through a qualitative narrative self-inquiry, a reflective framework on teacher presence is designed to serve as a positive prompt for efficient professional help.

Keywords: *teaching presence; self inquiry; virtual classroom; synchronous online learning; teacher identity.*

Извън научния контекст преподавателското присъствие се проявява чрез способността на преподавателя да създаде спойка със своите обучаеми, за която, от своя страна, се твърди, че има положителен ефект върху ангажираността на учениците с материала, средата и общността. Статията изследва повторения модел на преподаване в онлайн среда, или начина, по който се компенсира липсата на физическо пространство и принадлежност и се предоставят нужните социални и когнитивни условия, които от гледна точка на конструктивизма правят възможен процеса на учене. Прави се опит да се намери отговор на въпроса „Как да изградим учителски образ, в който да се чувстваме удобно онлайн?“. Прилагайки качествения изследователския метод на наративен самоанализ, е създадена рефлексивна рамка за преподавателското присъствие, която ефективно да подпомогне професионалната практика.

Ключови думи: *преподавателско присъствие; саморефлексия; виртуална класна стая; синхронно онлайн обучение; преподавателска идентичност.*

Introduction

Studies inform that the way “an instructor establishes their presence in an online environment can have important implications on students' overall learning experience” (Richardson et al. 2016: 82), that

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“there is a relationship between instructor presence and perceived student satisfaction with their online course experience” (Ladyshevsky 2013: 20), and that students were “significantly more likely to report higher levels of learning and community when they perceived higher teaching presence behaviors” (Richardson et al. 2015: 258). An inspiring teaching persona can work miracles on students’ progress irrespective of other internal and external factors that might influence learning. The ease with which an instructor communicates their ideas and knowledge in the classroom helps build not only their personal credibility and trust, but also contributes to the readiness with which the subject matter is perceived and processed by the student. The modes of communication and interaction are the channels an instructor can use to show their approachability, immediacy and support for students’ progress, even more so when we consider the online context (Chakraborty, Nafukho 2015, Jaggars et al. 2013). Chakraborty and Nafukho’s study (2015) highlight the influence teaching presence and teaching immediacy have on learners’ cognitive and affective experiences during online courses. In turn, these would enhance teachers’ and courses’ effectiveness.

Two opposing standpoints on the nature of teaching persona exist in literature. One is based on the premise that professional and personal teacher’s personae coincide and “we teach who we are”, as Palmer says in *The courage to teach* (Palmer 2007: 1), the other considers that they should converge. The present article adopts the view that for a successful educational experience to happen, especially the one in an online setting, a teacher should do more than simply reveal one’s authentic personal identity. There needs to be more of an intentional and deliberate choice, to some extent even “dramaturgical” scripting and crafting of the teaching persona to be projected, a kind of priming of the “elusive phenomena of practice competence and artistry” or “the artistry of good coaching”, as Schön (Schön 1987: XIV, 17) calls it.

Research context and questions

Despite already being equipped with the digital tools and distance learning platforms, many institutions came to discover the advantages of the remote classroom only after forcefully conducting it during the pandemic. In such circumstances a medium-scale Bulgarian private language school took the decision to transfer their classes entirely online, since it could give them the necessary flexibility and outreach to cater for their students, mainly adult professionals. Subsequently, in order to improve their digital competence, the need for professional development emerged for the teaching staff. The participants that are taken into consideration in the present research are individual learners of English as a foreign language, at a pre-intermediate level and above, whose major interest is the use of the language for occupational purposes, primarily the development of the productive skills – written correspondence and spoken communication at the workplace. The Learning Management System (LMS) used was purpose-built by Vedamo EAD as a primarily interactive live teaching platform.

The aim of the present study is to identify, both in theory and practice, the possible interaction and communication strategies an online instructor can use to establish and project their teaching presence and thus compensate for the social, affective, cognitive and spatial discrepancies of the online medium. An additional goal is to develop a framework of possible communication and interaction factors to consider, with a positive effect on building online teaching presence.

The research questions the study seeks to answer are as follows:

RQ1: What are the strengths and weaknesses of my instructor presence pattern in the virtual classroom?

RQ2: What interaction and communication strategies can be used to establish teaching presence online and thus compensate for the social, emotional, cognitive and spatial discrepancies?

Research method and instrument

The research reported here has been conducted in the form of a qualitative narrative inquiry by means of critical self-study (Hamilton, Pinnegar 2009), for the sake of expressing and interpreting the researcher’s personal experience and improving her professional practice as an EFL teacher in an online



setting. An instrument referring to aspects and categories, in the form of an observation checklist, was elaborated to reflect on the research questions, posed above. The role of the identified elements is to approach, organize, interpret and measure teaching presence in the online classroom. These have been compiled on the basis of established researchers' frameworks for reflective practice, namely Kolb's and Gibb's (Bassot 2016), and Carol Rodgers' (Rodgers, Raider-Roth 2006) cycles, the Community of Inquiry (Garrison et al. 2000) and TPACK (Mishra, Koehler 2006) models as well as emerging researchers' works on the topic, plus the personally significant manifestations of teaching presence in my own online EFL lessons. The instrument is based upon literature review, reflection on action, video observations, my personal teaching philosophy statement, and ideas drawn from the professional development courses attended on online teaching and materials development. To support the reflective process, fifteen video recorded online lessons have been randomly selected, running through a period of four months, between March and June 2022. The participants were four young adults, and two senior professionals, attending a pre-, upper- and intermediate level General English language course.

Applying the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, I selected the elements which are relevant for the context of the one-to-one synchronous lesson, where no asynchronous part exists, so the number of categories and indicators was reduced compared to the original one. Community building, for example, is not applicable in such modality.

Conceptual framework

The epistemological stance this research adopts is the constructivist one, where knowledge is viewed as a process, not as a product, of interaction "within certain and specific contexts with people who exist in the same space" (Hamilton, Pinnegar 2009:51). The study is also grounded on the view that teacher identity is socially constructed, multiple and fluid (McGregor, Cartwright 2011). Through self-study we can unravel our self-constructed understanding of the world and our role in it, thus making it visible. On the other hand, the desire to make teacher cognition explicit through self-inquiry, reveals the actual state of affairs in our practice, thus turning our reflection towards the ontological perspective, the true nature and reality of being a teacher.

Literature review

Why self-reflect?

The bulk of research on online teacher persona and teaching presence refers to the group experience of academic courses, which contain both synchronous and asynchronous elements, and the necessity for building online community. The present article is directed at the synchronous one-on-one lessons, or the tutoring online in EFL teaching at a private school. Literature and research in such contexts are scarce.

The transition to online teaching was a significant change for many educational professionals, and although on its way for decades now, in a number of cases, it happened abruptly during the pandemic. In this respect, we might term it a critical incident of "teacher's unpreparedness" type, as categorized by Nejadghanbar (2021), which spurs self-reflection. In defining Self-Study of Teacher and Teacher Education Practices, Hamilton and Pinnegar point that "the self, who is the inquirer, has a private vested interest in coming to understand the practice. The self seeks to explore the gap between who I am and who I would like to be in my practice and studies that self and the others involved as the self takes action to reduce or alter that gap" (Hamilton, Pinnegar 2009: 12). Self-study helps surface the tacit assumptions and beliefs held about teaching, learning, the role and presence of the teacher, or teacher cognition on the whole. The "developmental readiness" (Finlay 2008), when facing critical challenges as a professional, "has the potential to become transformative, leading to new ways of understanding and implementing practice" (Freidus, Kruger 2017:106). Reflexivity helps reshape actions and identities. This involves "the messages you give to pupils through your choice of attire, your body language, how and where you position yourself in relation to the pupils, your voice, how you speak as well as what you say and when." (McGregor, Cartwright 2011: 71) As Velikova points out: "it is reflection that connects knowledge with



practical experience, and increases teachers' awareness of their professional learning" (Velikova 2019: 11)

Video recordings

The online conferencing platforms offer an inherent feature of video recording, which greatly supports the reflective process. Several advantages of the video recorded lesson observation can be enumerated: they provide objective evidence and richer feedback on the details of the learning taking place, which a teacher might not have noticed due to the cognitively engaging process a lesson is for them, as well as the technical convenience of being watched and rewatched at any time. (Edmondson 2022). Video-recorded lesson observation naturally enhances reflexive practice and is a "stimulus for critical reflection" (Orlova 2009: 31).

Teaching presence and the persona

The constructivist standpoint views identity not as static, but fluid, the result of an ongoing relational process. (McGregor, Cartwright 2011: 50). Whether primary or posterior to it, technology integration inevitably leads to identity changes for the teacher. In order to aid learning, teachers need to enact their newly coined digital persona and project their teaching presence meaningfully and purposefully. Such transition can be vastly hindered when teachers identify themselves as "digital immigrants" or "Luddites". Bowman points that our professional identity evolves through the roles we adopt (Bowman 2022: 49). To achieve our educational outcomes online, we perform cognitive, affective and managerial roles; show social, cognitive-emotional and teaching presence in our interaction with students. "An online persona is the online social identity that an instructor creates for themselves" (Phillips, Jowallah 2015). Rodger's and Roth's definition of presence emphasizes its relational and affective dimensions: "a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environments, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step" (Rodgers, Roth 2006: 266).

The disembodied experience

The online experience is often referred to as a disembodied one, where "people leave their bodies behind when going online", and "one has to 'type oneself into being', since "texts in a sense become bodies" (Sundén 2002, quoted by Bolldén, 2016: 2). As Bullock and Fletcher (2017) state, when discussing the importance of embodiment in shaping teachers' relationships with students, the online environment diminishes the sensory capacities – mainly the visual and the auditory, and thus impacts teaching practices. It was through the lack of these online, that the authors realized the role the senses played in developing the relationships in the traditional classroom, and especially when understanding students' emotions, as well as the necessity for intentionally seeking channels through which to compensate for this. On the premise that "teaching is relational" and Goffman's "impression management", the affordances of the new, digital medium should be explored on how to efficiently "present ourselves to others and interpret others' presentations of self" (Bullock, Fletcher 2017:44), even if it means breaking away from practices adopted as successful in the face-to-face medium and constructing new ones. David White describes the experience of the virtual classroom as disembodied, with no sense of space and location: "we see our own body reflected back at us and we are forced to ask 'Where am I?'. I can't be 'with' the people I see on screen because I'm constantly reminded by the digital reflection of myself that I'm in my room at home, hunched over a computer...not 'seeing' each other or feeling any meaningful presence." (White 2021a).

The environmental factors and place-making

Self-study requires from educators to "come to grips with cognitive dissonance" (Freidus, Kruger 2017: 106). Some environmental factors contribute to the cognitive dissonance in the digital medium. The way we perceive ourselves through the camera in the synchronous online classroom is repeatedly reported to cause such cognitive dissonance. The use of voice in the online classroom becomes another



decisive performative aspect to consider. The online experience is liminal not only affectively and cognitively, but also spatially and temporally. Consequently, teaching supposes yet another pedagogical effort on the part of the instructor – to bridge the divide and soothe the shift to the new chronotope, where time annihilates space. Rupert Wegerif names it a “dialogic space” or a “dialogic gap” “in which learner and teacher engage with each other and, in a sense, learn to see the task through each others eyes” and a new pedagogical responsibility is “resourcing spaces of creative play” (Wegerif 2007: 12, 20).

Placemaking has to do with the architecture of the virtual classroom, but it also means the pedagogical devices applied to it, as well as creating community through them. There is an inherent link between space and identity, since space represents one side of the context of identity building, together with the biological, social, institutional, and even political aspects, or, quoting Lefebvre “the mental, social and physical elements that constitute space” (Rinquest 2021: 6). In the virtual classroom, place-making becomes one of the responsibilities of the teacher, and it also contributes to his/her presence. Finding the convenient and comfortable way of making the “non-space” a pedagogical space is another challenge an online teacher has to face. Here is where the technical know-how comes to assist the process. On the other hand, knowledge of online tools and features alone could not be enough to make the learning and teaching process fluent and meaningful, there needs to be a creative effort on the part of the teacher to manage technology in a purposeful and goal-oriented manner, so that it can encompass the lack of physical embodiment and belonging that teachers acknowledge through reflecting on their personal online experience. As Rinquest (2021) points out, by place-making, or our pedagogical practices, we are giving a soul to the space, and expressing our thoughts and feelings through the bodily features – our way of standing, speaking, walking. David White suggests arranging the space and giving it an architecture different from the scrolling down, vertical one, as a way of building cospace. “It is not a matter of trying to recreate the realistic world in the virtual classroom, but accepting the fluidity of the new medium through the disembodied forms of presence – voice, text, image, maps.” (White 2021b)

Community of Inquiry

Viewed from the perspective of the Community of Inquiry framework, developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (Garrison et al. 2000), teaching presence is the way an online instructor establishes their presence in the virtual medium, when the traditional sensory dimensions of interaction, mentioned above, are scarce. It is conducted through handling design, discourse facilitation and direct instruction, and together with the social and cognitive presence, it provides meaningful learning and relevant educational experience (Richardson et al. 2016). The three perspectives to presence are necessary and desired for the optimal experience to happen, and yet, some of them might be totally lacking or they might be unequally represented, with one of them dominating the others in a specific context.

The pedagogical considerations of online teaching

Finally, the mere integration of technology might be a cutting-edge tendency, but if not accompanied by a pedagogic (or andragogic) goal, it might be inefficient or even counterproductive. So, by applying the *Backward design* paradigm, for example, a teacher can stay focused on the learning needs and the outcomes that activities and tasks, conducted though the use of technology, should satisfy. In other terms, it means to weigh and subject the affordances and limitations of the digital tools and features to the overarching educational value of the course or lesson. The TPACK model, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) from Michigan State University, is directed at helping instructors integrate pedagogy, technology and content knowledge in an interdependent relationship, which has an effect on their teaching presence and the clarity and transparency of their academic goals.

Findings and Discussion

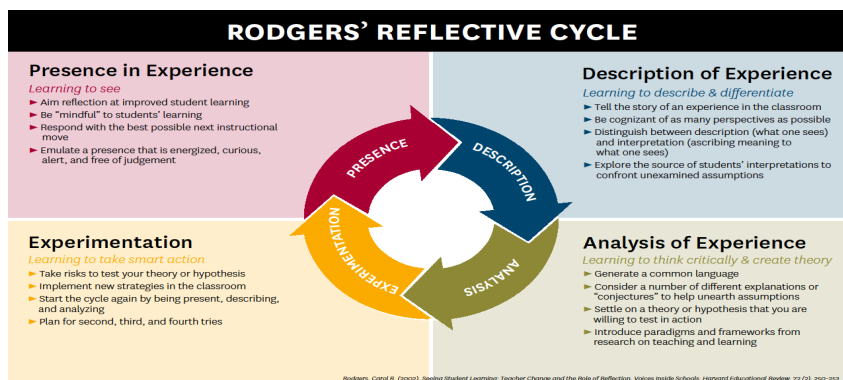


Fig.1 Carol Rodgers' Reflective Cycle (2002)

Through the narrative that follows, the findings, guided by the elaborated research instrument (Appendix 1), are presented:

1. The necessity to integrate technology in my language teaching practice, and the critical situation experienced, initiated literature research on the elements and factors which influence establishing presence, and the creation of an online teacher persona. It was a part of the reflective cycle of description, observation, analysis and conceptualization, which lead to the experimentation stage (Rodgers 2002). My experience as an online learner and the participation in professional development courses also helped conduct a meaningful technology integration.

The change of identity experienced in the new educational medium led to feeling novice and incompetent teacher, and was disruptive to my identity, but this same critical incident led to the search for courses, webinars and additional readings on the topic of online teaching. Not until the later lessons observed, did I start to perceive myself as someone capable of integrating technology to explicit pedagogical ends, and freely experimenting with it.

The first thing which caused discomfort online was the use of the camera. Both being exposed to the close-up frame of it and the penetration into my privacy when lacking background options, as well as later seeing myself on video, were affecting the way I felt. I also became aware how important the use of my voice became in such a performance medium. The role of voice quality and prosody, the non-verbal communication expressed through eye movement, frowns and stares, or involuntary mimics, even the silence that these implied, were loaded now with a more significant role. The search was then focused on building a teaching persona online that I would be comfortable with. Orlova (2009) advises on multiple views of the video recording, with a lapse of time between, so that a teacher could get comfortable with watching oneself on camera, and be able to transform their observation from self-awareness about their teaching into awareness of students' learning. The following quote evidences that the same perception is recognized by students, too: "The uncertainty of being "on stage" via technology to numerous unknown individuals can be a hurtful trigger and one that has the potential to distract a student from instruction completely" (Day, Verbiest 2021: 15).

2. "When teachers enter the school and their classrooms, they bring their personal, political, emotional, and professional identities into that space (Jansen 2001) and recreate it through their practices" (Rinquest 2021: 19). So, the question "How do you turn space into a place through your pedagogical practice?" arises. The virtual classroom is still in the process of creative experimentation and rebuilding. The organization and the use of space provides evidence for the underlying pedagogical beliefs. The whiteboard becomes a placemaking device in the virtual classroom, so its affordances should be exploited for the purpose of giving a mutual physical space to the participants, a space of creativity and sharing, but also a place to reside in. "Residence is about presence" (White 2021b).

I observed in my online classroom that I physically used to put my video icon in the middle of the screen, but presently I put it in the bottom right-hand corner, or even conceal it sometimes, and let



students and whiteboard take the central part. I also very much enjoy the together mode with its variants in Zoom, which might be interpreted to represent my idea of the role of the teacher as a guide on the side, literally. I want to make my figure not so prominent, not so intimidating. On the other hand, I have not yet even made the effort to explore the affordances of the platform to co-create and co-edit the whiteboard and text space. I entirely dominate the whiteboard space, the text editing space, and the document creation. I allow students to share screens, but do not allow the other participants to intervene in the writing of the document for fear it would be lost or damaged, or improperly created, which reveals my entirely teacher-centred approach to the virtual classroom, and, together with my estimated teacher-talk time and the tendency to “spoon-feed” students ready answers, and not allow for thinking time when asking questions, represents that my enacted pedagogical practice is not what my perceived or desired one is. In reality, I tend to be a dominant teacher and the holder of knowledge and the true answers, while my intention is to actually convey that I am willing to step back and let students take the lead. In this respect, I would have to look for proper pedagogical applications of the technology features which would allow me to really include students in the process and give them more agency. This could be done through letting them participate in the writing and making of the notes and the reversing of the turn-taking in asking and answering questions, for example. Or, through including the cloud technology and the shared Google Docs, where everyone can be an editor, commentator and a creator, “make the space into a place of cowork” (White 2021b) and give the feel of education as a shared endeavor”. This insight is very much in line with what David White (2021a) describes as the “mapping” of the coinhabited space online and giving the sense of togetherness in the virtual classroom experience. In this respect a useful digital product, called SpatialChat, can be used, too, for its emphasis particularly on the space and the movement between virtual classrooms online, as well as the possibility for creative layout to give the sense of coziness.

By providing a routine for the start of the lesson, be it with warm-ups or a small chat to feel the pulse of the classroom, or a familiar way of transitioning and ending each task and the lesson, I both give students structure and space, because another way of placemaking is the way, the ritual you use to enter and leave the classroom space, how you wait, what you do, how you greet, what you start with, or how you organize the space visually – background or not, delivery mode, breakout rooms. Some platforms offer more affordances in this respect, but the platform we are using has some limitations, because it lacks the additional features to modify and personalize your environment, which sends a powerful message about your teacher persona, teaching presence and style. It does not allow for architecture of the classroom either, like SpatialChat does, for example.

3. I try to engage students in lesson design. My idea of being flexible includes the ability for students to participate in and negotiate the way the lesson or the module will be focused and what it will revolve around, because of the perceived needs and preferences of the student. I oftentimes resign entirely from the decision-making process or give the students several opportunities, sources or materials to choose from. This is how I want to convey the impression that although a teacher, I am a learner myself, allow for vulnerability and novelty inside the classroom and give students the support they need cognitively not though the presence of someone knowledgeable and an expert, but by being one of them, in quite the same situation. As pointed by Dacey et al., researchers “challenged their traditional identities as “experts” in their brick and mortar classrooms, and embraced their new identities as vulnerable novices willing to learn from their students” (Dacey 2016: 169). Johnson et al. share a similar observation: “Learning to teach online forced us to revisit what it means to be a novice learner” (Johnson et al. 2014: 52). This also comes in line with the notions of vulnerability and authority in the context of teacher-centredness, teacher-learning and teacher knowledge, of which Velikova speaks: “Vulnerability and authority occupy two opposing extremes of free will and agency. And, in the context of teaching, vulnerability is part of the feedback process from the invited and uninvited comments of peers and teacher educators” (Velikova 2019: 24).

4. Another way to project a teacher persona online is through the course materials chosen and the lesson structure, as well as through the use of the written messages, chat and the emoticons. I do not use any of the latter. I use the chat box only for posting links and reading students’ instant messages

concerning any technical problem that prevents them from participating with microphone and camera. In the choice of materials I try to be creative, but also tend to reuse topics and resources that have proved successful. Such are the interactive quizzes and worksheets, which, although directed at the material from the coursebook, draw the experience to a more personal, and “homely” location – the virtual classroom, and thus, in a way, relate to the students personally. Interactive worksheets and quizzes, apart from testing comprehension and giving immediate feedback, are also a way of focusing students’ thoughts and reflections, and chunking the new information. They are also helpful by the visual arrangement of the cognitive load. One flaw of mine is that of always over-preparing, having and keeping loads of possible materials, among which I sometimes get lost. I would rather stick to keeping it simple, but find it is inherent in my way of being in general and hard to modify. The way we use materials, even if it were the coursebook – when deciding what activity to discard, and what to prioritise above others, shows that “however selective a teacher is, he or she is still tied to, at least fundamentally, with some theoretical methodological, be it eclectic, stance, which can be brought to the surface through critical reflection” (Thornbury).

5. A discernible element of the presence a teacher would establish online, especially when tutoring, is their human, affective projection. In a synchronous one-to-one lesson, the whole setting resembles a coaching session. In my lessons, there were situations when I needed to give emotional and affective support, to coach students on matters beyond the classroom context, a role in which I felt somehow detached and awkward, but the emergence of which comes to prove that the level of my relatedness and trust with students has augmented, and that they felt a supportive environment was created for them, where their feelings could be acknowledged and where they could be heard. Partnering students in the speaking activities, for example, I often model on my experience and disclose things about myself. This is one of several “easily inserted low-level behaviours” like using names, emotion, emphasis, approval, invitation, humour, acknowledgement, greeting, reminders of due dates, values, rich media, consistency, disclosure, “viewed as a playbook of strategies”, to provide verbal immediacy and diminish the distance in the online setting. It is also a way of “gauging” social presence (Richardson et al. 2015: 274 – 278).

6. One-to-one speaking lessons run the risk to turn into two separate monologues, instead of a dialogue. I noticed there was oftentimes such a case in my own lessons, where the flow of the lesson was not so smooth and the interaction between me and the student lacked spontaneity. When asking students and receiving their answers on personal experiences, as suggested by the coursebook, for example, instead of a free-flowing dialogue, it sometimes resulted in a broken-up, schematic Q&A bit, and other times in a confessional soliloquy. I definitely consider that it is the facilitator’s soft skills that have to come into play in such cases. The point is that sometimes it is quite inappropriate to do this in a too intimate tone, students might feel startled by being so exposed in front of someone they regard as a kind of authority. So, a logical way of acting in such case will be to share something about yourself of the type of information you are asking the student to give about themselves, so that there is a mutual exchange of personal information. This way you also show the student that you are “human”, just like them. It also proves that a teacher is familiar with and really puts into practice the Socratic pedagogy, as well as social constructivism belief that truth and knowledge do not lie outside us, as a static bulk to be engulfed, but are an act of self-knowledge and reflection, as well as a construct of our interaction with a more knowledgeable other.

7. Immediacy is the reduced perception of distance and it is achieved through timely responses and feedback. It is an aspect of instructor presence along clear directions and course requirements (Richardson et al. 2015). Sometimes, response time can be delayed or hindered by technology and the lack of immediacy it brings can affect students’ engagement negatively. Feedback needs to be timely, specific and formative, with recommendations, clear and concise on assignment, it helps learners “self-evaluate their performance to enhance critical thinking” (Stavredes 2011: 114 – 122). Apart from the error correction approach, where I tend to use the recast, or delayed feedback technique, I also rely too much on unspecific positive expressions, as well as non-verbal confirmation, and these, research shows do not ensure the efficacy sought. On the other hand, the whiteboard notes taken during the lesson, made of text and drawings, I convert to a Word document and send to the student after the lesson, or once every



week, if workload is too much. This way, I provide continuity and engage students cognitively beyond the classroom. The document not only creates the history of our mutual effort by being a repository and an archive, but also becomes a digital, editable and visually enhanced (I highlight, underline, use bold and italics, place images and infographics) reminder and support for ensuing work on the part of the student. This creates my presence socially by showing that I am actively involved in the learning process outside the classroom. It is the professional digital print I leave. On the other hand, from the perspective of technology use, it is mainly text-based and supposes passive work, which is in contrast with what TPACK suggests doing with texts to engage students cognitively and be more interactive. One thing that I could do to improve this practice is to further develop the document into a newsletter, a Q&A section, a FAQ, or a blog, where I (and other teachers) could observe and identify recurrent issues with language, comment on them at regular intervals, and, when the need arises, engage students in comments, clarification and peer advice. It is rather time-consuming and can become too overwhelming, which could question its efficiency, but with the proper time management, it can be a rewarding effort on the part of the instructor.

8. Stavredes indicates that “instructor interactions should be a blend of facilitation and knowledge sharing, which can include the use of prompts, elaboration, clarification, weaving, perspectives, inferences or assumptions, implications, and summaries to encourage discussion, build knowledge, and develop critical thinking“ (Stavredes 2011: 115). When encouraging students to interact with me in conversations, I try to make them feel comfortable, and engage them cognitively, but respecting their emotional and mental disposition. For example, instead of having the pre-planned job interview preparation with a student, I had to change the lesson plan significantly, because she shared she wasn’t feeling like talking about herself, or in another case, I had to abandon the language lesson completely, since the student just wanted to share about a pressing life experience. Observing the way my synchronous one-to-one lesson develop, I came to the conclusion that my preferred Socratic pedagogy, based on dialogue, could be said to dominate the way I interact with my students, and develop their speaking skills in particular. This could not be claimed to have happened only in the online setting, since a preference for it existed already in my face-to-face lessons. What was added probably is more precision in the formulating of the questions, which was adjusted not only to the language proficiency level, but, to a much greater extent, to the appropriateness of the information exchanged and the sensitivity of the topic discussed, which could lead to a conclusion that I was becoming more aware of my affective role there. I also try to provide students with tips on how to succeed, by building a study plan, and recommend learning strategies, on vocabulary retention, for example, as well as prompts to guide their thinking. I provide additional resources and information, like websites and apps, and when presenting new content I try to link it to prior knowledge or the immediate material covered on the same day, so that information obtains continuity and congruence.

9. On the other hand, I use elicitation when I have to give rules, not explicit teaching. I give examples and guiding questions and make students discover the rules for themselves. Concerning my preferred technique for analyzing texts with my students, I realized I make a lot of use of the technique of “noticing” in my classes, I make students notice and think on the language, so I was encouraging their reflective practice through guided discovery. Pair work is impossible in the one-to-one classroom, but Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is actually increased when giving feedback because you cannot rely on nonverbal feedback much – a nod, a gesture, a mime, a facial expression. There is a need to support my speech with a written text, so I double code the feedback to make sure it gets across. Giving clear, carefully worded explanations and simple instructions is also important in the online classroom. Precision in guidelines I try to achieve through fewer words and more images, infographics or diagrams. It is recommended to use the online virtual classroom for communication and interaction, especially in teaching productive skills, while reading and listening activities can be done by students on their own, with the teacher giving instructions and clear guidelines beforehand. Something I need to learn is to allow for silence in the classroom, because I feel extremely awkward when silence sets, as if students are absent. The conversation is the almost only indicator of working on the task if there is no visual proof for it, or students have their cameras off for reasons of privacy and commodity. Silent independent



work in itself could be viewed as evidence for the processing time and internalization of instructions, explanations, and activities, as well as thinking on a response to a question. “Prompting, providing clues and rephrasing the question are often counterproductive when the student merely needs time to answer.” (Darn) On the other hand, recent findings support the use of TTT as a meaningful input, model of language and a source of authentic listening. I, personally, will never consider myself a good source, since this is not my native language, but in the one-to-one classroom there is inevitably a larger amount of TTT and it gives a natural feel to the flow of the conversation, as well as a chance of getting to know the teacher better, reveals something about their personality. I also tend to pose a lot of questions in my lessons, when conversing, when explaining rules, when checking for understanding, apart from the comprehension questions required in some tasks. I also very much use anecdote and personal stories, especially at the start of a lesson, instead of a warmer, because I believe these make the conversation meaningful and keep students interested.

10. As for the managerial role and facilitation, the clear and well-communicated objectives help build trust in the instructor. Trammell and Aldrich (2016) report that even when the personal characteristics of a teacher, their content knowledge, empathy, approachability, and immediacy are available, students’ satisfaction with the online medium depends strongly on course and classroom management. A teacher should have clear objectives in mind, even when improvising with the means to reach them, and should communicate these aptly in advance. There should also be a tight, pre-meditated plan to achieve these. Adult learners tend to be very much goal-oriented and it is a real stimulus for them to know that the person facilitating their learning knows the way and will not let them go astray, lose effort, time and finances, in vain. In my observations, I notice that I do not always, and deliberately, communicate what the goal of our sessions is, but when I do, I perceive students’ motivation rises. A student of mine was explicit on the need to perceive my lessons were strategically planned to achieve her specific language goals, and expressed her skepticism for teaching decisions made on the spot. When pre-conceived long-term objectives are informed in advance, adult learners know that they can trust the instructor who will not deceive or misguide them. It communicates the instructors’ professionalism and credentials. If this is followed by a good job done in scaffolding, and suggesting strategies for how to reach the objective, plus coherent prompts, then students will feel supported in their learning and have the desire to reach the goal set, even if it be their own self-knowledge. A teacher in such cases does not take over the whole responsibility for the outcomes, but paves the way for the necessary self-questioning and internalization for efficient learning to happen.

Conclusion

One of goals of critical reflection is the alignment of theory and practice. Relating my online experience to research and literature, I have explored the concepts of reflection, persona, and presence in order to improve the educational experience and the efficacy of my professional effort. Both the liminal space and the cognitive dissonance of the virtual classroom create a context for identity transformation. By being simultaneously exposed to ourselves through the camera, and to the students, instructors can trigger the process of “self-illumination and exploration” (Bolton 2010:4), and if certain incongruity is found between our enacted and desired identities, our actions and our assumptions and beliefs, we can adjust the elements which impact our presence online – the tone, the attitude, the manner of addressing others and listening to or learning from others. The virtue of the virtual medium is that it prompts reflexivity, and although uneasy at the beginning, sustains the necessary cognitive uncertainty, and forces us to take the courage to go ahead in our self-knowledge. Teachers are well-equipped with the affordances of the modern virtual classroom to create a place for learning and social belonging, and make themselves visible by inhabiting the same world as their students, not a separate one.

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Appendix 1: The Instrument

The categories from the *Cognitive-Affective-Social Theory of Learning in Digital Environments (CASTLE)* (Schneider et al. 2022), Philipsen's (cited by Mirana 2021) factors for online professional development and Salmon's (quoted by Baxter, 2011) stages of online competence, the CoI presence categories, coded into the analytical tool of Clarke and Bartholomew (2014), and adapted by Granite State College, have served as the basis for the present framework. The instrument suggests that teaching presence could be achieved online through the following means and elements:

Areas of online teaching presence	Elements/categories/aspects	Strategies/techniques	<i>Suggested indicators – do you....? Observe and reflect.</i>
personal	cognitive and affective engagement/aspects unique to the individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use an icebreaker with a poll or by posting a question in chat (muddiest point, weekend plans, what is your favorite, etc.). • Offer extended opportunity to practice concepts • Vary learning experiences • Show your subject matter knowledge and project yourself as a lifelong learner • Make learning personally relevant and meaningful by providing real-life examples and applications • Provide for reflection, exploration and validation of ideas when the student interacts with the content, foster deep learning • Assign homework • Provide additional resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you engage students in a conversation? • Consider the use of L1 and L2. What about L2 input? Its nature, length and use for teaching. • Consider how prepared and confident you appear in the classroom. How do you meet students' questions and uncertainties? • How do you convey your enthusiasm with learning, do you act as a lifelong learner? • How do you project yourself – as a knowledgeable person or as a common learner like themselves, reducing the distance? • How do you connect the lesson to the outside world/current social and political situation? Do you express and convey your opinions on matters outside the classroom? • What is your preferred method of teaching vocabulary/grammar/the skills? • How do you use humour? What topics do you choose to talk on? • How do you use students' prior knowledge to enhance learning? • What follow-up work do you plan to implement – type and difficulty of homework, sending a follow-up document with the notes? • What questioning strategy do you use? Do you prompt and engage students' higher order thinking? Do you try to engage students cognitively? Do you make use of the Socratic method? • Do you show attitude/enthusiasm to the content taught? Do you voice your ideas of teaching and learning? • Do you use metacognitive strategies for teaching?



relational	social and affective connections and interactions with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants present themselves as real people • Acknowledge each students individually • Personalize the course experience, create a sense of connection with the instructor • Cater for the affective dimension of communication • Disclose your emotions and respond to students' ones • Create a trusting, safe, appreciative environment • Construct meaning through sustained communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the non-verbal feedback you give. • How do you correct mistakes? Explicit or not? Delayed or not? • Consider the use of voice and pitch. • Consider teacher and the student talking time. • Consider how you deal with yours and students' emotions during the lesson. • Consider what emotions you convey and how they affect the atmosphere of the lesson and the behavior of the student. • What personal experiences do you share and how? • What moral qualities do you project if any? Do you make any straightforward comments on moral and ethical issues and how do these help shape your persona? • How do you build rapport? • Do you engage students in syllabus/ curriculum or class design? Do you give them agency through participation in this?
practical	managerial role; purposeful technology integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate and explain concepts • Scaffold, help grasp and address content-related question • Give direct instruction • Design for purposeful interaction • Use of Power Point and video screen capture lectures • Provide timely, focused, informative, detailed, specific, (both oral and written) feedback • Refine your non-verbal feedback, do not overreact, align it to the verbal feedback, because sometimes they can emit opposite messages, worst is to lack any non-verbal feedback • Wait time after a question is also a non-verbal way of communication, increase it to allow for thinking time and better output and participation • Communicate clearly course/lesson objectives • Make use of all teachable educational situations/occasions when they occur • Show proper netiquette • Use of video capture lectures, audio and video chats, GoogleDocs, polls, quizzes, games, breakout rooms, equal application of video, audio and text stimuli, task-based learning • Increase the level of student engagement and align with the overall objective, to achieve the pedagogical goal, diversify instructional approach, sample and solve problems • Provide feedback from more than one source – written, oral, visual, video comments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you engage students at the beginning and the end of the lesson? • What use do you make of scaffolding? • How do you deal with direct instruction? • How do you give feedback? Is it timely and efficient (focused, specific, informative, detailed) • Consider the pacing of the lesson. How flexible are you? Do you accept the change of lesson plan when suggested by student, monitor for evidence of lack of interest, boredom, tiredness to change the pace of lesson? • Consider the announcements you make. • Consider the type of activities you choose and their sequence, the design? • Consider the timing of the activities. • Consider the use of technology/external or internal features and tools of the platform and how do you facilitate them for the students. • Consider the creativity, authenticity and practicality of your teaching methods. • Do you state at the beginning what the objectives of each lesson are – communicative, linguistic, metalinguistic?



<p>contextual/ situative</p>	<p>place-making; external environment, network and digital capital</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensate the lack of embodied, physical presence • Architecture/arrange space into an educational place through mutual sustained effort • Take into consideration the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group • Show availability and immediacy to students' needs • Write colour-coded text comments, colour-code your feedback (for ex: green-grammar, blue-vocabulary), cross out, highlight text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the organization of the whiteboard and shared spaces like? • Could you claim to have felt disembodied and misplaced and how did you take care of this cognitive dissonance? • What use do you make of digital annotation tools to support student performance and comprehension? • Where do you position yourself in the learning space to express your attitude of the power relations? Do you place yourself in the centre, bottom or top of the screen? • Place-making – do you let students take enough part in note-taking and document and white board writing (and not only when assessing their performance and proficiency) as an expression of your students-centred teaching philosophy and pedagogy? • Do you make use of shared documents and collaborative tools to let students be part of the process of teaching, and this way, of learning, too?
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