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Cue the Paralinguistics: A Qualitative Case Study of Teacher Social Presence

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School of Instructional Technology & Innovation, Kennesaw State University

October 2023

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Education in the Bagwell College of Education

Dr. Julie Moore, Chair

Dr. Jenn Wells, Committee Member

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand teachers' rationale and practices as they establish a social presence in a 100% online learning environment in a high school setting, with a specific emphasis on paralinguistic cues and symbols, such as emoji, emoticons, and Bitmoji. This case study focused on the meaning and understanding of teacher social presence in the virtual setting, utilizing a variety of data collection methods. In-depth interviews were conducted, followed by digital document collection and a focus group interview; transcripts of both interviews and the focus group were analyzed in order to establish the specific practices teachers use to establish a social presence as well as their rationales. Specific emphasis was placed on paralinguistic cues and their role in the establishment of social presence. Findings supported previous research on social presence strategies with few exceptions. Online educators rely on strategies that humanize their virtual interactions with special consideration for tone in written communication, particularly considering the age of high school students. Paralinguistic cues were widely used, with Bitmojis used universally by all participants as a visual extension of their physical selves in computer-mediated communication. Suggestions for future research, practice, and teacher education are included.

Keywords: social presence; online learning; teacher practices; paralinguistic cues; Bitmoji

Dedication

As cliché as it may be, this dissertation, and all that it represents, is dedicated to my family, past and present. My grandmother, a life-long educator, once told me, “Get all the education you can.” She didn’t live long enough to know that I earned more than a master’s degree, but she believed I would. My parents had the unenviable task of raising me to be an independent thinker; I was not an easy child, but they supported me every step of the way from digging in the backyard looking for dinosaur bones to sending me to live in Belgium at sixteen as a foreign exchange student. My dad was an expert letter writer, and I enjoyed every one of his narratives, for there is no better description for his many stories. While they did not live to see me earn my advanced degrees either, I know they cheered me on from above.

On earth, my husband and son have lived with my drive for years and have continued the encouragement without missing a beat. Thank you, Mike, for cooking and cleaning and telling me to get back to work. Thank you also, Charlie (Chuck, Charles...) for understanding how important this is to me. Also, thank you to my in-laws Mary and Ralph who knew I was not finished when I said I was, and have given me the parental love I needed throughout all my endeavors.

Cheers to my family on earth and in heaven.

Acknowledgements

The list of people who supported me in this doctoral journey is long. While I may seem like a “do it by myself” kind of person, I have a village that encourages and supports me. That list begins with Dr. Julie Moore, my KSU advisor and Committee Chair. I was so positive that she chose the short straw when she was assigned to me more than three years ago. Her guidance every step of the way has always been encouraging, even when my ideas were odd. Dr. Jabari Cain and Dr. Jenn Wells, my committee members, have provided the additional encouragement and insight that helped me finish strong. I would be remiss to not acknowledge all the KSU instructors who helped me along this journey. There was not a single course that didn’t play a part in my growth. 🤓

My village includes my coworkers and friends, many of whom are both. We have experienced much change these past three years, but through it all I had some of the very best cheerleaders - in the classroom, the front office, the library, or the hallway - who let me try new things, talk through challenges, or just vent. In particular, a hearty thank you to Dr. Kimberly Sheppard for advising me throughout the program. Thank you to my friends in several schools in three counties and a few at the board office, too. A special thank you also to all the students who dared ask about my dissertation and got a mini presentation. 🌸

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There are more. There are always more. 😊

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In March 2020, most schools were closed due to a worldwide virus. The coronavirus, or COVID-19 as it would be known long-term, was discovered in December 2019 and, due to its very contagious nature, quickly spread worldwide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). While the school closures were intended to be short - approximately two weeks - many systems, K-12 through university alike, remained shut down through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. As a result, educators worldwide turned to “pandemic pedagogy” (Ray & Ntuli, 2022, p. 1164) to find innovative ways to teach and engage their students during emergency online teaching. Once schools reopened, some educators had a unique opportunity to retain their online classrooms. According to a June 2021 American School District Panel survey, many districts will continue to offer virtual learning of some form on an ongoing basis (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2021). Lessons learned from the pandemic would continue to make a difference in many students’ educational lives.

Fast forward to July 2023. New and veteran teachers alike are getting ready for the new school year. Excitement is in the air and on Twitter. #clearthelist and #bettertogether are trending hashtags, but so are #aineducation and #growthmindset. New teachers especially need good advice, and following the currently trending hashtags starts getting muddy. A recent #Satchat asked the Twitterverse to give advice to brand-new teachers just getting started in their careers. The trend was clear: build relationships, make connections, check-in, and ask questions. This advice is offered to all teachers, year one to year thirty, in person or face to face. Educators at all levels are taking the advice to build relationships, but some educators need some fresh ideas, preferably research-based strategies.

Problem Statement

When the world was forced into an immediate shift in teaching and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and students at all levels suddenly became digital versions of themselves. While most would not choose to teach through a pandemic, lessons can be learned from the experience. Conversations and reflections should include what practices worked well for the students and the teachers, particularly as online learning continues to grow through online courses and virtual schools (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2021). Further, a greater emphasis and shifting focus was placed on social-emotional learning and wellness for students and teachers (Currie et al., 2022; Kaplan-Rakowski, 2021), even through digital means.

The increase in text-based communication points to the need for teachers to be creative to maintain their sense of “being there” for the students (Lowenthal & Dennen, 2019), including getting to know them, a “human skill” artificial intelligence cannot replace (Chan & Tsi, 2023). Walther (1992) built upon the social presence theory developed by Short et al. (1976), updating it to include the richness that computer-mediated communication offers. Walther’s resulting Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) helped to inform the Community of Inquiry Framework by Garrison et al. (2000), establishing social presence as one of three elements, along with cognitive and teaching presence, for a complete educational experience. In addition, many digital communication users prefer paralinguistic cues such as emojis and Bitmojis to help relay and support messages (Crombie, 2020; Huang et al., 2008; Manganari, 2021). The research on paralinguistic cues in the K-12 online classroom is growing, and their importance in digital communication cannot be ignored (Al-Zou’bi & Shamma, 2021; Crombie, 2020; Tang & Hew, 2020; Vareberg & Westerman, 2020).

While well-studied at the university level, the Community of Inquiry framework remains relatively understudied at the K-12 levels, particularly regarding social presence (Rice, 2006; Rovai, 2002; Whiteside, 2015). The primary focus of studies from the K-12 online educational environment tends to be related to student perceptions and reactions to the three elements of the Community of Inquiry (Harrell & Wendt, 2019; Turley & Graham, 2019; Velasquez et al., 2013; Vourloumis, 2021; Zhang & Lin, 2021). Additional studies exist that focus on the teacher rather than the student, but they often address teacher self-efficacy as it relates to the lack of a social community (An et al., 2021; Barni et al., 2019; Cardullo et al., 2021) in an online environment. Actual practices of K-12 teachers in the online environment, particularly regarding the social presence element, are scarcely studied (Amundson, 2021; Sanders, 2019). In short, “there is a growing body of literature and research, but the practice of K-12 distance and online learning is still outpacing both the availability and use of that research” (Barbour, 2019, p. 534). Teachers need theoretical and research-based ideas to help solve pedagogical problems that online teaching poses (Putnam & Borko, 2000), including ways to communicate digitally with their students, parents, and colleagues to maintain their sense of being “real” and remaining connected.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand teachers’ perceptions and practices of social presence in a 100% online learning environment in a virtual high school setting, with a specific emphasis on paralinguistic cues and symbols, such as emojis, emoticons, and Bitmoji. Social presence is generally defined as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 151).

Research Questions

The following questions were developed based on one central question that explores social presence from the educator's perspective. The goals of the questions are to establish the importance that teachers place on social presence in the online classroom, how they feel they achieve and maintain a social presence, and to what extent this is established through the use of paralinguistic cues. Data will be collected to answer each question through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a focus group interview.

Central question: What is the importance of teachers being socially present in a 100% online environment?

RQ1: How do teachers establish a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ2: According to teachers, how does their use of computer-mediated communication affect establishing a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ3: How does teacher use of emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis contribute to the social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the body of research on social presence in the online high school learning environment, provide proven strategies for teachers to build relationships through digital means, and lead to improved and more informed professional development for online, blended, and in-person teachers. Although the specific focus of this study is the 100% online classroom, strategies involving communication through digital means relate to all teachers, especially those seeking to establish a more intentional social presence. The results of this study will be

significant since the focus on social presence in online learning research is more limited at the K-12 level, particularly from the perspective of the teacher (Coppola et al., 2002; d'Alessio et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2021; Rajcsanyi-Molnar & Bacsa-Ban, 2021; Rice, 2006; Wendt & Courduff, 2018).

It is important to note that preparing educators to teach online differs from preparing teachers for the traditional classroom (Johnson et al., 2022). Some skills transfer from face-to-face instruction to blended and online, such as being flexible, using assessments, and engaging students; however, these do not necessarily look the same from one environment to the other (Anthony, 2019). Additionally, specific skills are needed for the online classroom (Barbour, 2019; Pulham & Graham, 2018), and teacher professional development should reflect these needs. Grounding teacher preparation programs in research is needed to provide a more robust toolbox for online educators (Johnson et al., 2022).

One important online teaching component is communication conducted entirely through digital means. Teachers must hone their technological expertise to present information clearly, provide personalized feedback, and build and retain personal relationships (Borup & Evmenova, 2019). To help address this, new and existing professional development programs must provide targeted instruction and information specifically addressing communication, allowing teachers to practice new skills (Huck & Zhang, 2021). Ideally, such professional development would be presented online, including best practice examples for teachers (Borup & Evmenova, 2019). This study will identify best practices that in-service online teachers already use, explicitly focusing on establishing and maintaining social presence.

Delimitations and Assumptions

The scope of this study is limited to teachers in a 100% online environment focusing on the importance of social presence as they understand it. Further, a specific objective is to understand what types of paralinguistic cues, such as emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis, teachers use in their written communication with students, parents, and colleagues. The use of paralinguistics was studied solely through appropriate and approved educational platforms, and the researcher did not consider social media use, such as Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook.

The timeframe and location are both limited, collecting evidence from one location - an online school that includes a variety of grade levels - within a three-month period. The study participants included only high school (grades 9-12) teachers who self-reported high social presence in the online classroom and included instructors of various subjects and years of experience.

The methodology for this study is a case study; therefore, it is limited to one case but may result in relevant ideas that might transfer to another population, location, or time (Stake, 2010). The online environment and the social presence strategies, and their importance within this one case, are described with enough relative detail for the reader to determine if transferability is a valid consideration while maintaining the confidentiality of location and participants (Glesne, 2016).

The data collected included information and perceptions of each participant's reality that is not limited in time. Through interviews and documents, participants explored their personal social presence and discussed how and why they utilized the methods chosen through their online classroom. Participants were invited to present documents illustrating examples of social presence, but these documents are not time-bound. Since data was collected at the end of the

school year, participants could have drawn from experiences throughout the semester and even the previous one.

Definitions of Terms

Distance learning is not new but has undergone many iterations since its conception (Barbour, 2021). Even online learning can look and feel different depending on how it is conceived and the intended purpose; therefore, I outline below several terms and definitions necessary to the scope of this study.

Online teaching vs. emergency remote learning is an important distinction. Teachers who are trained and have intentionally planned lessons and units for the online classroom - online teaching - are quite different from teachers who experience “a temporary shift of instructional delivery due to crisis circumstances” (Barbour et al., 2020, p. i), generally considered to be emergency remote teaching and learning.

Synchronous vs. asynchronous pertain to the two main modes of online instruction given to the students. Synchronous is real-time, frequently via video conferencing, where students and teachers are within the same virtual learning environment simultaneously. Asynchronous refers to instruction that students engage in within their own time frame, with very little or no real-time interaction with the online instructor expected (Johnson et al., 2022). Asynchronous content relies heavily on clear communication via computer-mediated means.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is any communication through digital means, including video, audio, or written (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017). This type of communication can be synchronous (video or live chat) or asynchronous (emails or discussion threads).

Paralanguage or paralinguistics are nonverbal cues included in communication, whether verbal or written, to help support or clarify a message (Beebe, 1980). The scope of this study

does not include in-person paralanguage, such as gestures, eye contact, proximity, or other vocal characteristics (pitch or tempo) (Beebe, 1980). Rather, paralinguistics in written form are the primary source of paralanguage data, including but not limited to emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis.

Emoticons are visual cues created via a specific set of keystrokes and tend to exhibit emotions such as a smile or a frown (Gettinger & Koeszegi, 2015). *Emojis* are cartoon-like pictographs that require software support to enable a code to generate an image such as a smiling face, heart, types of food, and many more (Tang & Hew, 2019). Finally, *Bitmojis* are cartoon versions of the user - a personal emoji - created through Snapchat or bitmoji.com. Bitmoji also has a Google extension for ease of use across applications. These can be highly personalized, including various hairdos and outfits, and then be shared easily via copy and paste into any document or email (Lacoma & Beaton, 2021).

Summary

This study aims to address real concerns for many educators teaching in an online classroom. While the pandemic was unexpected, many educators learned quickly and adapted strategies to best serve their students, but more work is to be done. Online teaching and learning continues to grow, and schools must be prepared for any instance going forward. Neither the student nor the teacher should suffer due to a shift in the learning environment. The research questions posed helped generate strategies that can be used by existing educators in their online classroom immediately and better inform professional development for new and veteran teachers. The significance is clear that this study will add to the scant but growing body of research focusing on teachers' social presence in the online classroom.

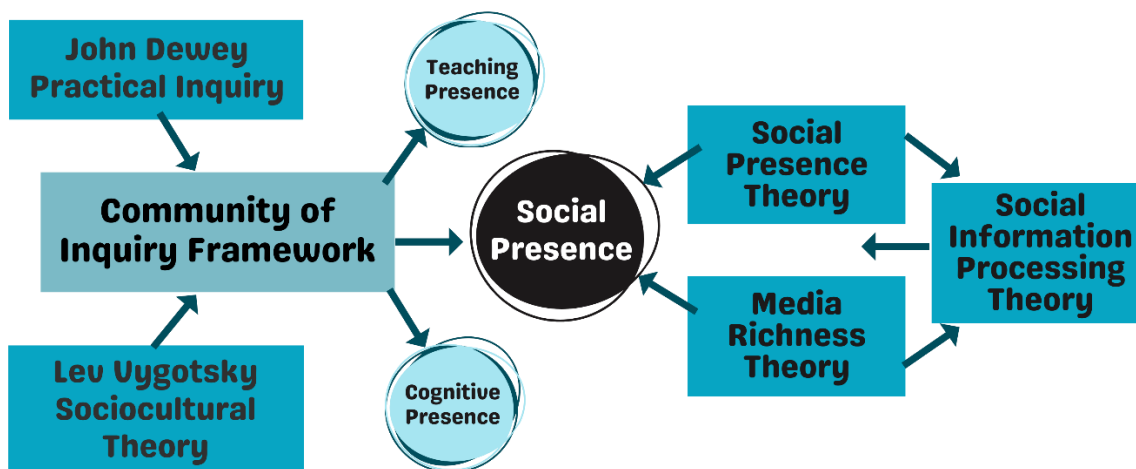
Chapter Two comprises a literature review, beginning with a theoretical framework. Relevant literature covers online learning, Community of Inquiry (CoI), social presence, and paralinguistic cues. The literature review concludes with the current gaps in the literature. Chapter Three gives an overview of the methodology, beginning with a restatement of the research questions. The research design of case study is outlined and supported, followed by a description of the participants and the setting of the proposed study. Data collection procedures and analysis are outlined, followed by the researcher's worldview and a discussion of ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the findings organized by themes: being a real person, overcoming challenges, and paralanguage. Chapter Five provides a narrative discussion of the findings followed by implications and limitations. Finally, recommendations for further research, practice, and teacher education conclude the chapter.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

A positive classroom environment, whether face-to-face or virtual, allows students to express themselves socially and academically (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). In the online classroom, as evidenced worldwide during the recent pandemic, teachers must adapt strategies to create a learning environment suitable for all students, socially and academically (Barbour, 2021). This literature review begins with a theoretical framework and then moves into an outline of relevant studies beginning with online learning, social presence specifically, and finally, studies involving paralinguistic cues such as emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis. The final part of the review presents relevant gaps in the existing literature that this proposed study will address.

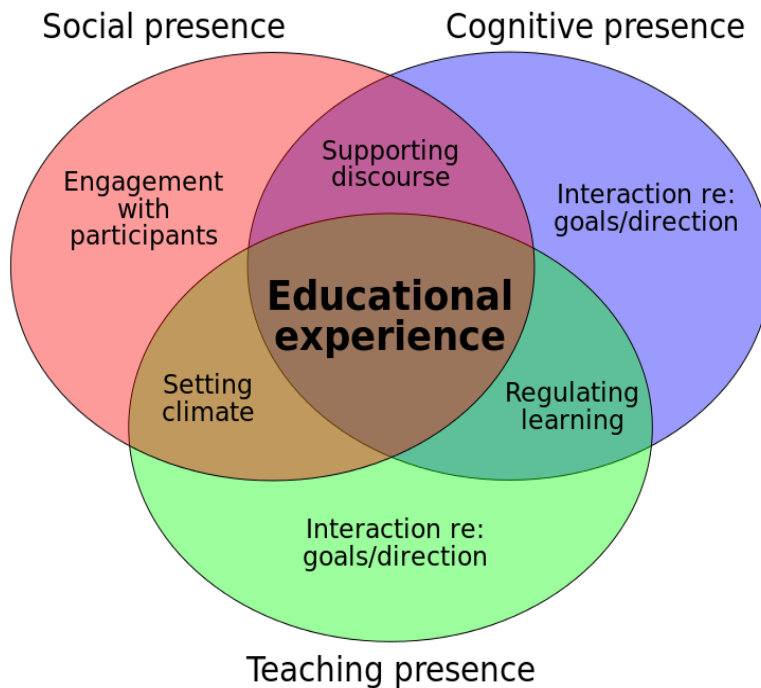
Theoretical Framework

This study is primarily informed by the Community of Inquiry Framework first presented by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000, which was firmly based on John Dewey's idea that meaning is co-created through an exchange of ideas (practical inquiry), and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that suggests that learning is a social activity. The scope of this research focuses specifically on the social presence bubble of the Community of Inquiry and three additional theories that inform social presence as a concept (see Figure 1). The first is Social Presence Theory, initially introduced by Short, Williams, and Christie in 1976 and later built upon by Gunawardena (1995). The second is Media Richness Theory by Daft and Lengel (1986). Both theories helped build the Social Information Processing Theory (SIPT) developed by Joseph Walther (1992).

Figure 1*Theoretical Framework Graphic****Community of Inquiry***

The Community of Inquiry framework was developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000 (see Figure 2), suggesting that a model educational experience for students includes three presences that help to build a community through communication and collaboration (Garrison, 2017). Cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence work together to encourage learner engagement with the content, goals, and each other (Garrison, 2017). This framework was originally conceived from a need to find connections between human issues and the online environment (Garrison et al., 2010), and has been studied in various contexts since then (Athabasca University, n.d.).

Figure 2*Community of Inquiry Framework*



Note: From "[Community of inquiry model](#)" by [Matbury](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Teaching presence generally means that learners know the instructor is there, ready to help as needed, even if the class is virtual (Savery, 2005). Developing teaching presence includes designing the class, units, and lessons, direct teaching, and maintaining an active and cohesive learning environment (Anderson et al., 2001). In the virtual environment where communication is frequently through computer-mediated means, teachers are expected to intentionally model and provide extra encouragement for discussion threads (Anderson et al., 2001) and provide regular and specific feedback (Oyarzun et al., 2018).

Cognitive presence relates to the students engaging with the content, constructing meaning through various collaborative and individual activities and reflection (Day et al., 2013). Student interest is often initiated by the teacher, and then such interests are explored as the teacher guides them through the learning process (Day et al., 2013). As in the face-to-face

environment, students should work to create connections between content and real problems, leading to viable solutions to the problems (Garrison et al., 2001).

Social presence, the focus of this study, is defined by Gunawardena (1995) as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 151). Further, Gunawardena (1995) explains two main concepts related to social presence: intimacy, a 1965 concept from Argyle and Dean, and a 1968 concept of immediacy by Wiener and Merabian (Short et al., 1976). Intimacy is related to physical distance and other physical attributes such as eye contact and smiling. Immediacy is related to the psychological distance that is placed between the communicator and the person with whom they are communicating (Gunawardena, 1995). Distance education is more than physical distance, but “a separation of learners and teachers” (Moore, 1991, p. 3).

Akyol et al. (2009) outline three components that comprise social presence: affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion. Affective expression evolves when teachers and students express their personalities using humor (Day et al., 2013) and friendly wording when providing advice and feedback to students and peers (Clark & Mayer, 2016). Open communication requires the teacher to be available to explain content and norms as well as model netiquette (Day et al., 2013). Finally, group cohesion is a concept of commitment from both students and the instructor, maintained through collaborative activities and regular communication between all involved (Day et al., 2013).

Social Presence Theory

Initially developed by Short et al. in 1976, social presence theory helps explain how digital media influences how individuals communicate (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017; Whiteside, 2015). The researchers considered social presence to be the most critical factor in

communication, and the medium chosen should be able to transmit such essential details as facial expressions, posture, and dress, all of which help to contribute to social presence (Short et al., 1976). Computer-mediated communication was believed to be too task-oriented and impersonal to establish a social presence in whichever form is used. The more channels available for communication - audio, video, or both - the greater the social presence should be (Short et al., 1976). However, communication is a two-way medium, and social presence can only be achieved if the participants, both sender and receiver, notice and engage in it (Gunawardena, 1995). If people receive responses that they feel are immediate and intimate, they are more likely to be emotionally connected, resulting in a greater social presence online (Short et al., 1976). Even when Garrison et al. started their research on the Community of Inquiry in 1999, they read doubts in the literature about establishing a social presence online. To help address this, they built their framework so that all three elements, social, cognitive, and teaching presences, would work together (Garrison et al., 2010).

Media Richness Theory

Information has varying levels of ambiguity and uncertainty. For example, the more information presented, the greater chance the receiver understands the message; therefore, greater detail is typically better, forming the foundation of the Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Similar to Social Presence Theory, Daft and Lengel (1986) suggest that the degree to which a medium can send messages that express a variety of cues (audio and visual, for example), allowing for immediate feedback and personalization, the better. There must be a way for the receiver of messages to clarify information, ask questions as needed, and then act (Daft & Lengel, 1986). They suggest that audio-only is not as rich as video, but face-to-face is best, as it provides multiple cues such as body language and tone of voice (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

According to the researchers, text is the least rich medium; however, Beattie (2017) points out that non-verbal messages can be understood much more quickly with image support such as emojis. Text plus paralinguistic cues, including emojis, emoticons, and Bitmojis, provide additional cues. With more than a thousand options for emojis and emoticons, this allows for greater personalization and helps establish a significant social presence online (Beattie, 2017).

Social Information Processing Theory

Regardless of the tool used, Walther (1992) suggests through his Social Information Processing Theory that those wishing to communicate will do so, adapting to whatever means they are using. Establishing a social presence does not need to be hindered by space or time and can be accomplished with online tools easily enough (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Walther et al., 1994). In fact, Walther et al. (1994) conducted studies during which computer-mediated communication allowed for the same level of social interaction as face-to-face; however, more time was needed for it to manifest. For example, in video or face-to-face interactions, there might be a head nod; in text-only mediums, people can simply write “I agree” (Gunawardena, 1995). Further, paralinguistic cues such as emojis and emoticons can replace the missing facial cues (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998). The absence of physical connection need not hinder the personal effect that a teacher-student relationship can have. Garrison et al. (2000) established that social presence is an important element of the online learning experience, and theories and research support the endless possibilities to make this happen.

Online Learning

Distance education has been a viable option since well before computers, dating back to the days of correspondence courses. Generally, any method where the teacher is physically separated from the student constitutes distance learning (Kentnor, 2015). Various options to

convey information for learning at a distance can be used, including writing, audio, video, computers, and the internet (Roffe, 2004). Today, we understand distance education as online learning, and while it uses computers, it also incorporates writing, audio, and video. Singh and Thurman (2019) defined online education simply as “education being delivered in an online environment through the use of the internet for teaching and learning” (p. 302).

Correspondence courses, dating as far back as 1728, helped to create educational opportunities for those who did not have access to a traditional educational setting (Sleator, 2010). Two-way communication was either lacking or slow, but it continued to grow through the 19th century as several universities adopted correspondence courses (Kentnor, 2015). The invention of the radio encouraged the audio broadcast of educational lessons, and well over 100 universities acquired broadcast licenses (Kentnor, 2015). This way of learning had even less two-way communication and was nothing more than educational programming. Although radio was a means for an efficient, inexpensive, and immediate broadcast of educational material, television provided the important visual of a real person (Kentnor, 2015).

The use of television in education was utilized in the beginning far more in the face-to-face classroom than in distance education (Verduin & Clark, 1991). When used for distance education and when coupled with the telephone, students could see their instructor and engage in two-way conversation (Sleator, 2010). By the 1960s and 1970s, many classrooms used radio and television, and even PBS and NPR were available for families to enjoy educational programming at home (Kentnor, 2015). Distance education via television, though, continued to struggle as it was not always interactive or exciting for the learner (Kentnor, 2015). Although the 1980s brought about the computer and educational programs that would increase accessibility to company employee training, it was around 1989 when online education truly emerged through

the University of Phoenix (Kentnor, 2015). With the invention of the World Wide Web in 1991, followed by the Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN) in 1992, online education was about to begin a rapid growth, continuing today. It should be noted, though, that although many universities quickly added online learning, many also failed to realize the many pedagogical differences between online and face-to-face education, leading to a lack of support for faculty (Kentnor, 2015).

Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) typically refers to communication via the internet, many more technologies have preceded the computer, including the printed word, radio, telephone, and television (Thorne, 2008). A greater understanding and expanded use of CMC using the internet have allowed online learning opportunities to grow and flourish. Distance education has become common with many universities worldwide, and within the past several decades, online learning has become an essential part of the K-12 landscape. Throughout the 1990s, while institutions of higher education were working on expanding online learning, several K-12 online learning programs were being developed, with the first full-time program being established in California in 1994 (Barbour, 2021). By the year 2000, fourteen states had over 40,000 students enrolled in online programs, growing to include all 50 states by 2011 (Barbour, 2021).

Emergency Remote Teaching

Although online learning was evolving and expanding, the COVID-19 pandemic took many educators by surprise, and most were not fully prepared for emergency remote teaching. Until this point, only as much as 8% of students had experience in the online learning environment, and even fewer educators (Barbour, 2021). Most likely, only a fraction of teachers had experience in or any training for online teaching, and most professional development plans

did not anticipate the sudden shift from face-to-face learning to virtual on such a grand scale (Barbour, 2021). Moving to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic was not a traditional online learning plan but emergency remote teaching, which is quite different from planned online education (Barbour et al., 2020). Many teachers suddenly became online educators without adequate preparation. Various challenges arose, including creating a community of learning that equaled what they could accomplish in the physical classroom. (An et al., 2021; Cardullo et al., 2021). Teachers surveyed regarding their pandemic teaching experience cited a loss of relationships; without face-to-face interactions, teachers felt a striking lack of emotional connection with their students and colleagues (Cardullo et al., 2021). It became clear that educators worldwide would need to adapt strategies they would typically use in the face-to-face setting and make them appropriate for the online classroom, a notion online educators have relied on since the advent of distance learning (Archambault, 2011).

Not all strategies from the physical classroom can adapt appropriately to the online environment and vice versa (Barbour, 2019; Pulham & Graham, 2018). A clear result of the pandemic is the need for more specific professional development to prepare teachers for online teaching (An et al., 2021; Rajcsanyi-Molnar & Bacsa-Ban, 2021). When adequately adapted, pedagogical strategies can work in either online or in-person learning environments. Many teachers continue to use pandemic-inspired procedures and systems in their face-to-face and blended classrooms to retain student consistency and prepare for any potential changes in learning conditions (An et al., 2021). Meanwhile, some teachers note a benefit of online learning in that they could better personalize learning with the increased use of technology and, frankly, they had time to learn the tools (An et al., 2021). Practice might make perfect, and it surely makes more comfortable, so the more teachers use the technology needed for online learning, the

more comfortable they will be should face-to-face learning suddenly shift to emergency remote learning in the future (Cardullo et al., 2021).

Community of Inquiry

The Community of Inquiry is a theoretical framework developed to understand online learning better when it was still in its toddler stages (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019). While online learning grew rapidly, the need for connections between humans and the learning environment became apparent (Garrison et al., 2010). Teaching is much more than delivering notes and lectures, and the work by Garrison et al. in 2000 focused on the interactive possibilities of a fully online educational experience. They considered the importance of higher-order thinking skills as well as the role of the instructor, developing three elements that work together to form the Community of Inquiry: teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019). When fostered together as a community, it is suggested that these elements will create a model online educational experience for students through communication and collaboration (Garrison, 2017).

Teaching presence generally means that learners know that the instructor is there, in the instructor role, ready to help as needed, even if the class is mostly or entirely asynchronous (Savery, 2005). Establishing a teaching presence typically includes designing the class, units, and lessons, direct teaching, and maintaining an active and cohesive learning environment (Anderson et al., 2001). In the virtual environment, where communication is through computer-mediated means, including audio memos, video messages, written feedback, or synchronous teaching, instructors are expected to intentionally model and provide extra encouragement, just as expected during face-to-face teaching (Anderson et al., 2001). Additionally, the best practice of providing regular and specific feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) should continue in the

online environment but must be very intentional so the students are not feeling alone or left out of the learning loop (d'Alessio et al., 2019; Oyarzun et al., 2018).

Cognitive presence relates to the students engaging with the content, constructing meaning through various collaborative and individual activities and reflection (Day et al., 2013). Based on Dewey's phases of reflective inquiry, which include suggestion, intellectualization, hypothesis, reasoning, and testing the hypothesis by action (Greenberger, 2020), cognitive presence follows the Practical Inquiry model. This model comprises four non-linear phases: triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution (Cleveland-Innes et al., 2019). As in the face-to-face learning environment, students should work to create connections between content and real problems, leading to workable solutions to the problems (Garrison et al., 2001). Cognitive presence is clearly important in all learning environments, whether face-to-face or online.

Social presence is defined by Gunawardena (1995) as "The degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication" (p. 151). Further, Gunawardena (1995) explains two main concepts related to social presence: intimacy, a 1965 concept from Argyle and Dean, and the 1968 concept of immediacy by Wiener and Merabian (Short et al., 1976). Intimacy is related to physical distance and other physical attributes such as eye contact and smiling. Immediacy is related to the psychological distance that is placed between the communicator and the person with whom they are communicating (Gunawardena, 1995). Akyol et al. (2009) outline three components of social presence: affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion. Affective expression evolves when teachers and students express their personalities using humor (Day et al., 2013) and friendly wording when providing advice and feedback to students and peers (Clark & Mayer, 2016). Open communication requires the teacher to be

available to explain content and norms as well as model netiquette (Day et al., 2013). Finally, group cohesion is a concept of commitment from both students and the instructor, maintained through collaborative activities and regular communication between all involved (Day et al., 2013).

Although the three presences that make up the Community of Inquiry (CoI) are evident in the face-to-face classroom, this framework was built to ensure the same quality learning experience for the online learner. Some skills from the face-to-face classroom translate well to the online classroom, while some may be adjusted to fit, and still others should be abandoned altogether. Archambault and Larson (2015) discovered that possibly the most crucial skill for the online educator is strong communication. These communication skills are executed in the online classroom through computer-mediated means, so teachers must be knowledgeable about appropriate and effective text messaging, emails, and video chats (Archambault & Larson, 2015).

Social Presence

Computer-mediated communication has evolved as it relates to education. Before the advent of authentic online learning in the 90s, educational environments employed telephones, remote cameras and microphones, and video. The concept of social presence also evolved beyond physical interactions to include the projection of identities in all facets of online educational spaces (Oztok & Kehrwald, 2019). For the scope of this study, the researcher will apply the original definition of social presence, amended by Gunawardena (1995) as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 151). Establishing a social presence is vital to the ongoing success of an online learning community. Dikkers et al. (2012) investigated how educators consider connections with their students as a key to academic success. Students need to feel as though they belong and have a connection

(Dijkers et al., 2012) to the people involved in the online class and the learning itself. Rovai (2002) outlined seven factors that help to build a community online and, in turn, potentially retain learners and even prevent dropouts: transactional distance, social presence, social equality, small group activities, group facilitation, teaching style and learning stage, and community size (p. 12). Building a classroom community in part through a robust social presence allows students' needs and interests to be considered, making the learning far more relevant (Lawrence, 2020).

Learner Considerations

Although social presence is only one of three essential components, along with cognitive and teaching presence, of an ideal online learning environment (Garrison et al., 2000), it is considered integral to fully creating an online community of learning (Aragon, 2003). Further, it is crucial to consider the developmental differences of the learners, as well as the idea that teaching practices will vary from one age group to another (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Although studies suggest that social presence is less important than teaching or cognitive presence, these studies also tend to focus on the university level rather than the K-12 online learning environment (Annand, 2011; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009). Higher education typically works with a population of learners who would be considered adult learners and for whom social presence may be less necessary (Barbour, 2021). For the high school learner specifically, social presence has been shown to be necessary for virtual learning. As less autonomous learners than adults (Borup et al., 2014), coupled with the lack of physical interactions with peers or the instructor online, virtual K-12 students have exhibited lower social presence versus their face-to-face or blended counterparts (Harrell & Wendt, 2019). Rovai (2002) points to evidence that in face-to-face schools, those with lower dropout rates have prevention programs that help to

connect the student to the school, “developing a sense of belonging” (p. 2). Such programs can be adapted utilizing specific strategies targeting the online learner.

For students to be successful and for teachers to enjoy their online classroom, a level of comfort must be established, from the beginning, to create a true community of learning, regardless of the physical or online status (Garrison et al., 2001). Several social behaviors conducive to the beginning of the school year go a long way to establishing the social aspect in an online classroom, including personal greetings, sharing appropriate personal detail and interests, and using humor (Aragon, 2003). These practices can open communication between learners and the instructor and form group cohesion online from the very beginning (Harrell & Wendt, 2019).

Classroom Considerations

Learning environments with a collegial perception tend to have a higher social presence, which enhances future group interactions and makes collaborative activities more engaging and rewarding (Rourke et al., 1999). Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory suggests that learning is a social activity, providing the basis for a social-constructivist worldview and one that is integral to a thriving Community of Inquiry. Although not enough on its own, social presence may help cognitive functions improve. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that interaction on a social level precedes any idea development and that cognition and conscious thought will follow. The onus of responsibility lies with the instructor to initiate an appropriate social presence for the online classroom community; otherwise, students will do this independently, which may degenerate quickly (Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017). Even as teachers establish a community via social presence, with proper structures in place and modeling of online netiquette, students can be expected to maintain an appropriate social presence throughout the course. Such initial

strategies may include communicating expectations, navigating the learning management system, and suggesting ideas for using the course content (Dijkers, 2018; DiPietro et al., 2008). During the pandemic, students turned to social media for collaboration when the teacher was unavailable or too limiting, enabling a desired daily interaction with their peers (Yates et al., 2020). To help address these connections that students and many teachers crave, instructors should regularly utilize icebreakers or other activities to establish initial communications, allowing students to step up following the instructor's lead (Whiteside, 2015).

Once social presence is established within the virtual classroom, it can positively affect perceived learning and student satisfaction. Strategies such as online discussion boards and collaboration that promotes peer connectedness mainly support social presence (d'Alessio et al., 2019; Oyarzun et al., 2018; Swan, 2002). The evidence further suggests that strategies to support online interactions and discussion may also lead to greater student achievement (Borup et al., 2013; Dijkers, 2018; Oyarzun et al., 2018). Even before online learning was considered mainstream, Hackman and Walker (1990) investigated teacher immediacy behaviors that enhance closeness between the message sender and message receiver. These behaviors were situated in a televised environment where teachers worked remotely via camera, and phone lines were set up to encourage discussion in real-time. When students had the opportunity to comment and interact with the class, and when teachers actively encouraged such involvement and offered feedback, students felt that they learned more and cited greater satisfaction with the course as a whole (Hackman & Walker, 1990). In addition, instructor behaviors such as sending announcements via the online platform and providing feedback have been shown to help students establish a strong connection with their virtual teacher and possibly increase student achievement (d'Alessio et al., 2019). In fact, d'Alessio et al. (2019) conducted a study that discovered that

when social presence, and thus a cognitive presence, was weakened in one online course, fewer students earned As and more earned Ds and Fs, suggesting a direct link between social presence and achievement.

Teacher Role

The teacher role is varied and need not preside only within the teaching presence bubble, for teachers serve as both social and academic guides in the online learning environment. Further, instructors of record are not the only ones who can and should establish a social presence in the online classroom. Course designers often have the first opportunity as they develop welcome messages and establish student profiles (Aragon, 2003). Indeed, teachers play the most significant role in establishing the social tone for the online class, as they may adopt three roles: instructional designer, teacher, and facilitator (Ferdig et al., 2009). Such simple behaviors as smiling (whether through images or video messages), addressing students by name, encouraging discussion, and providing feedback can help establish a teacher's social presence and immediacy (Wendt & Courduff, 2018). Teacher immediacy is abundantly important to the online learner as these instructor characteristics are those that tend to reduce the perceived distance between the learner and the teacher (Mitchell et al., 2021; Richardson & Swan, 2003), setting the stage for “being there” for each student when the need arises. Online instructors must carefully balance the individual's immediate needs with the learning community's overall culture. Individual feedback through personal messages rather than whole group comments is valuable for individual efforts. When the individual feels respected for their contributions to the group, the whole community benefits (Whiteman, 2002). Feedback should be prompt and specific without too much complexity, keeping the message easy to digest (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Continuous dialogue, including through the feedback loop, is essential to the online student,

particularly since current technology tools allow for this easily enough (d'Alessio et al., 2019; Oyarzun et al., 2018; Velasquez et al., 2013).

Strategies for Social Presence

Teachers employ numerous strategies to promote social presence, specifically in the 100% virtual classroom. For example, Rourke and Anderson (2002), two researchers at the forefront of Community of Inquiry studies, explored text-based forms of social communication during computer conferences to identify types of communication that contribute to a social environment. Of the 15 that they determined were social communication, seven were identified as contributing the most: addressing others by name, using compliments, showing appreciation, using the reply feature, expressing emotion, showing humor, and using salutations. These were confirmed in a separate study by Tang and Hew (2020), eighteen years later, who determined that the most common indicators of social presence are expressing emotions, using inclusive pronouns, continuing an idea, and using social language. Teachers utilize these strategies in many ways, including contributing to online discussions and providing immediate and specific feedback while fostering positive relationships with students within the online learning environment.

By 2008, K-12 virtual learning had grown in popularity, but little research on 100% online education strategies had been conducted (DiPietro et al., 2008). DiPietro et al. (2008) attempted to address this gap through a study at a Michigan virtual school. Through qualitative interviews and observation, they collected data from sixteen participants to identify best practices from the teachers' viewpoint. The findings include 23 pedagogical strategies sorted into five categories: community, technology, student engagement, meaningful content, and supporting and assessing students. Several strategies address social presence specifically, such as

encouraging interactivity through discussion boards (DiPietro et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2022; Swan, 2002) and forming relationships and connections, generally through discussion or written communication, even including appropriate non-course content (Coppola et al., 2002; DiPietro et al., 2008; Gunawardena, 1995; Johnson et al., 2022; Swan, 2002). Specific and timely feedback was also cited, supporting the importance of teacher immediacy (DiPietro et al., 2008).

Instructors cited a 24-hour turnaround requirement by the school when addressing student questions and concerns (DiPietro et al., 2008). Specific considerations for how students interpret communications were noted, particularly without the visual facial cues and body language face-to-face learning can provide (Derks et al., 2008; DiPietro et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2016; Tang & Hew, 2019; Zhou et al., 2017). While these and other strategies are supported by previous and current research, including some that post-date the study, concerns still need to be addressed, including the need for a validated instrument to measure these strategies' true impact (Barbour, 2019).

Additional research, particularly since the pandemic, highlights strategies for effective online teaching (An et al., 2021; Francom et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2022; Matteson, 2020). Some studies focus specifically on social-emotional learning, which has room for improvement in online learning (Currie et al., 2022; Mariani et al., 2022; Miller, 2022). For example, Currie et al. (2022) conducted a study focusing on SEL strategies adapted for K-12 online learners. This study is significant since it has been suggested that the younger the learner, the more support they need from their teachers to continue developing as a competent learner (Currie et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2022). In addition, many strategies were collaborative, requiring students to use online programs such as interactive spaces like Google Workspace and Padlet, small group breakout rooms, and non-verbal signals such as emojis built into the video

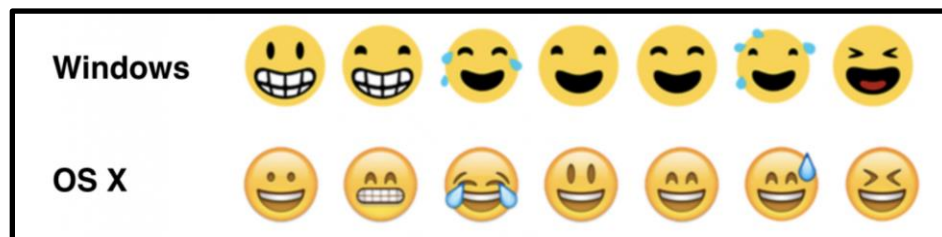
conferencing programs (Currie et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2022). Similarly, Matteson (2020) reports using the same strategies with her high school students to help keep them engaged but coupled this with personal communication, including class support and feedback. With a large portion of the high school classroom conducted asynchronously, Matteson (2020) notes a positive response from students when personal communication is specific and encouraging. Further, she clarifies that feedback should be free of ambiguity and include facial expressions and tone to help the message transmission. Clarification may be established via video but also with the use of paralinguistic cues if needed.

Paralinguistic Cues

Within this study's scope, paralinguistic cues include emoticons, emojis, and stickers like Bitmojis. Emoticons are icons that show emotion and are typically created with a specific set of keystrokes on the keyboard (e.g., :-)) (Gettinger & Koeszegi, 2015). Emojis are cartoon-like images requiring software support, so they look different between an Apple machine and a Windows machine (see Figure 3) (Tang & Hew, 2019). Many use the two terms interchangeably despite the stark difference between emoticons and emojis (Tang & Hew, 2019). Stickers are larger than emoticons and emojis and are often found in sets on social networking sites such as Facebook or Snapchat (see Figure 4). They are more expressive and allow for greater personalization (de Seta, 2018). The most commonly used sticker in the educational setting is the Bitmoji from Snapchat.

Figure 3

Emoji example variations between Apple and Windows machines

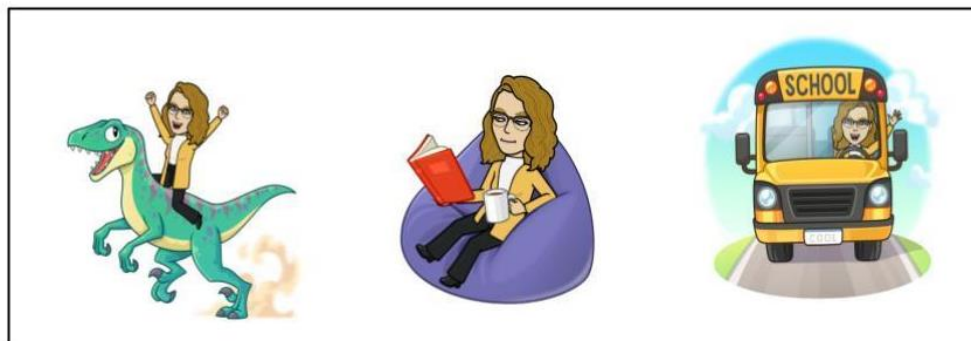


Note: Seven popular emojis created on one machine will look different on a machine with a different operating system, such as Windows and Apple (OS X) devices. Adapted from *Emoji Support in Email: Can Your Subscribers See Them*, by B. Specht, 2016, litmus.com (<https://www.litmus.com/blog/emoji-support-in-email-can-your-subscribers-see-them/>).

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Figure 4

Sticker examples of Bitmoji by Snap Inc.



Note: Bitmojis are cartoons of yourself, customized through the skin, hair, facial features, body type, and outfits. Then the avatars are used in various design stickers, from riding dinosaurs to reading, driving a bus, and hundreds more.

These paralinguistic cues are essential for online communication. For example, in the face-to-face classroom, students and teachers rely on facial and body language to support communication; however, in the virtual environment, where messages are frequently text-based, emojis and emoticons provide non-language support (Lo, 2008), helping teachers to express

emotion, clarify meaning, and personalize messages (Derks et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2016; Tang & Hew, 2019; Zhou et al., 2017). In addition, teachers looking to improve communication and enhance the important social presence in their classroom can do so with the help of emoticons and emojis, building their community of online learners (Dunlap et al., 2015).

Paralinguistic cues aid in accomplishing several tasks, from displaying humor and emotion to clarifying the meaning of messages while adding playfulness and a greater perception of enjoyment by the teacher, thus leading to social connectedness with students (Hsieh & Tseng, 2017; Tung & Deng, 2007). Even when a message is potentially negative in tone, a well-placed emoji can help to give the message a more positive tone (Derks et al., 2008). In asynchronous communication, that which does not occur in real-time, such paralinguistic cues are used in more positive ways than negative, sometimes to help decrease negativity in discussions and feedback (Gettinger & Koeszegi, 2015). Clear writing still matters, in any case. When text and emoji are together, but the tone does not match - negative text coupled with a smiley face emoji, for example - text tone may prevail over the emoji (Wang et al., 2014).

Over the past decade, people of all ages have shown increased emoji use for communication (Adobe, 2022; Chen & Siu, 2017), but not everyone uses them with the same consistency. Females tend to use emoticons more frequently than males, but males tend to use a wider variety of them in their communication (Bai et al., 2019; Dunlap et al., 2015; Tossell et al., 2012). It should be noted that not all cultures understand emojis the same. Some common understanding regarding which emojis are appropriate and their specific meaning may help avoid a communication breakdown that would be detrimental to the Community of Learning (Ge & Herring, 2018).

Overall, students seem to like seeing emojis and emoticons. An increase in the sense of connectivity, perceived intimacy, and immediacy between students and teachers can be created by using such paralinguistic cues (Janssen et al., 2014; Tung & Deng, 2007; Vareberg & Westerman, 2020). In addition, these paralinguistic cues can help teachers establish and maintain a solid social presence, leading to a sustainable Community of Inquiry and greater student motivation and self-efficacy, creating a better learning environment for all (Zilka et al., 2018).

Gaps in Literature

Online learning has existed for several decades, although the advent of such is newer for the K-12 levels than for higher education (Barbour, 2021). Some literature reviews about online teaching combined findings from higher education and the K-12 environment, although the needs of each age group differ tremendously (Johnson et al., 2022). For example, students who are online learning at the university can generally be considered adult learners while those in the K-12 environment would not be, yet there is far more literature based on the higher education level (Coppola et al., 2002; d'Alessio et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2021; Rajcsanyi-Molnar & Bacsa-Ban, 2021; Rice, 2006; Wendt & Courduff, 2018). Also, online teaching practices may be misinformed due to the lack of literature at the K-12 level or the mere blending of results from adolescents and adults (Johnson et al., 2022). Some K-12-based literature exists, particularly since the pandemic, but the nature of online learning continues to shift and change (Barbour, 2019; Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Ferdig et al., 2009). While the literature on the K-12 environment is growing, a gap remains; there continues to be a lack of research to inform the future of teacher development for K-12 online learning (Johnson et al., 2022). This study focuses solely on participants who teach grades 9-12 100% online, providing a more focused insight into teacher practices and helping to address this gap.

The original study that formulated the popular online learning framework situated at the university level is the Communities of Inquiry (CoI). This framework has evolved through the years, but the three presences - teaching, cognitive, and social - remain solid. As a framework to inform online teaching and learning at the K-12 level, more must be done to address the needs of younger learners. An attempt to address this with a similar framework as the CoI but with a central focus on the K-12 environment resulted in the Academic Communities of Engagement (ACE) (Borup et al., 2020). Borup et al. (2014) first considered the adolescent learner and their differing environmental factors, such as parental involvement and social support outside the online learning environment. Focusing on “how learning support communities can help maximize student academic engagement” (Borup et al., 2020, p. 809), ACE includes two separate support communities (rather than the one - online - of the CoI): personal and course communities. *Personal communities* include parents and other family members, tutors, peers, and even social media support. These support people outside the course can help and guide the online learner. The *course community* comprises those within the online class, such as the instructor and classmates (Borup et al., 2020). Together, these communities support three elements of student engagement: cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement. It is affective engagement where social presence is most prominent as support by the learner’s community includes communication and developing relationships (Borup et al., 2020). The crux of the research behind ACE is communication, which is directly tied to the intentions of this study. One suggestion presented by the researchers is for online instructors to assess student engagement, consider additional supports that students may be lacking, and further build communities to provide needed assistance through academic mentors or success coaches, for example (Borup et al., 2020). The suggestions for further research and specific communication outside the online

learning environment fall outside the scope of this study; however, his adjusted framework is promising for future studies situated at the K-12 level.

K-12 Teacher Social Presence

As with research on online learning, specific studies on social presence tend to be focused on higher education (Rice, 2006; Rovai, 2002; Whiteside, 2015). Further, it is common for these studies to consider social presence between learners as well as the learner and the instructor, which makes the results less streamlined as far as what works best for K-12 teachers (Borup et al., 2013; Harrell & Wendt, 2019; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Yates et al., 2020). This is an important distinction, considering the vast differences between adult learners and adolescents (Johnson et al., 2022). At the K-12 level, students tend to rely far more on the teacher than at the university level (Barbour, 2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). This directly impacts how social presence is established and maintained. Further, research that is a result of the pandemic tends to focus on general teacher strategies online, focusing more on teaching presence (pedagogy) and cognitive presence (thinking and learning) (Johnson et al., 2022). The data from this study helps to fill the relative absence of research on social presence as it is established by the high school online educator, including their rationale, helping to better inform the growing need for research-based best practices and professional development for current and future online educators.

Paralinguistic Use by K-12 Teachers

Most research on paralinguistic use focuses on how emoji and emoticons are used in general social media platforms and on instant messaging sites (Manganari, 2021; Tang & Hew, 2019; Tossell et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014; Zhou et al., 2017). Research related to instructors using paralinguistic cues, especially emoticons and emoji, is slowly growing, particularly in the

past several years; however, again, these studies tend to focus on instructors in higher education (Al-Zou'bi & Shamma, 2021; Crombie, 2020; Tang & Hew, 2020; Vareberg & Westerman, 2020). Crombie (2020) points out that since “emojis are here to stay” (p. 38), instructors need to learn to speak the language, communicating in a way that is relevant to our students, and this certainly applies to all ages. Teachers need to learn how to use paralinguistics such as the ever-popular emoji appropriately, without overuse, and with proper support to be sure students have the same shared understanding of the meaning (Crombie, 2020). The importance of a well-placed emoji on communication effectiveness with teenagers (Manganari, 2021) should not be overlooked.

Research on Bitmoji and other stickers is even more scarce. There are studies related to teaching and learning that utilized Bitmoji and other stickers (Hall et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Van Pate, 2022); however, the focus of most current research is not based on the rationale for using this specific paralinguistic cue, but an overview of the “craze” and obsession, both the good and the bad (Gewertz, 2020). The most common use of Bitmoji throughout the pandemic is via the Bitmoji classroom, which quickly morphed into class group photos and even full faculty group photos at a time when coming together was inadvisable (Van Pate, 2022). Bitmoji may be used by teachers as a form of identity extension, using the cartoon features to express themselves in ways they could not, even in the real world (Sime & Themeli, 2020). It should be noted that everyone does not embrace Bitmoji classrooms, and some educators feel they are not appropriate (Van Pate, 2022). The scope of this study investigated the sticker Bitmoji, whether it is used on its own as an identity reflective of the educator or as a part of a Bitmoji classroom.

Emojis and other pictorial language are important to our students’ lexicon, yet many teachers consider their use unprofessional (Crombie, 2020; Tozer, 2022). It is important to

distinguish the difference between using paralinguistics versus using social media such as Facebook or Instagram to communicate with students (Dennen et al., 2020; Tozer, 2022). Social media as a pedagogical practice is outside the scope of this study. Online education continues to evolve, as do many online teaching practices. This study investigated how teachers incorporate paralinguistics into their daily communication with their students in an effort to better establish and maintain a social presence. Emojis are everywhere, and teenagers take comfort in their use (Huang et al., 2008). Teachers do not need to use them with wild abandon, but this study identifies best practices for their use, along with Bitmoji, effectively helping to fill the wide gap in the literature on this topic.

Summary

This qualitative case study research takes a deep dive into the practices and rationale behind the instructional choices of high school instructors who teach entirely online. Social presence has been established as a vital part of the online learning environment, along with teaching and cognitive presence (Aragon, 2003; Dikkers, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2021). Understanding how and why teachers utilize the strategies they do helps to inform best practices and future professional development for current online educators as well as those who may need to shift to emergency remote teaching with little to no notice (Barbour et al., 2020; Rajcsanyi-Molnar & Bacsa-Ban, 2021). Individual interviews, a focus group interview, and document analysis within this case study address the suggestion by Bai et al. in 2019 when they recommended research from a qualitative approach to learn more about emoji use in real-world communication. Further, this research is grounded in theory rather than based solely on perceptions (Barbour, 2018). Day-to-day communication with students, including specific and timely feedback, is important and authentic for the students and the teachers involved. Overall,

teachers face greater demands regarding communicating effectively with students in a virtual environment and using the various forms of technology at their disposal. We must clearly understand their experiences and identify their needs to best prepare them for their online career (Archambault & Larson, 2015).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study was conducted through a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is defined as research that emphasizes words and observations, qualities that are challenging to put into numerical statistics but rather are better interpreted subjectively (Glesne, 2016). Typically, researchers embrace qualitative research not to reach a final consensus on any particular context but to better understand a situation through its complexity (Stake, 2010). In-depth interviews and other observational techniques are frequently used as research methods and are paired with copious field notes and memos (Glesne, 2016).

This research approach is appropriate “for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 23). While social presence is not a problem, it is to be better understood through the members of the educational community who are tasked with making it happen. Further, every educator does not establish a social presence in the same way; therefore, multiple perspectives should be considered. The intent of this qualitative study was to explore and understand how and why teachers establish a social presence through computer-mediated means, particularly through written messages and, more specifically, through emojis, emoticons, and Bitmojis.

Data was collected in the natural setting, in this case, the online environment. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that qualitative researchers collect data by directly talking to people in an environment that is not contrived but comfortable. This may happen over time and should include multiple methods of data collection. Time spent with the participants helps the researcher understand the circumstances and what is happening outside of what can only be seen (Patton, 2015). The researcher's role is that of a learner, not an expert, regardless of what one already knows (Glesne, 2016). The research setting of this study, the online environment, is natural and

comfortable for the participants (online instructors) as well as the researcher (online learner). The task was to listen to the participants' stories while building a rapport so that they felt trusted enough to fairly represent their realities for others to consider (Glesne, 2016).

Typically interviews, observations, and documents are included in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The three data collection methods for this study included interviews, a focus group, and document analysis, as these methods best address the research questions. It was important that the data collection did not rely on a single source as multiple data sources ensure fewer mistakes in interpretation and provide multiple views of the same situation. Further, multiple data collection methods helped to provide triangulation (Glesne, 2016), increasing the findings' credibility and trustworthiness (Patton, 2015).

Qualitative research does not rely on survey instruments for collecting data; instead, the researcher is considered the key instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data was gathered for this study by interviewing participants individually and as a group, as well as examining digital documents collected. The only instruments outside the researcher were a survey used to select the participants (see Appendix A), which will not be used to analyze findings, and a second survey with three questions, used to collect demographic data for informational purposes, but again, not for analysis purposes (see Appendix B). The second survey followed individual interviews to help fill in the gaps. The individual interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Appendix C), as suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018). This qualitative inquiry focused on the participants and their multiple perspectives, realities, and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes that emerged reflected the various perspectives of all the participants collectively.

Research Questions

Qualitative research uses questions rather than hypotheses or predictions of the data. First, a central question is written broad enough to encompass the study without imposing limitations on the participants and the resulting findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Research questions then “narrow the focus of the study but leave open the questioning” (Creswell & Creswell, 2020, p. 192). Finally, more specific but still open-ended questions are reserved for the data collection phase. The researcher developed three research questions based on one central question, explored through semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis.

Central question: What is the importance of teachers being socially present in a 100% online environment?

RQ1: Why do teachers establish a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ2: According to teachers, how does their use of computer-mediated communication affect establishing a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ3: How does teacher use of emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis contribute to the social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

Chapter three includes an overview of the case study research design, including the appropriateness of this choice for this study. Participants and the setting are described and justified, followed by step-by-step details of the data collection and analysis procedures. The researcher's worldview is presented, followed by ethical considerations, including plans to address any issues that may arise, both proactively and as they occur.

Research Design

A case study is an intensive investigation of a case or a bounded system such as a person, village, event, or set of procedures (Glesne, 2016). Like any qualitative investigation, case studies should involve multiple data-gathering methods, including interviewing, document collection and analysis, and participant observation (Glesne, 2016). Sharan B. Merriam, a prominent case study methodologist, suggests that a literature review drives the theory development and, in turn, the research design and outlines this in five steps resulting in purposive sampling (Yazan, 2015). This study employed Merriam's guidelines and advice regarding literature review and data collection.

This qualitative case study focused on the meaning and understanding of teacher social presence in an online setting. Included are detailed descriptions and analyses of a specific bounded system or case (Merriam, 1998). Specifically, the bounded system for this study is that of an entirely online high school that is stand-alone and not a part of a public school system; therefore, the data are finite and limited to one specific setting (Merriam, 1998). The case is a group of teachers from the school who have self-described experience establishing a social presence in the online classroom. The unit of analysis is the individual teachers (Patton, 2015) and their perceptions.

Utilizing Merriam's case study design requires the study to be particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic (Merriam, 1998). Case study research that is particularistic means that it focuses on a particular individual, situation, event, program, or phenomenon. This qualitative case study focuses on how online teachers establish their social presence and why they believe what they do to accomplish this is important. A second focus is on each participant's perceptions of their use of paralinguistic cues. A descriptive case study means that the final product has rich, thick

descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. Data is presented through detailed thick descriptions based on interviews, documents, and focus group data from the participants, ensuring that the information presented reflects the participants' realities and not those of the researcher. The practice and importance of teacher social presence are evaluated and summarized, allowing for greater applicability of the findings. This suggests the study is heuristic, meaning that this investigation will help the reader extend their own experience with the phenomenon of social presence (Merriam, 1998). Stake (2010) explains that a case study can sometimes "extend to readers a vicarious experience of the activities, thus a better opportunity to decide in their own way how things work" (p. 65). Together with a specific focus, thick description, and informing the audience, this completes the three features Merriam (1998) suggests for a qualitative case study.

Setting and Participants

The site selected for this study is a fully online, fully accredited state-sponsored school in the southeastern United States. Online Academy of the South (OAS - a pseudonym) was established in 2005 and currently has nearly 12,000 students in grades 9-12, with some limited middle school and elementary courses. It should be noted that while not many middle school students are enrolled, they sometimes take high school-level courses. The school is fully staffed with nearly 200 highly qualified teachers (certified to teach in their area) and offers core, advanced placement, college prep, and elective options. Students enrolled in classes may be hybrid, meaning they only take one or two classes online while the rest are at their home school (public, private, or homeschooled), while other students are fully enrolled in OAS. The school specially trains all instructors at OAS for the online environment, including the pedagogy of online learning and instruction. New instructors are also paired with experienced mentors before

they teach their own courses. Additionally, OAS provides ongoing professional development in a variety of areas. This site was selected for two reasons. First, the school offers appropriate participants and relevant online learning to answer the research questions. Second, the convenience of availability was offered to me, the researcher, by the school's Supervisor of Teacher Quality.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, the most common form of sampling strategy for case study research (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling allows the selection of "information-rich cases for study in-depth" (Patton, 2015, p. 264). The first task in choosing participants through purposeful sampling is deciding on the selection criteria (Merriam, 1998). This study is focused on how and why teachers, who teach 100% online, establish a social presence, particularly those who utilize paralinguistic cues such as emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis, so it was important to choose those who self-report a high level of social presence in their online environment. The researcher opted for criterion-i sampling, a type of purposeful sampling that identifies those cases that meet set criteria since participants were expected to be selected based on their qualities fitting this relatively specific profile (Palinkas et al., 2015). A survey (see Appendix A) was offered to all teachers at the online school who teach classes in grades 9-12, distributed through the institution's faculty listserv. The survey included information regarding the study, an overview of the procedures, and a consent statement. Next, the survey defined social presence according to Gunawardena (1995) and included three Likert-scale questions regarding self-reported levels of teacher social presence. The survey did not request details related to how the participant establishes social presence in their virtual classroom, as this information was discussed in the in-depth interviews. One of the three questions asked whether the teacher regularly uses paralanguage in their online classroom

experience. In addition to definitions of key terms, the survey was written in participant-friendly language. A fourth question allowed the potential participants to add any comments they felt were pertinent, as well as their name and best contact email.

Only nine educators responded to the survey. Originally, the intention was to select those with the greatest self-perceived social presence, based on the Likert-scale results, for an in-depth interview. Of the nine respondents, one was not a teacher but served in a support role, and so was not included. Regardless of their responses, the other eight respondents were contacted to confirm their eligibility (9-12 teachers) and willingness for an in-depth interview. Each participant received an informed consent document at the beginning of the survey, to which they marked yes to indicate their agreement before any data was collected. The informed consent (see Appendix A) included basic details about my study (what, how long, how, why, and for whom), potential risks, if any, participant rights, possible benefits, confidentiality, how data will be used, and contact information. Copies of this document were given to each participant upon request, and the researcher maintained a copy (Seidman, 2019).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this case study is the individual and the meaning each gives to social presence, how it is established, and the importance of maintaining a social presence in the 100% online classroom. This study included eight participants (see Table 1). It should be noted here that all the participants are Caucasian women with 13 or more years of experience teaching. None were from math or English departments, but otherwise, are from various departments and experience levels. While not all information within Table 1 was considered in the data analysis, as it is outside the scope of this research, it is offered here as a means of transferability.

Table 1*Participant Information*

	Department	Years experience TOTAL	Years experience ONLINE	Teach in person also?	Number of classes taught online this semester	Number of students total this semester	Number of pages in transcript data	Number of documents provided	Focus Group participant?
Alice	World language	13	7	NO	3	More than 105	16	2	NO
Beth	Social studies	24	7	NO	3	More than 105	19	0	YES
Catherine	CTAE	29	9	YES	2	76-90	17	6	NO
Daisy	CTAE	24	6	NO	4	16-30	21	7	YES
Emma	CTAE	15	4	YES	1	76-90	19	0	NO
Fiona	World language	27	4	YES	1	31-45	19	5	YES
Gwen	World language	26	14	YES	1	31-45	21	3	YES
Holly	Science	26	3	YES	1	1-15	21	2	NO

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative studies frequently gather a variety of data. Stake (2010) describes the data as “whatever clarifies the picture of what is going on” (p. 88). Case studies typically include three types of data: interview, observation, and document analysis (Merriam, 1998). According to Patton (2015), using only one form of data does not present the full perspective. In order to validate, cross-check, and provide triangulation, the research must include a combination of data sources. Further, Merriam (1998) explains that the data collection should be recursive, meaning that collecting one form of data will lead to another, and so on. For this case study, since the primary investigation is social presence through computer-mediated writing, which is not conducive to observation, the researcher conducted a focus group interview as the third data type

(Morgan, 1997) in addition to interview and document analysis. This helped address the suggestion by Whiteside (2015) to conduct further social presence research through varied data sources such as interviews, email correspondences, course assignments, and online discussions. With the three data types, the data was triangulated and corroborated throughout all the data sets, reducing potential bias (Bowen, 2009).

The first form of data collection was an in-depth, semi-structured interview to learn why the participants establish a social presence, how computer-mediated communication affects the maintenance of social presence, and how online instructors use paralinguistic cues to contribute to the overall establishment of social presence. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes to an hour. The interviews were conducted virtually via Google Meet, allowing the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes. The interviews were semi-structured with several demographic questions, including years of teaching, both overall and online, and the content taught. More in-depth questions followed, including several probing questions (Glesne, 2016). Since the interviews were semi-structured, the participants were encouraged to talk about what was important to them related to the questions asked. Although the interviews were recorded, a separate audio recording was created as a backup, and the researcher took notes during each interview. All interviews were transcribed and cleaned before data analysis (Merriam, 1998), and each recording was compared to the transcript to ensure accuracy. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

Document analysis was the second supporting data collection method (Merriam, 1998). Two to three examples of digital documents representing social presence, particularly those that include paralinguistic cues such as emojis, emoticons, and Bitmojis, were requested for further data analysis. Some participants provided more than the requested 2-3, while two provided none,

resulting in 25 examples (see Appendix D). Two examples did not include paralanguage and so were not used. These documents helped to support participant commentary that answered the research question about how paralinguistic cues contribute to social presence. Specific documents included bulletin board graphics, banners, feedback, Sways, presentations, announcements, and Padlets. None of the documents contained student identifying information.

Following the interview phase and document collection, the researcher set up a focus group interview of participants who had participated in the one-on-one interviews but agreed to discuss some topics in more depth. The focus group allowed the participants to meet in a virtual social setting, permitting them to hear what other participants shared to add relevant comments, creating a friendly discussion (Patton, 2015). For ease and comfort, I conducted the group interview through the same online video conference platform, Google Meet, as the individual interviews. Conducting the focus group via a virtual platform allowed for a more open discussion with the study participants about the research topic and permitted observation of their interaction with each other in their naturalistic setting (Morgan, 1997). The questions asked during the focus group (see Appendix E) encouraged participants to elaborate on previous responses, expecting to gain further insights drawn from the participants' interactions with each other and different opinions and experiences (Morgan, 1997). In fact, participants asked each other questions to help clarify how and when they used certain programs and applications in their classes.

During the focus group interview, the researcher conducted member checks. As the data was reviewed and themes emerged, some of the most prominent ideas and patterns were offered to the participants for confirmation or contradiction (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, ideas and patterns were shared with all participants via email, encouraging each to participate in the

process of member checking regardless of any limitations they may have (Carlson, 2010). No contrary comments were received.

Data Analysis Procedures

Considering that data analysis is recursive (Merriam, 1998), analysis began as the researcher recorded memos throughout the interview phase, allowing personal insights to be recorded and tracked. This allowed any initial emerging ideas to be noted, but care was taken not to rush to conclusions or overdo the initial ideas (Patton, 2015). The researcher carefully inventoried and organized all the data, filling gaps as they were noticed through additional questions for the participants via email, survey, or focus group. The data was backed up to ensure security while preserving older copies as data sets changed (Patton, 2015).

Each interview was recorded and then loaded into Otter.ai to be transcribed word for word. The researcher then reviewed each transcript by listening to the audio recording and reading the text to edit errors that interfered with meaning. No parts of the recordings were removed. Pseudonyms were added to the transcriptions within Otter.ai before exporting to any other program. Once each transcript was cleaned for glaring errors, the researcher exported the document in PDF format to GoodNotes for review and initial hand coding. Using GoodNotes, each transcript was highlighted to indicate rich or significant participant ideas and quotes. This first round of hand coding enabled the researcher to interact with the data, allowing initial patterns to emerge. It became clear that a priori coding would be most appropriate for the transcriptions.

When using an a priori coding scheme, it is important that the codes and categories used are consistent with the theoretical or conceptual framework of the study from which the codes and categories are borrowed (Merriam, 1998). Initial highlighting of the transcriptions revealed

parallels with Sanders' (2019) study, which used the Community of Inquiry theoretical framework as one of three key concepts of his conceptual framework, along with social constructivism and Online Learning Support Roles framework. Two of Sanders' (2019) themes, practices and rationales, are represented by several codes used during the first round of coding. A third set of codes was initially created to encompass the third research question specifically addressing paralinguistic cues. Additional codes were added as needed through coding using Atlas.ti.

The transcriptions were loaded into Atlas.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Once transcriptions were loaded and labeled, each was carefully reviewed to apply preliminary codes from the current codebook based on a priori coding from previous research by Sanders (2019). As the data was reviewed in further detail, various additional codes were added, and previous codes were then edited as they supported research from the literature review. Research by Rourke and Anderson (2002) and Tang and Hew (2020) provided several strategies evident in the transcripts, so those were used in the codebook. Teacher rationales from Sanders' (2019) research remained, and additional rationale codes from this study's interviews were added. Additional codes were added from research by DiPietro et al. (2008) and Matteson (2020), as their research was focused on similar age groups as this study. While Atlas.ti allows importing of images of documents and PDFs for content analysis, the documents collected were organized in GoodNotes instead. Due to the inconsistent number of documents collected from each participant, content analysis was not conducted; rather, the documents provided support for the commentary related to the paralinguistic cues used by the participants. These documents include bulletin board graphics, banners, feedback, Sways, presentations, announcements, and Padlets. Digital documents were authenticated following the guidelines Merriam (1998) suggests

for documents to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher utilized the questions presented by Guba and Lincoln (1981) regarding the nature of the documents (see Appendix F). Then, the researcher reviewed each document to determine the paralinguistic cues used in each, including emojis, Bitmojis, images, memes, and GIFs.

Using Atlas.ti, codes were sorted into initial categories based on shared characteristics to help them be more easily retrieved and analyzed. As codes were sorted, patterns emerged, such as similarities, differences, frequency, and causation (Saldana, 2009). Coding is not a one-time process but cyclical; therefore, each time transcripts were reviewed, codes were edited, added, and resorted, for a total of 38 codes in seven categories. The researcher added memos, at times linking them to specific quotes for later analysis. The master codebook was edited as codes and categories changed to better fit the data.

Categories of codes were refined before comparing them and finalizing a rule or reason for the inclusion of each (Saldana, 2009). A definition for each code was generated, and quotes from the transcripts were chosen for each code. In addition to field notes, the researcher continued analytic memoing throughout the process to help keep track of initial ideas and patterns (Saldana, 2009), later aiding in the narrative description of the results. All codes, descriptions, and examples from the data were recorded in a codebook within Atlas.ti and in Google Sheets (Appendix G).

The focus group interview transcription was initially hand-coded, reviewed and highlighted, to identify important and relevant meanings, the same as the initial interviews, followed by loading the transcript into Atlas.ti and applying codes using the same a priori coding scheme constructed using studies in the literature review. Because the focus group built on the individual interviews, the transcript was be coded and sorted into categories using the same

master codebook. No new codes emerged from the focus group interview, and 28 of the 38 codes were evident.

Using CAQDAS allows for searches of coded passages to link, compare, and even filter codes. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher used the query tool to isolate quotes across all transcripts related to specific codes and key terms. For example, a query in the code for feedback, specifically including the word time, returns 16 results, potentially highlighting relevant quotes about providing feedback quickly to students. The researcher also utilized the text search tool that allowed any or all documents to be searched for specific search terms, including inflected forms. This tool was used based on the researcher's notes on key ideas that needed to be retrieved easily.

The use of CAQDAS allows for generating diagrams of the various relationships between codes and quotes. As Yin (2016) points out, creating a variety of diagrams and assembling codes in various ways helps to deepen the analysis and find new relationships. The researcher minimally used the networking tool to generate diagrams but generated two word clouds related to the codes 'emoji' and 'Bitmoji' (Appendix H). Finally, using CAQDAS helps with the audit trail, tracking each decision made related to the analysis, thus improving transparency and trustworthiness. Throughout the coding and analysis process, the researcher worked with a mentor and advisor and conducted member checking to validate any findings.

Worldview

Philosophical ideas that a researcher brings to inquiry help to explain many choices made within the research design. Also described as a worldview, these ideas characterize how the researcher sees the world and are shaped by beliefs and past experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The paradigm, or worldview, that most fits the researcher's positionality is social

constructivism. Social constructivism suggests that learning and social contexts cannot be separated (Vygotsky, 1978). Knowledge is constructed through a series of experiences and cognitive processes where people make meaning from their own world experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within this study, the researcher's goal was to rely on the participants' experiences as they were conveyed without inserting any personal bias. However, it is important to note that a researcher's background tends to shape the interpretation of the data, so understanding this position as it relates to the study is important (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a lifelong educator, the researcher has resisted stories that make up other teacher realities pertaining to students, preferring to create a unique reality with each new class. Berger and Luckmann (1991) point out that knowledge can often be created through simple interactions with others, whether observation or conversation. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) view that individuals often make meaning by putting experiences into language. One person's reality can affect another; people are easily swayed by others' words, even when their experience is limited.

Individuals make sense of reality at the moment it exists, and these experiences change over time, much like one's reality could (Moon & Blackman, 2017). The researcher's life experiences are varied and broad. Although growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, significant time was spent in France and Belgium, forever changing the researcher's reality of the world compared to many of her peers. Well-read and well-educated, the researcher is afforded more information on which to base perceptions of the world and what to perceive as real and important. Both realities, small town and world traveler, are equally important. With a belief system rooted in Christianity, which has also helped shape how the world is perceived, the researcher believes in the good in people and feels there is a lot to look forward to. Others may have differing worldviews, possibly including those who participated in this research.

This research on social presence places an emphasis on the participants and how they interpret their professional online teaching world as it relates to their written interactions with students. Within the participants of this study, multiple realities were explored, including how social presence is established and its importance. While only an observer, collecting data through interviews, a focus group, and document analysis, the reported findings must be balanced and fair. This research is not to report the researcher's worldview influences; however, it is expected and understood that this qualitative research filters the findings through a constructivist lens (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Reflexive memoing helped to keep any skewed interpretations based on personal background to a minimum (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

Glesne (2016) points out that complete objectivity in field research is nearly impossible and that researchers should embrace interests and concerns while maintaining a neutral stance in presenting findings. Subjectivity does not equal bias but is the personal self as it relates to the research (Glesne, 2016). Keeping track of subjectivity throughout the research process makes one aware of perspectives as they relate to the information presented by the participants. Glesne (2016) points out that understanding subjectivity throughout the process may lead the researcher "to ask certain questions (and not others) and to make certain interpretations (and not others)" as the study progresses (p. 147). Detailed field notes chronicling personal views on the subject and emotions help to position the researcher within the study better and understand how the findings are being interpreted (Glesne, 2016).

With a social constructivist worldview, the researcher understands that participants constructed their reality of social presence in their online environment as they know and understand it. The researcher co-constructed their reality through their lens. Each participant discussed their constructed landscape, detailing their experience, their actions, and their rationale

regarding their social presence in the online environment (Boyland, 2019). The researcher's role is to present their stories from their perspective with any bias and subjectivity clear and well documented (Glesne, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical behavior is treating people fairly and respectfully (Lichtman, 2017). Qualitative researchers must consider ethical concerns at all phases of the study, not only during data collection, and it is best to anticipate them and be prepared. Creswell and Baez (2021) suggest considering potential ethical issues as they may arise in each phase, including prior to the study, in the beginning, and during data collection, analysis, reporting, and publishing. For this qualitative case study, care was taken to consider and then address, as much as possible, all ethical issues.

Throughout this study, ethical behavior was maintained with the treatment of the participants, the online learning site, the data, and the results. First and foremost, no harm came to any participants in any way, either physically or emotionally. In fact, as expected, many participants enjoyed discussing their virtual classrooms and felt empowered with the validity of what they do with and for their students. Generally speaking, this research topic is not sensitive, nor are the methods invasive (Haines, 2017). At no point did any interview become uncomfortable for any interviewee or the researcher, so there was no need to stop and offer to reconvene later. In presenting the findings, privacy was maintained as well as the confidentiality of the participants and the site where data was collected. This is particularly important as the researcher cannot control what participants say outside the interview or the focus group, during which they saw who was participating (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). The nature of this topic, social

presence via paralinguistic cues, is not a sensitive topic. Informed consent was collected from each participant, and all approvals were obtained, including IRB and the site itself.

The researcher built a good but appropriate rapport with all participants. Their time was respected by scheduling the focus group and individual interviews of a length and at a time that fit their needs while meeting the research timeline. Interview questions were not intrusive, and the data is a fair interpretation of the individual reality of each participant without the participants feeling as though they are being “used” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus is on why teachers establish a social presence, from the teacher's perspective, and the importance of such, emphasizing paralinguistic cues. This remained the focus throughout the study.

Ethical considerations regarding collecting data via web-based means were also considered. The researcher took care to keep all data private and secure. Any data printed was kept in a locked cabinet, and a personal computer (rather than a work computer) with an account that is password protected was used. There was no real concern with participants understanding the technology, for they teach online on a similar platform on which interviews were conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The online platform chosen, Google Meets, was utilized through a personal account rather than a school account; therefore, any data generated, such as transcripts, were delivered to a personal account, rather than that of the participant or someone within a public school district.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study set out to confirm and add to the body of research specifically related to the importance teachers place on social presence in the online classroom of grades nine through twelve. One overarching question and three research questions were developed to help guide this investigation:

Central question: What is the importance of teachers being socially present in a 100% online environment?

RQ1: Why do teachers establish a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ2: According to teachers, how does their use of computer-mediated communication affect establishing a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ3: How does teacher use of emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis contribute to the social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

Eight open-ended interviews were conducted, followed by a focus group of four participants. Documents were collected to support social presence practices, primarily focusing on paralinguistic cues. Interviews were transcribed and coded, allowing themes to emerge, and aligning with each research question.

The setting is a fully accredited state-sponsored online high school in the southeastern United States. The Online Academy of the South (OAS) has operated since 2005. It is well established, with over 125 courses taught each year, including all core content areas, world languages, CTAE, electives, and various AP classes. New teacher supports are in place, including providing a mentor teacher for all new-to-OAS instructors and ongoing professional

development opportunities, both required and optional. Each fall and spring, OAS holds an optional conference for all teachers and administrators to meet, collaborate, present, and learn from each other. This was held online during COVID-19 years but is otherwise held in person. OAS uses the Microsoft platform and encourages using Yammer for Professional Learning Communities and sharing resources. OAS creates specific Yammer groups for the various curriculum areas and coaching partnerships, which are all optional.

The eight participants in this study come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. While all participants are Caucasian women, their courses vary from social studies and science to CTAE and world languages. Their pseudonyms are Alice, Beth, Catherine, Daisy, Emma, Fiona, Gwen, and Holly. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, and Beth, Daisy, Fiona, and Gwen participated in an additional focus group interview. Documents with examples of social presence, explicitly using paralinguistic cues, were received from all participants except Beth and Emma (Beth never sent any, and Emma stated she had none at present). The other six participants sent various examples (see Appendix D). All eight participants had similar motivations for teaching online, primarily centered on the flexibility of the schedules, which allows for more timely feedback and personalized communication (See Table 2).

Table 2

Participants' Motivations for Teaching Online

Alice	"...it was just very convenient to teach online."
Beth	"I can work from wherever I am."
Catherine	"I do have more time in my day to do the things I need to do with my children."

Daisy	“I like the ability to set my own schedule and do my own things, the flexibility it gives me, I can work when I want to work and when I need to work.”
Emma	“I like the flexibility. You know, I get to do something that I enjoy at my pace.”
Fiona	“It is convenient to me; it's less stressful for the teacher.”
Gwen	“I taught my class from Michigan and Ohio, you know, so definitely that flexibility that even if I am teaching a course, I can take the course with me. That is 100% hands down the best aspect.”
Holly	“I like doing it right here where I'm sitting. I actually do my weekly live sessions sitting right here [on the porch]. And I am home, I'm in my environment.”

OAS is a setting that has been offering 100% online classes for eighteen years; while the school caters to a variety of students, teachers state their appreciation for what online teaching has to offer, specifically the ability to get back to doing what they love doing: teaching. Participants described being able to connect with students through personal feedback, discussion board postings, and other forms of communication. Several participants suggested that the uniqueness of teaching 100% online helps them to form personal relationships with students rather than acting as a barrier. Typical distractions of the in-person classroom are absent, such as cell phones, school-day disruptions, and general behavior issues.

Through eight personal interviews and the focus group interview, participants outlined the importance of teachers being socially present, primarily making sure the students knew there was a real person on the other side of the screen who was there for them, doing what they could to help them be successful as an online learner, versus artificial intelligence. The major themes that emerged include the need for teachers to be real people online and how they accomplish this,

addressing the first research question about why teachers establish a social presence. The second emerging theme is how teachers overcome challenges in the online classroom, many of which directly result from the primary communication being via computer-mediated means. This theme directly answers the second research question about how computer-mediated communication affects teachers establishing a social presence. Finally, the third theme centers on how teachers use paralinguistic cues, including the emoji and forms of Bitmoji. This section also includes several examples from the documents collected from the participants that illustrate the use of paralinguistic cues. This theme directly relates to the third research question asking how the teachers' use of paralinguistic cues contributes to social presence.

Being a Real Person

The Community of Inquiry, proposed by Garrison et al. in 2000, comprises social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. The cornerstone of this research is social presence, which Gunawardena (1995) defined as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 151). Specifically, this study focused, in part, on why teachers establish a social presence (RQ 1). Through in-depth, personal interviews, their reasons were clear when discussing the various forms of communication they use.

Teachers at The Online Academy of the South (OAS) have access to a variety of modes of written communication, including assignment feedback, discussion posts, email, Learning Management System (LMS) announcements, LMS-based messages, other applications such as Smore and Padlet, and the use of Google Voice for texting. All OAS instructors make phone calls to students and parents at the beginning of the semester as a school requirement and throughout the semester as needed. In addition to written communication and telephone calls, teachers at OAS incorporate a variety of video or audio messages for both instruction and

feedback, including recordings of live learning sessions, which are held each week. Live learning sessions are teleconferencing sessions available to students at a set time each week, during which they may interact live with the teacher and classmates. These are recorded and posted for review as a kind of supplemental resource. This study focused on written forms of communication; therefore, audio and video forms of communication are outside the scope of this study, including telephone calls and audio or video feedback. Recorded live learning sessions, which are in turn available as course resources, are the exception due to their extensive use of slide presentations. The forms of communication the participants in this study suggested were most helpful in establishing themselves as real people and building a social presence were feedback on assignments and assessments, discussion board posts, and other personal messages outside the traditional curriculum topics.

Feedback

The most common form of communication the participants referenced in this study to help establish social presence was feedback on specific assignments and through general student inquiries. OAS requires all teachers to provide specific, personal, and timely feedback on each assignment within three days. All participants in this study consider the feedback they give students to be very important; therefore, they each make efforts to offer feedback more quickly than the three-day requirement to provide helpful information for the student moving forward immediately.

The online learning environment's a lot easier for me to offer more opportunities for them to enrich their learning or to help them remediate. So I guess, again, that would be with feedback too, you know, when I'm giving them feedback, immediately, I can give

them things to help them or help them to extend their learning (Catherine, personal interview, April 21, 2023).

The teachers discussed that they typically provide feedback as comments within an assignment and through annotations throughout an uploaded document. All participants mentioned that they give suggestions that are very personalized to the student regarding how to improve on the skill specific to the assignment. They also offer additional supplemental materials based on the needs of each student per assignment, sometimes providing links to videos or other websites within the comments or sending additional messages to students. All participants also discussed that they try to give more substantial comments in their feedback, providing specific constructive feedback notes that are not just empty observations. “Not just saying...great job, but going into...this is why...this is wrong. This is what you need to do...give them links to articles...” (Daisy, personal interview, April 18, 2023). Finding the right balance was a struggle for two participants who were used to their face-to-face classrooms.

It was very difficult for me to navigate finding the line between constructive and helpful feedback for the student to develop the concept for themselves versus...sticking an answer key up, and you can go check it. Any questions? (Holly, personal interview, May 24, 2023).

This sentiment was echoed by Fiona, who consistently reflects on the balance of too much communication and not enough. She believes students do not always read her feedback, so she searches for additional communication methods to reach them better. “I try to find the best ways of doing things for the student as well as for myself” (Fiona, personal interview, April 26, 2023). She sees the need for the feedback loop, opening a dialogue with students about their work.

Supplemental materials are always accompanied by personal commentary in the feedback left for students, but teachers also mention using names or nicknames to personalize their communication. To simplify adding often repeated comments, such as reminding students to respond to peers on discussion threads or to review certain materials, teachers will use applications such as ProKey; still, they personalize the messages with the student's name to prevent the messages from sounding “canned.” Beth mentioned keeping a document at the beginning of the term noting any names students are called other than their given first name. “That name makes a huge difference.” (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023). While there are programs that can provide computer-generated feedback, only live teachers know a preferred name.

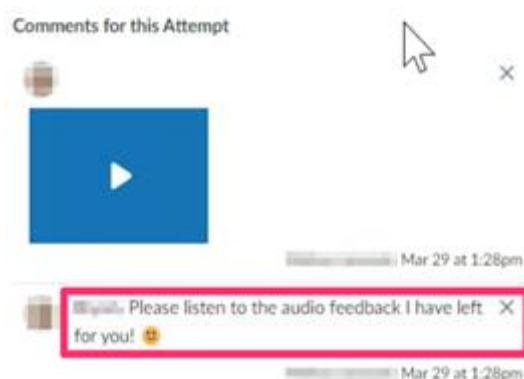
All the participants show some emotion in the feedback they leave for students, typically through happiness, worry, and a little frustration. While all participants mentioned being somewhat guarded with their emotions, particularly worry, anger, and frustration, they commented that they are real people, even if computers are between them and their students, and real people have emotions. They all expressed the feeling that when their students sense real emotions from them as their teachers, it helps them to come across as real people, even when facial expressions are not present. “I've learned that I have to use things like I'm concerned. I'm proud. I am worried. And those are okay to use” (Alice, personal interview, April 4, 2023). Daisy pointed out that she needs to use emotion in her communication to not sound like a robot. Aside from the potentially negative emotions, complimenting students on a job well done is also quite common and is frequently accompanied by a smiley emoji to reinforce and support the message.

If I feel like I'm telling them something that they could correct, but I also want to let them know you're not in trouble...so I don't want them to think of it as a negative, I'll always

include...but you're doing a great job, keep doing what you're doing. I always like to compliment them, or usually, I even start with a compliment first. And then kind of put that emoji (see Figure 5) or something like that in there (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023).

Figure 5

Example of Emoji in Feedback



Every participant mentioned using compliments in their feedback; two participants even specifically described “sandwich” feedback. “Compliment, provide the bulk, you know, and then end with a compliment” (Alice, personal interview, April 4, 2023). All participants explained that they work to focus on the “bulk” part rather than just saying a good job or well done, again being sure to expand their personalized feedback.

The participants discussed spending time on each assignment providing personalized feedback because, as Daisy points out, “They have to realize that we are real people, and we are going to read what they write” (personal interview, April 17, 2023). Two teachers mentioned concerns regarding plagiarizing and possible AI use in assignments, which, they admit, can also happen in face-to-face classrooms. They suggest it’s because students online do not always believe someone will actually read the work they turn in. In fact, Beth described a personal

online experience when she was in the student role, and her online instructor seemed absent. She talked about this during the focus group interview, and the other three participants added comments of agreement. This personal experience encourages her to take time as she provides feedback, ensuring her students know she is always there. The feedback loop is important, but even if students do not engage, the participants strive to make the comments they make personal and relevant in a very timely manner. Clearly, feedback is not only a specific focus for OAS but for each of the participants as well.

Discussion Boards

Being a real person can also be accomplished through discussion posts within the learning management system. OAS requires teachers to include a discussion post assignment for each chapter or unit of study. Students must make an initial post and respond to at least two peers. The response is expected to be more substantial than a simple agreement reply, preferably intended to spark discussion. Teachers are also expected to participate, often creating an active, ongoing conversation in the online classroom. These discussion threads, while cited as a method for teachers to establish and maintain a social presence, are met with various opinions from the participants. Of eight participants, three mention that discussion posts are an excellent place to create conversation, specifically conversations that fall outside the scrutiny of grades. Holly points out that the discussion boards act as “a launching pad that got out of the ‘this is not a graded thing.’ This is a place where I can actually talk” (personal interview, May 24, 2023). Three participants pointed out that the discussion threads are one of the only places where the students can interact with each other. Only two participants actively do not like the discussion threads. One pointed out that students tend to be at many different places in their learning due to varying start dates, which hinders the conversational tone in discussion threads. The second

participant does not enjoy participating in the discussions with students but uses the platform to remind students of important information, such as the proper format for submitting videos.

Regardless of opinion, all participants, along with students, include an introductory post in the discussion thread. In all cases, the teacher posts first, such as Alice, who notes that she “need(s) to jump in and really be a person in there, I need to be the one that posts in the introduction discussion first for them to see that, hey, I’m introducing myself too” (personal interview, April 4, 2023). The importance of the initial discussion post is echoed by other participants, including Catherine, who uses the introduction discussion thread to familiarize her students with her Bitmoji, which she then uses throughout the class. Four participants discussed using images in their initial posts to help establish themselves as real people by including photos of themselves. Three teachers mention that they pay particular attention when reading introductory discussion threads. For example, Emma looks for things she has in common with the students to help make connections from the very start. “I tried to, you know, let them know, I’m a person too” (Emma, personal interview, April 26, 2023). Catherine makes a point to reply to each introductory post, specifically commenting on something they mentioned and asking follow-up questions. “So that’s another way, I think, that I kind of let them know - I’m here; I’m real” (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023). Each participant, in their own way, uses the introductory discussion thread to their advantage, setting the stage for a community of learning.

Other Personal Communication

OAS has specific requirements for feedback, discussion threads, and email, but each participant described additional channels they find that help them establish a social presence online. Four participants discussed using other applications outside the LMS, such as Sway, Smore, and Padlet; applications that allow images to be added to materials much more

effortlessly, providing a personal side of themselves for the students. While each participant will include an image of themselves within their introduction on the discussion boards, Catherine prefers to include a whole stack of pictures in her ‘beginning of the course’ newsletter, created in Sway.

I also like to include in there a picture of myself at the very top. And then at the bottom of the newsletter I talk about myself, I talk about my family, I talk about what we enjoy doing. And I include a whole stack of pictures of things of me and my family together on vacations...So I think that's one way that they know I'm a real person (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023).

All participants mentioned personally sending messages through email or messenger within the LMS to students. Sometimes these are simply conveying a well-done message. “Any student that had like a really great test average, and a really good overall grade, I messaged them” (Alice, personal interview, April 4, 2023), avoiding the trap of only sending negative messages. Two participants described that they would check in with students when they had not been active in a while.

And I check up on them. And I send reminders that you've you missed three assignments that were due today. You know, those kinds of things. I don't always do it. I don't always have time. But if I've got a struggling student, then I'll send an email. Are you sure you're okay? Because you had three assignments, due. You know, I'm trying to get you through this class. So they know I care about them, not just as students (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Two participants also describe that they like to reach out to students when they know there have been personal challenges in their lives, such as an illness or a death in the family. Further, Beth

takes her personal communication to a different level by scheduling personal birthday emails and sending handwritten cards. For her, this is the ultimate indication of being real, because they see her actual handwriting. “They really know I'm a real person because I wrote it by hand” (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Whether the teacher receives messages from students through email or text messaging through Google Voice, all the participants expressed the inclination to respond as quickly as they can, understanding the importance of time for actively working students.

They ask questions about how do I do this. Or how would you like this? And I try not to ever make them wait, because I know they're trying to work. And I know that they've got jobs and other classes. And those kinds of prompt responses make it so that they're more able to turn their work in on time (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Daisy echoes this sentiment, “I try to get back to them immediately if I can because they're working on that assignment right then. And they need that feedback” (personal interview, April 17, 2023). The school expects teachers to respond to emails within 24 hours and post feedback within three days. While one participant points out that being evaluated on response time is motivating, all the participants try to respond more quickly than is required. Two participants admitted that they tend to be online often, even at strange hours, and will usually respond at whatever time they get messages. It should also be noted here that these are also two participants who teach only online and not face-to-face as well.

All eight participants establish themselves as real people in similar and unique ways. Being a “real person,” whether through personal messages, personalized feedback, or response time, was essential to all. Some strategies are similar to those in the face-to-face classroom,

while others are particular to the online classroom. All the participants found ways to bridge the gap between themselves and their students, sometimes turning negatives into positives.

Overcoming Challenges of Online Instruction

The participants in this study overwhelmingly speak fondly of teaching online; however, it isn't without its challenges. These challenges seem to stem from the overwhelming amount of computer-mediated communication in the online classroom. These findings lead to information that helps to answer the second research question related to how computer-mediated communication affects establishing a social presence. Five areas the participants discussed most consistently are described next, including how to teach and learn online, individual student pacing plans, tone of written material, building relationships, and students reading online messages.

How to Teach and Learn Online

While all the participants understood that they had a learning curve when they first started teaching online, they point out that many students arrive at the online learning environment with even less experience *learning* online. Participants pointed out that frequently, students begin their online learning with little prior experience with the Learning Management System (LMS), time management behaviors, or just learning online in general. As Fiona explains, "It's difficult to get them [students] to think the communication is the most important part that, that sometimes cannot happen easily (focus group interview, May 16, 2023). This sentiment is echoed by five other participants who point out that students often do not know where to locate things online within the LMS, such as announcements or feedback, or where to check their direct messages and email. As a result, six participants explained that they teach

executive functioning skills, simply how to learn online, or, as Beth suggests, “skills you’re going to need for life” (personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Like establishing routines at the beginning of the school year, OAS teachers help students establish online habits. Alice helps students find their calendars, how to view feedback, and reviews what type of communication is best depending on how quickly they need an answer (personal interview, April 4, 2023). Beth adds that she tries to offer tips for organizing and time management, skills she believes will help students long-term (personal interview, April 12, 2023). Catherine points out that she helps her students navigate the online environment because they are not used to needing to converse completely through computer-mediated means, and understanding all the sections of the online space helps students know where to go to read and send messages (personal interview, April 13, 2023). Fiona gets concerned because without learning these essential online learning skills, the students do not read everything they should and often skip modules (personal interview, April 26, 2023), which is essentially like skipping entire in-person classes. Modules are where much of the coursework is organized. The teachers explain that by beginning the course with some of these helpful hints for students, teachers are more likely to better build relationships through communication going forward. During the focus group interview, Daisy and Beth suggested that the more the students know there is someone on the other side of the computer screen who will actually read what they are writing, pay attention to what they are doing online as a student, and simply care about them, the less stressed they will be and in turn, become better online learners (focus group interview, May 16, 2023).

Individual Student Pacing Plans

At OAS, students can enter an online class at any time during the course's first four to six weeks. This creates an individual pacing plan for each student; therefore, the students tend to be

at various places in the curriculum. Not only does this impede students from working in collaborative groups, a common social presence strategy for learners, but the instructors are constantly switching from one lesson or unit to another for grading and feedback. Additionally, students may work ahead if they choose to, which some do, given their diverse schedules. All participants expressed some frustration with the individual pacing plans' impact on live learning sessions, which are online video-conferencing teaching lessons. Teachers must hold one live learning session weekly via the video conferencing platform OAS utilizes. Instructors have complete autonomy to determine the day and time, but regardless, all participants noted that few students, if any, attended on any given week. The live learning sessions are always recorded and posted as supplemental materials for those who missed the sessions or need to review material.

Six participants have embraced the idea that live learning sessions are like creating a video with content, whether there is student interaction or not, for students to view at a more convenient time. "I think there's value in that, to students being able to learn on their own schedule or go back and look at something later that they need to review that sort of thing" (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023). Although the individual pacing plan puts students at unique spots in the curriculum, the teachers generally do not consider this much of a hurdle. The communication and specific feedback they give students is personalized enough that they can build relationships through their words and sometimes emojis without the need for video-enhanced interaction. In fact, Beth enjoys that students are working on different assignments simultaneously as grading is more enjoyable for her, rather than repeatedly assessing the same topics and assignments.

I want to read your work. You deserve for me to read your work, And you deserve for me to give you feedback on it to help you because it's not just busy work. But I can't do that

with so many at one time. With individual-paced plans, it's gotten better because students have started at different points (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023).

The individual student pacing plans are a set part of learning at OAS. The online instructors understand this, and while some find it irritating because they prefer interactivity during live learning sessions, they also seem to realize that a personalized plan leads to customized instruction and feedback. Emma explains, “We spend our time trying to provide feedback that is relevant and personal to each student and assignment” (personal interview, April 26, 2023), and this does not require that the group of students are at the same place in the pacing plan.

The Tone of Written Material

Many well-documented strategies for establishing social presence were evident among the eight participants. In fact, of the seven types of communication determined by Rourke & Anderson (2002) that contribute the most to social presence, six were quite prevalent (see Table 3). The seventh was salutations, which may have been overlooked simply due to the interview process. The participants did not specifically mention using salutations; however, it may be assumed they used them in conjunction with other social presence strategies. They were not part of the data, though. Regardless of the strategy used, there was a consistent concern regarding tone. The participants’ awareness of tone both enhanced and hindered specific strategies such as humor and emotion.

Table 3

Strategies to Promote Social Presence

	Showing appreciation	Using compliments	Expressing emotion	Using the reply feature (discussions)	Showing humor	Addressing others by name
Alice	X	X	X	X	X	X

Beth		X	X	X	X	X
Catherine		X	X	X		
Daisy		X	X	X	X	X
Emma	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fiona	X	X	X	X	X	
Gwen		X	X	X	X	
Holly	X	X	X	X	X	

Note: This table includes six of the seven types of communication determined by Rourke & Anderson (2002) that contribute the most to social presence. Indicated are whether the participants discussed using each strategy.

While seven participants attempt some humor through communication with students, they are careful about their tone. “I have to be so careful because it comes across differently in text as it does if you're in person, and so there's no tone” (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023). In person, she is able to adjust the sound of her voice but also she can include facial reactions as well. Two participants mentioned that they tend to be sarcastic in person and are particularly careful to keep that in check online. One participant generally avoids humor altogether because she never knows how it will be perceived. Two participants specifically mentioned using emojis to support a message of humor. For example, Daisy states, “You don't know how they're gonna take it. So I'll put like an emoticon with a laugh. Laughing emoji or something” (personal interview, April 17, 2023).

Humor was not the only strategy that was a concern regarding tone. All participants mentioned keeping various emotions guarded, such as frustration and worry, constantly reflecting on how the message would be received.

I think that I tried to be really careful in the beginning, but I am a real person, so I'm allowed to say I'm worried. And it's important to allow students to know I'm worried, so I do that as well. In the beginning, if a student doesn't submit work for one or two days, I will try to write right away and say, I don't want you to struggle. So those emotional words to me have become more and more important. (Alice, personal interview, April 4, 2023).

Other participants echoed Alice's sentiment that as real people who want their students to know they are there, they allow emotions beyond happiness to show. Still, several others remained more reserved to avoid being misunderstood due to the misunderstanding of tone. Daisy admitted, "I do sometimes get a little aggravated with them, but I try to be real careful that I don't let that come through" (personal interview, April 17, 2023). The most common emotion that the participants allowed was happiness, which was freely shared, but even with joy, how the message is received is always to be considered.

Building Relationships

When asked about any challenges the participants faced in the online teaching environment, all mentioned the challenge of building personal relationships with students. This was particularly evident at the beginning of the participants' online teaching careers. Five participants said they still struggle to develop satisfying personal relationships with their students. In comparison, three participants feel they can achieve the same level of connection, if not more, than in the face-to-face classroom. In Fiona's case, she feels she can more consistently build relationships with all students. She points out that she dedicates time to each student online, whereas, in the face-to-face classroom, some students do not always need her help, so she interacts less with those students and consequently feels she has less of a bond (personal

interview, April 26, 2023). Beth believes she gets to know her online students better because she is free of many discipline issues in many face-to-face classrooms (personal interview, April 12, 2023). She says that without the distractions of the physical learning environment, she is able to focus on each student individually in turn.

Between the flexibility that allows the participants to provide consistent and individual feedback on each assignment and the lack of face-to-face classroom distractions, the participants explain that personal relationships can be built by carefully using various social presence strategies. Building a personal relationship was important to Fiona and Daisy, both of whom had issues with some cheating using artificial intelligence. Fiona cited her efforts in communicating with the students, ensuring they knew a live person was interacting with them. “We can discuss things together, and the relationship took a completely different path (Fiona, personal interview, April 26, 2023). Daisy suggested that many online students feel isolated and crave interaction (focus group interview, May 16, 2023). Across the board, all participants reiterated that the students must do their part in reading the personal messages the teachers leave for them, whether it is feedback, email, or announcements.

Students Reading Online Messages

An important potential complication with the online classroom is that there is considerably greater reliance on students taking the time to read, understand, and interact with the course materials and the written communication from the instructors. The participants in this study mentioned concerns about how much the students were truly engaging in the feedback, discussion posts, and other forms of communication. Daisy points out, “There's the communication gap because it's harder to communicate with them when almost all your communication is written, and they don't get it” (personal interview, April 17, 2023). Each

participant mentioned supplemental materials they offer students, either as a whole class or individually based on need. Seven of the participants mentioned that they are not convinced that students are consistently using the materials, though, and most times, they are unable to track participation, such as how many times an article was read or a video was watched. Emma discussed conversations she would have with students who were struggling. She would suggest that the student review the materials posted and allow the assignment to be resubmitted, and the student's grade would improve every time (personal interview, April 26, 2023). Six other participants echoed this sentiment, explaining the importance of two-way communication to build and maintain the necessary relationships. When students had a back-and-forth series of messages with the instructor, something akin to a live conversation, their efforts often shifted for the better.

While participants explained that they rarely receive feedback from students outside of end-of-course surveys, meaning there is little in the way of a feedback loop, they can often tell when students are not reading instructions, announcements, or feedback. "I tell them, you need to read my feedback. I'm trying to tell you how to do better. If you don't read that, then you're going to make the same mistakes over and over and over" (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023). Often, the participants explained that additional communication, private to the student through methods that the students understand best, helps them to reach students to better establish the necessary relationships. With the variety of modes of communication, each participant searches for the best method for the student, the class, and themselves, striving to make the necessary connections entirely. In some cases, participants use images to catch a student's attention.

Utilizing Paralanguage

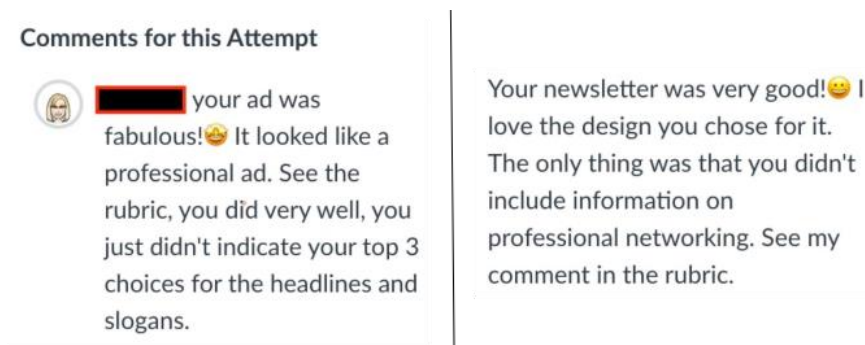
Paralinguistic cues, such as emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis, were specifically studied to determine their use by participants in the high school online classroom, addressing the third research question. Paralanguage is a more specific approach to establishing and maintaining a social presence, typically coupled with other strategies such as personal language, emotions, and humor. Paralinguistic cues were used by all the participants in this study somewhat widely, especially the Bitmoji, followed by the emoji. Emoticons were mentioned only once, and it was quickly paired with the emoji. One participant mentioned using GIFs. All eight participants mentioned using the Bitmoji, and six of the eight discussed using the emoji. The two participants who explained that they do not use the emoji much or at all clarified that they avoid it due to its informal nature.

Emoji

Emojis are cartoon-like pictographs that require software support to enable a code to generate an image such as a smiling face, heart, types of food, and many more (Tang & Hew, 2019). Six of the eight participants discussed using an emoji in certain situations to support or soften a message, especially in feedback. This is especially true with messages that contain humor (support) or constructive feedback (soften) because the participants believe these are two areas that are often misinterpreted without the benefit of an audible tone (see Figure 6). In the face-to-face classroom, teachers rely on their facial expressions or tone of voice, which is often absent in the online classroom. “People don't read things in the same voice that you write them” (Daisy, personal interview, April 17, 2023). Gwen uses the smiley face emoji because it’s “a way to see that what I'm saying has a smile behind it” (personal interview, May 10, 2023).

Figure 6

Examples of Emoji with Constructive Feedback



Daisy specifically pointed out that when using humor, students may not know how to take it, so she likes to add a laughing emoji to reinforce that her comment is intended to be taken lightly or be interpreted as humorous (personal interview, April 17, 2023).

In addition to humor, four participants noted they sometimes use the smiley face or even the thumbs-up emoji to remind students they aren't in trouble when they are being corrected or offered constructive feedback.

If I feel like I'm telling them something that they could correct, but I also wanted to let them know you're not in trouble, you did a great job, that kind of thing, so I don't want them to think of it as a negative, I'll always include an emoji (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023).

Other common emojis, aside from the smiley face and thumbs up, were the sad face, typically when parts of an assignment were incomplete, and the confetti and horn of celebration for a job well done. Each emoji used tended to be a very simple one and not typically open to various interpretations.

Alice described a different way that she uses emojis outside of feedback. She learned from another OAS teacher to use emojis within her class documents, to help a message make more visual sense, such as the caution emoji to remind students to slow down with their work because they were making mistakes. She also uses the number emojis when giving step-by-step directions. “I try to visually create a much more appealing explanation with the use of the emojis” (Alice, personal interview, April 4, 2023).

Outside of supporting the message conveyed, four participants stated that they use emojis for two additional reasons. The first of which is that there is a possibility that the students are more likely to read the message, whether it’s feedback or otherwise; perhaps the images will catch their eye more than just words will. When asked why she uses emojis, Alice responded, “I think they're just more catchy for students” (personal interview, April 4, 2023). Emojis, unlike emoticons created with keystrokes, are brightly colored. Additionally, three participants mentioned that they like using emojis because they, personally, are accustomed to them. They use them in personal communications with friends and family, or as Fiona says, “I guess I'm used to using them” (personal interview, April 26, 2023). So it’s natural to include them in messages with students as well. Fiona also cautions that while emojis can help students decipher messages, they should never *replace* the message.

Two participants stated they do not use emojis much or at all due to the need or requirement to establish a more formal tone in writing. Both participants explained the importance of setting a positive example for their students. Emma feels her subject is a serious one, and emojis are too informal to be added to regular communication with her students. Beth tends to have a lot of writing as part of her curriculum, so her feedback also takes a more formal tone. A second concern was the issue of cross-platform compatibility. Gwen, who frequently

uses emojis in her personal communication with friends and family, and even with her face-to-face students, often avoids them with her OAS students due to cross-platform compatibility, or lack thereof. In her face-to-face classroom, she is confident that the image will look as it should since all her students use Chromebooks. She has had issues where her emoji on her computer simply showed up as a black dot on a student's computer, which can be misinterpreted in several ways.

Bitmoji and Bitmoji Classroom

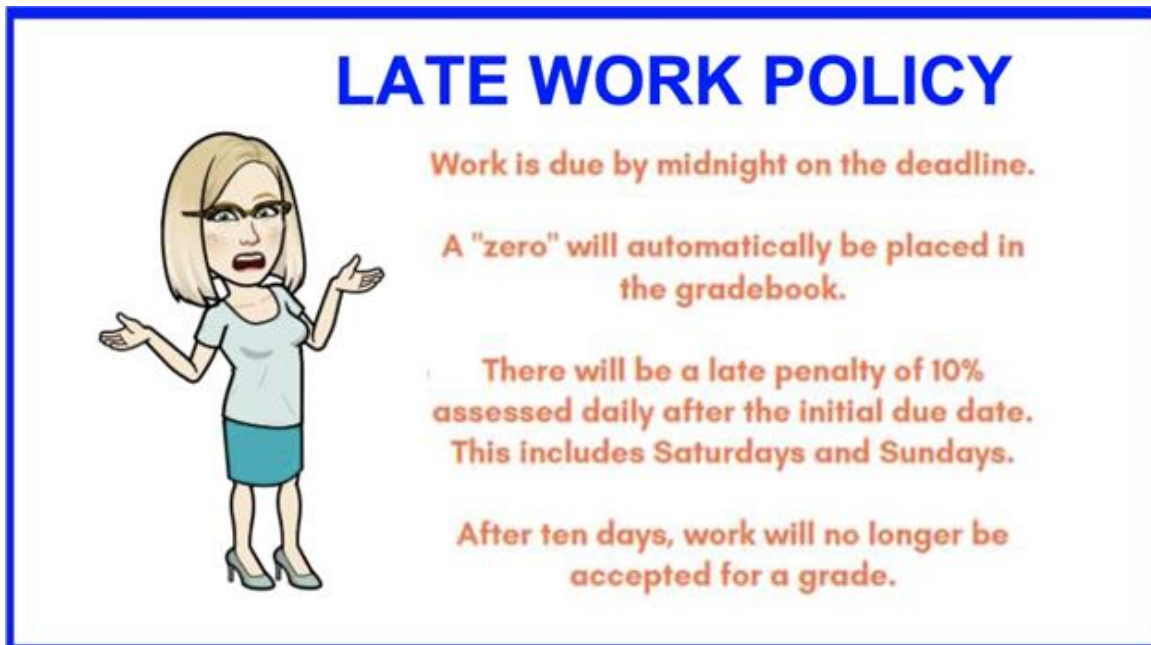
The Bitmoji - a cartoon version or avatar of the user - was the paralinguistic cue of choice with the participants in this study. All eight mentioned using their Bitmoji in some way. Three participants have used them in specific Bitmoji Classrooms with a background scene. Still, mostly the participants stated that they use Bitmoji mainly as a representation of their person, as a replacement for their physical presence. Three participants mentioned that they appreciate how much their Bitmoji looks like them. In fact, Catherine added that she likes to include her Bitmoji on supplemental materials that she creates for students so that it has a more personal touch.

It's a way to let them know, this is from me, I made this for you. I'm putting this here for you, and this is personalized. It's not something I just went and got and threw here, you know, copied and pasted. This is something I put together for you. And this is me being present, I guess (Catherine, personal interview, April 13, 2023).

Using the Bitmoji to add a personal touch (see Figure 7) was mentioned by Daisy, "I try to use them some because I just feel like it gives a little more personal touch" (personal interview, April 17, 2023), and Gwen, "I feel like, you know, it's a little more personal than if I just had no Bitmoji and just the information" (personal interview, May 10, 2023).

Figure 7

Example of Bitmoji with General Information



The more participants used the Bitmojis, the more they felt they, as a person, were familiar to the students. Four participants enjoyed changing their Bitmoji with the season or for holidays, sometimes trying new outfits or hair colors. Regardless of those changes, the participants believed the “person” in the Bitmoji was always familiar to the student, much like a classroom teacher is familiar to her class. For example, even in a Halloween costume, Gwen points out that it’s always the same person in the cartoon image. “I think that they are very familiar with that character. So I appreciate that it doesn't change” (personal interview, May 10, 2023). The participants enjoyed expressing their different sides through a Bitmoji, which is sometimes more challenging to accomplish in the online classroom.

With the use of Bitmoji in various places throughout the online classroom, students become increasingly familiar with the image. Five participants mentioned using the Bitmoji in

their slides for Live Learning sessions, which are recorded and then posted for students to view as supplemental materials (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Example of Bitmoji in Live Learning Session



Bitmojis appear in announcements that are sent out to the whole class (see Figure 9), on bulletin boards (see Figure 10), and as a part of page banners (see Figure 11) within the learning management system used by OAS. Introductions are an essential facet of each online class at OAS, and the participants frequently put together creative presentations as a part of their own introduction to the course (see Figure 12) and will include their Bitmoji as well. The Bitmoji also sometimes accompanies a teacher's name at the end of an email sent to the student and their parent or in the initial discussion post at the beginning of the course.

Figure 9

Example of Bitmoji in Announcement



Figure 10

Example of Bitmoji on Bulletin Board



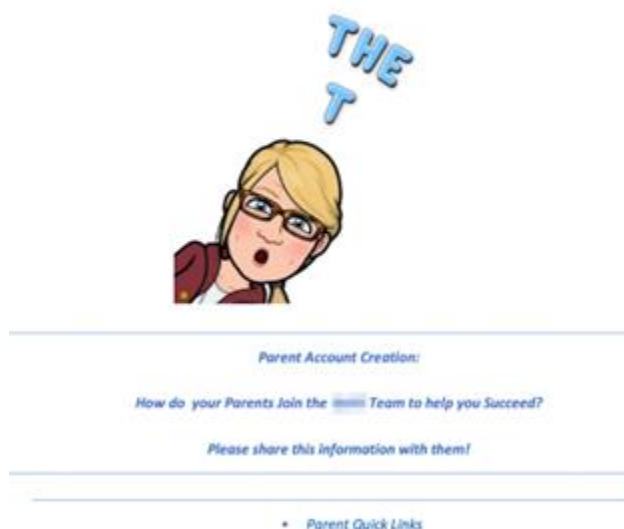
Figure 11

Example of Bitmoji on Page Banner



Figure 12

Example of Bitmoji in Introductory Presentation



While the participants acknowledged the familiarity, it was clear that Bitmojis are fun for the participants, also. Six participants mentioned they like using Bitmojis because they're amusing, colorful, and eye-catching. Emma said that they seem to have their own energy. Although three participants mentioned that they started using Bitmoji because everyone seemed to be using them, especially during the pandemic, they experienced more satisfaction in using Bitmoji than they thought they might. "I love the Bitmojis because you can make everything so creative. And that's fun for me" (Beth, personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Beyond the single Bitmoji, three participants mentioned they use them within scenes called Bitmoji Classrooms (see Figure 13). Sometimes, participants use stand-alone slides within their learning management system, such as a bulletin board. Still, others use them as a part of their presentations during live learning sessions.

Figure 13

Example of Bitmoji Classroom



In addition, one participant explained that she uses Friendmojis, which are Bitmojis in the same avatar image as other people or Bitmojis (see Figure 14). She and two other teachers frequently hold their live learning sessions together and prefer to include all three teachers on nearly every slide, “It kind of shows a unified front with the three of us teachers” (Gwen, personal interview, May 10, 2023). When not using a Friendmoji, they would include each of their Bitmojis posed in the same way (see Figure 15).

Figure 14

Example of Friendmoji in Presentation

**Figure 15**

Example of Multiple Bitmojis



During the focus group interview, a concern was briefly discussed regarding inappropriate emojis or Bitmojis. The participants mentioned that they tend to stick with simple

emojis that are easily understood, such as the smiley face and the thumbs up. They use a much wider variety of Bitmojis since most are typically not suggestive or inappropriate, although some certainly are. For example, Gwen described a Bitmoji she wanted to use in a spring break announcement, but the image was holding an alcoholic drink, so she replaced it with a can of Coca-Cola (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Example of Edited Bitmoji



Note: This Bitmoji originally held an alcoholic drink, but a can of Coca-Cola was added to hide the original.

Other Paralanguage

All the participants talked of including photos of themselves or other subjects personal to them, such as pets or their family, as part of an introduction and throughout the semester. Beth shared pictures of herself when she participated in professional development activities that were directly related to her curriculum. Fiona enjoyed sharing images of exotic foods she would eat

when she traveled in Europe, “I’m trying to show them that I am a real person and I am doing stuff” (Fiona, personal interview, April 16, 2023). Photos are not limited to only introductory posts; sometimes, they are used throughout the course as they fit the topics.

One participant mentioned that she enjoyed using GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) - essentially moving images - or memes - images intended to convey humor - with her Bitmoji. She felt that the use of these alternative images was a way that she could express humor to her students (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Example of Meme Used for Humor



Two participants, while they used Bitmoji and even emoji, tended to rely on video or audio to help with message meaning and also for ease of the content they teach. These are outside the scope of this study.

Summary

The participants in this study share one motivation for teaching online: the flexibility to do the job as they believe it should be done, with attention to the individual student without the distractions of the public school classroom. They share the need to be a real person with their

students and achieve that in various ways, from timely and personal feedback to using well-documented strategies to establish and maintain a social presence. This is not without challenges. The online learners in the environment of the Online Academy of the South are younger than at the university level and so require more attention regarding how to learn online, how the learning management system works, and other executive functions that the participants feel will serve them well beyond their online learning time.

Building relationships with the students was discussed throughout each interview. It was mentioned as a stark difference from face-to-face because using only computer-mediated communication sometimes impeded authentic relationships. Building relationships was a goal, though, and most participants felt it was met through their efforts of creating and sending personal messages and creating personalized communications for the students. Participants pointed out the reliance on students reading and interacting with the written messages and considered using various strategies to help garner the students' attention.

The use of the emoji and especially Bitmoji, served to be a colorful, energy-filled, personalized way to attract the eye and be a familiar image to students throughout the course. Participants appreciated the familiarity and, frankly, the fun of the Bitmoji. They represented the teacher well, from how the Bitmoji was designed to look like the teacher to the need to be friendly and welcome all learners to the classroom, even online. Participants used Bitmojis partly because they are eye-catching and also because they enable a level of personalization for materials from presentations to helpful hints.

This study was designed to understand the importance of teacher social presence in the 100% online high school classroom. Eight participants at the Online Academy of the South discussed strategies they use, addressing each research question. First, the importance of

establishing themselves as real people and strategies used through feedback, discussion boards, and other personal communication was discussed. Next, challenges that arise from teaching entirely online and using only computer-mediated communication were presented. These centered on five areas, including teaching how to learn online, individual student pacing plans, tone of written material, building relationships, and students actively engaging in written content. Finally, how participants used paralinguistic cues was outlined, focusing on emojis and Bitmoji. In the following chapter, the implications of these findings will be discussed.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

This study investigated the importance of teacher social presence in a 100% online classroom at the high school level. To create an ideal learning environment online, research has proposed that instructors adopt the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 2000). Social presence is one-third of the Community of Inquiry, along with cognitive presence and teaching presence. While frequently studied at the university level, primarily focusing on how *students* establish a social presence, this study focused on why and how the *teacher* establishes a social presence. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of paralinguistic cues in computer-mediated communication, the main form of correspondence in online learning. The findings support previous research-related strategies relating to social presence, including using emojis. Of particular note is the emergence of Bitmojis as a favorite strategy for presenting oneself as a real person. Previous literature on establishing a social presence generally did not include using Bitmojis specifically. While the use of paralinguistics is important, past studies focused primarily on emojis and emoticons (Derks et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2016; Tang & Hew, 2019; Zhou et al., 2017). This study highlights the increased use of Bitmoji and its ease of use in helping to establish and maintain a social presence.

This chapter begins with an overview of the study, followed by a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the literature reviewed. Implications for practice and teacher education are outlined, followed by the limitations of this study. Finally, recommendations for further research are presented.

Study Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand teachers' perceptions and practices of social presence in a 100% online learning environment in a virtual high school

setting, with a specific emphasis on paralinguistic cues and symbols, such as emojis, emoticons, and Bitmoji. In chapter four, three themes emerged: being a real person, overcoming challenges online, and utilizing paralanguage, which address the following research questions:

RQ1: Why do teachers establish a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ2: According to teachers, how does their use of computer-mediated communication affect establishing a social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

RQ3: How does teacher use of emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis contribute to the social presence in a 100% online environment in a high school setting?

Through interviews, a focus group, and document samples, eight participants discussed their practices in their online classrooms. Being a case study, the single bounded system is the Academy of the South, an independent and 100% online school, serving primarily students in grades 9-12.

Discussion of Findings

It is impossible not to compare face-to-face teaching with online instruction, particularly if the educator is a veteran of both environments and even more so if they teach both face-to-face and online during the same semester. All eight participants in this study have experience in both environments; currently, three teach only online, and five teach online and face-to-face. One opinion all the participants have in common is their motivations for teaching online. Each mentioned the flexibility of working when and where they can or want, whether in another country or just in the evenings on the back porch. The flexibility of working online, coupled with the absence of typical distractions found in the face-to-face classroom, has allowed teachers to

get back to the business of teaching, including creating content, providing targeted feedback, and building relationships with students in their online classroom.

All three research questions are addressed in the following sections in order. Why teachers establish a social presence is followed by how the use of computer-mediated communication affects establishing a social presence. Finally, how the teachers' use of paralinguistic cues contributes to social presence is discussed. Bitmojis are the star of this section, as the previous research has left them behind, but this study shows they need to be brought into the spotlight.

The Importance of Being a Real Person

Teaching entirely online is unique in that it is entirely possible, and quite probable, for teachers and students to never meet in person. While teachers will utilize video or audio to add a human element to their course, it is abundantly important for them to be the real person who is reading and interacting with the students; this goes well beyond reliance on audio or video. Particularly in this day and age of increased artificial intelligence, the study participants repeatedly pointed out that it is imperative to establish themselves as real people for their students. From personalized feedback to making personal connections, the participants in this study found ways to remind students they are not alone, and like a face-to-face classroom, the teacher is there to help them every step of the way.

All strategies that the participants discussed are supported by previous studies; for example, they used strategies that were research-based by Rourke and Anderson in 2000 and also by Tang and Hew in 2020, including addressing their students by name, using compliments, replying to discussion threads, showing some emotion, and using humor. These studies were conducted at the university level, while this present study specifically considered high school

teachers, changing the audience from adult learners to adolescents. As Barbour (2021) points out, the university level tends to include students for whom social presence may be less important. Indeed, the participants certainly utilized the strategies outlined in the previous studies, but they also referred to the discussion boards used in each unit, the need to form relationships and connections, the practice of providing specific and timely feedback, and their communication through a variety of means, even including content not necessarily part of the course, all supporting the previous study conducted by DiPietro et al. (2008) which was conducted at the secondary level.

Feedback emerged as an area where each participant felt they could be personal on a one-to-one basis with each student, bringing feedback into the social presence bubble rather than singularly in the teaching presence bubble of the Community of Inquiry framework. This included comments and annotations on assignments turned in, as well as questions through email, messages within the LMS, or Google Voice text. Participants made a point to mention that they try to grade and respond to messages relating to schoolwork as quickly as they can because the students are working at that time. With an individualized pacing plan at OAS, students are frequently in various places in the course curriculum. Teachers provide students materials but are often asked for extra help. In a physical classroom, teachers are immediately available, so online, the study participants try to do the same, within reason. Basically, their standard is to respond immediately if they can and if it is reasonable to do so. This mimics, in a way, their physical classroom in the unique time constraints of online learning. This also established immediacy, one of two concepts that make up social presence (Gunawardena, 1995). When they can respond in real-time, they do, thus enhancing social presence by shortening the psychological distance between them and their students.

Participants discussed using personal names within the feedback to help the students remember that the teacher is personally reading what they are turning in. Matteson (2020) conducted a study that showed a positive response from students when personal communication was specific and encouraging. This study supports these findings. Matteson (2020) included in the study how feedback can be clarified to keep it free from ambiguity. The participants in this study echoed this practice, which was cited as a common reason that they often avoid humor and even some emotions. Using humor and showing emotions may need the support of body language or facial features to understand, considering the possible absence of tone in written communication. Participants in this study did not feel like they had *carte blanche* to show their emotions all the time, which is the case even in a physical classroom. Emotions were kept happy and celebratory; even frustration was often coupled with a smiley face emoji. Incorporating the emoji to soften or support the message is supported by the media richness theory of Daft and Lengel (1986), which suggests that the more cues are provided with a message, the more likely the receiver will understand. Not all the participants used emojis, though, because they wanted to keep their messages more formal, and emojis in educational writing felt too informal for two participants in particular. Without the added visual cue, these participants were even more guarded than the others, taking care with their words in feedback to keep the tone positive and helpful.

Discussion threads are another strategy that emerged from previous research by DiPietro et al. (2008). Each participant in this study mentioned using them, although it was also pointed out that they are required by the school for each unit of study. Not all study participants enjoyed the discussion threads, but they all participated in them, per school requirements, which helped them establish their social presence with students at the very beginning of the course (Wendt &

Courduff, 2018). This, too, allowed each participant to establish immediacy, reducing the perceived distance between the learner and the instructor. As the teachers engaged with the students in discussion threads, they were more likely to be perceived as being available when needed by the student (Mitchell et al., 2021; Richardson & Swan, 2003). Each participant clarified that they intended for students to know they were always available, as discussed earlier; establishing this expectation in discussion threads is common. While modeling in a discussion thread may point to teaching presence rather than social presence (Anderson et al., 2001), more than half the participants in this study intentionally provide personal information within introductions, specifically find connections with students, and even engage in conversations outside the course content. “It’s a space where you can banter with the student and make it a little lighter while encouraging them to do what they need to do” (Holly, personal interview, May 24, 2023).

Keeping teenagers engaged can be challenging even in the physical classroom, but Matteson (2020) suggested using strategies such as communication that include specific and personalized support. The participants in this study echo this practice through their use of various communication strategies such as email, messenger, announcements, and bulletin boards through the LMS. Teachers discussed times when they felt the need to check in with students because they seemed somewhat inactive with the course content or communication. One participant even explained that she sends handwritten notes of sympathy or encouragement and schedules happy birthday emails. The more the participants paid attention to the students, ensuring they checked in with them when they either noticed or knew of a problem, the more they seemed to engage with the instructor. Fiona specifically recounted a time when she reached out to a student suspected of cheating. The teacher opened the line of communication that revealed she cared,

and the student responded positively when she otherwise might have been lost throughout the course. This specific and intentional engagement helps to set the teacher apart from any automated program written to help a teacher. Students know and can find for themselves applications that provide instant feedback, but personal messages that include names and specific information are invaluable, as it shows that a live person is there for them.

The participants in this study utilized strategies that are proven effective at the university level as well as the high school level; however, they discussed in much more depth the strategies highlighted in previous studies by DiPietro et al. (2008) and Matteson (2020), who conducted studies at the high school level. While showing emotion and humor are appropriate and positive, they do not always work best for the high school learner. All eight participants in this study discussed providing feedback, employing and participating in discussion threads, and taking time to include added personal communication, clearly highlighting social presence strategies that the teachers feel are most effective in their online classrooms.

The first research question asked in this study is why teachers establish a social presence; the short answer is to establish themselves as *real people*. Constant communication through the computer can become both isolating and impersonal. Their timely and specific feedback enables the students to realize their teacher is there to help every step of the way and not a bot providing helpful hints. Teachers use personal names but limit emotion and humor due to concerns about how the messages may be misunderstood. They do what they can to be personable and friendly without crossing lines. They participate in discussions and provide personal information about their lives. They establish themselves as real from the beginning of the course and remain consistent throughout the semester via personal communications, even when the messages fall outside the course expectations. The study participants do all this not only because their school

requires it or it is considered good pedagogy but because they can better address immediacy and intimacy; they are better perceived as real, live, with-the-students-every-step-of-the-way people. Teachers establish a social presence to ensure they come across as live, caring instructors for their online students.

The Challenges of Online Instruction

Short et al. (1976), through their Social Presence Theory, originally suggested that computer-mediated communication would not allow for true social presence and that it was far too task-oriented to include true social language. Walther (1992), sixteen years later, disagreed. He conducted studies demonstrating that social interaction could certainly be accomplished, although it often took longer than in-person conversations due to a time gap between sending and responding to messages. Knowing most or all the communication in the 100% online classroom is via computers, the participants in this study understood they faced specific challenges, but they overcame many hurdles and discussed numerous solutions, directly addressing the second research question: How does the use of computer-mediated communication affect establishing social presence?

It was clear that success starts with routines, and students need this as much online as in person. Initial strategies that orient students to communication expectations and course content emerged as important in past studies and are supported in this study (Dikkers, 2018; DiPietro et al., 2008). Teaching students how to navigate the learning management system, including when to use which tools proved an important first step for the participants in this study to help their students succeed online. Most face-to-face teachers review important information and classroom procedures at the start of the semester, and it is no different for online teachers. Providing videos or screenshots to help students understand the various components of the LMS is essential. The

study participants noticed a difference in the interaction and quality of work when students were more comfortable with the online environment. The Community of Inquiry is a three-part model, requiring teaching and social presence to work together so that cognitive presence can thrive. Through initial orientations to the platform and other executive functions required for online learning, such as time management skills, students were better able to learn content. This falls outside typical pedagogy and is often tailored to the specific course or even the student as needed. When teachers did not orient students, they discussed that students frequently missed information because they weren't reading everything or did not know where to find things, which affected their grades.

Students at the Online Academy of the South have individual pacing plans, which is not entirely uncommon in the online learning environment, particularly during a time in education when personalized learning is at the forefront of many professional development plans. Although students beginning a course at varying times may be frustrating at first, teachers at OAS find ways to use the individual pacing plans to their benefit. The teachers universally enjoy the flexibility of working where and when they want or need to, and the same extends to the students. Regardless of when students enter a course, they all can work at their own pace. Participants pointed out that this helps them to better personalize their communication with the students, particularly feedback. Specific and personal feedback is good practice, so students not being in the same place in an online course should not be a hurdle. As Beth pointed out, she is grading all different things all the time, which keeps it interesting rather than the same assignment, or even a set of answers, over and over (personal interview, April 12, 2023). In an online environment, as one finds at OAS, students work at their own pace with the guidance of the instructors. Such guidance is personalized to the assignment and the learner.

Perhaps one of the biggest barriers mentioned by the participants was the lack of tone in computer-mediated communication, causing them to be more guarded with their emotions and with humor than they might otherwise be in the regular classroom. This refers to the media richness theory, where Daft and Lengel (1986) suggested that more cues allow for a better understanding of the message. Using humor and expressing emotion are two strategies commonly cited in previous studies for establishing and maintaining a social presence (Aragon, 2003; Rourke & Anderson, 2002; Tang & Hew, 2020), but these strategies were problematic in this study due to the potential for the messages to be misunderstood. Many of the previous studies involved students at the university level rather than teenagers, and age frequently matters in certain situations (Johnson et al., 2022). While participants in this study noted that they attempted to use humor and express limited emotions, they were always careful. Sometimes using an emoji, essentially the teenager's language, could support a message of humor or frustration or even soften a message of criticism, but even these prove problematic for some teachers, as some emojis tend to be easily misunderstood and may be considered too informal for writing. As it turns out, the participants who cite an absence of humor or emotion most likely actually do use these strategies, but through their use of Bitmoji.

One important barrier to building relationships is the lack of interaction from the student, whether it is a breakdown in the feedback loop or students simply missing communication or materials. Participants cited the possibility that students simply are not reading all the course materials or the feedback they are given on assignments or in messages as they progress through the modules. This contributes to the absence of true relationships in that one cannot build relationships alone. Borup (2020) presented the idea that online students have two support communities, one online called the course community and a second called a personal

community. The instructor and classmates are part of the course community, but the student is at the center of their community, and their success depends on their engagement. Most likely, the students are not trying to avoid the teacher, but they just may not understand the importance of the relationships within the online community. Participants pointed out that they frequently remind students to read this or review that and that they are there for them. When the teachers reach out and remind students to do their part - read materials and review content - the feelings of an actual relationship grow. This starts at the beginning of the course as teachers establish the social aspect of their online classroom through greetings and sharing personal details (Aragon, 2003). Participants mentioned, though, that they need the time and flexibility to establish and foster the online community to be a friendly and welcoming environment; fortunately, time and flexibility are exactly what the participants cite as benefits of online instruction. As long as the students are appropriately engaged, relationships can be built online and in the classroom. It just might take a little extra time, as Walther (1994) suggested.

Computer-mediated communication clearly provides some hurdles for teachers who are intentionally establishing a social presence. Initial routines are as important online as they are in face-to-face classrooms; they are simply a little different in order to address the unique needs of the secondary-level online learner. As these are taught, teachers feel that students miss less and perform better as they navigate their learning online. Being online learners, their pacing plans vary from one to the next, but teachers also use this to their advantage. Because assignments to be graded vary, the participants point out that they have no real issues making sure feedback and other helpful messages are personalized. They are not bogged down with 60 of the same assignment, providing feedback on repeat. The absence of tone is one issue that participants have a hard time overcoming aside from limiting written messages that are likely to be misunderstood

and choosing video or audio if necessary. As long as students are engaged and reading their feedback and course materials, teachers find that they only need to adjust typical strategies for the online classroom. Teenagers are teenagers online or in the physical classroom, and they all need routines and encouragement to keep up with their studies. Using computer-mediated communication simply shifts the tasks from verbal to written, but the essence is the same. Online instructors continue to establish routines, provide personalized feedback and extra help, and craft messages meant to build relationships; however, they are aware of tone and adjust as needed while encouraging students to interact and engage with the written material. The use of CMC affects social presence in that teachers are abundantly aware of what they are writing, knowing it can be misinterpreted, and knowing their messages are the most important way for them to prove their realness to their students, answering the second research question about how CMC affects establishing a social presence.

Bitmoji as a Strategy to Promote Social Presence

Paralinguistic cues are a popular way to bridge the gap in computer-mediated communication (Lo, 2008). The third research question asks how the teachers' use of paralinguistics contributes to social presence. Emojis have been a common choice and growing in use as they continue to be incorporated into various online programs. In fact, one participant mentioned that adding emojis natively is a relatively new option in the LMS for feedback, while another admitted that because she did not have quick access to the emojis, she was less likely to use them. When teachers can easily add emojis to support or soften messages, they are likelier to do so. While participants discussed using emojis somewhat frequently, Bitmoji was far more popular with the study participants. In part, this is because two participants rarely used the emoji due to the informal nature of it, but they used Bitmoji. Further, it is easy for the meaning of

emojis to change with the user's culture, being either the message sender or receiver. Ge and Herring (2018) warned of this and suggested establishing a common understanding with the students beforehand for which emojis would be used and their intended meaning. Certainly, some emojis feel safe with online instructors; with hundreds of emojis available, only about five were frequently used by the study participants to feel confident with the tone of the message. These included the smiley face, rosy cheeks face, laughing face, celebration/confetti horn, and thumbs up. Clearly, the most common emojis were those that emphasized a positive message or softened redirection or criticism. This supports research by Gettinger and Koeszegi (2015), noting that such cues are typically used more frequently in positive ways.

Bitmoji, though, is universally used by all participants. Perhaps the main reason is the idea that it is representative of the human behind the screen, the teacher. Online classrooms do not allow a teacher to constantly be with the students as they learn and explore, but incorporating Bitmoji on materials and assignments enables the instructor to extend their personality and realness to what would otherwise be static pages. Participants created their Bitmoji to be themselves in their physical absence, even expressing themselves in ways they could not in real life (Sime & Themeli, 2020), and so they tended to be used a lot throughout the course. For example, Bitmojis allow users to drive school buses, ride dinosaurs, and even bask under stage lights. Based on the responses from the participants in this study, Bitmoji served to lessen the intimacy gap better than any other form of written communication since physical characteristics are the cornerstone of Bitmoji's draw. Participants appreciated that they could create their cartoon avatars to look as much like them as possible and still showcase their personalities.

Researchers suggest online instructors establish the social community from the beginning through personal details as appropriate (Garrison et al., 2001; Aragon, 2003). The participants in

this study did just that when they used their Bitmoji at the very start of the course. In fact, several mentioned that they felt that it was familiar to the students and hopefully reminded them of the real person behind the presentations, announcements, and feedback. Although only a cartoon avatar, it is at least a full human representation of themselves, from hair and clothes to personality. The more Bitmoji was added to course materials, the more the teachers expected their avatar, and themselves as an extension, to be familiar to the students, even without ever having been in the same room. Unlike the emoji or any other paralinguistic cue, Bitmoji can reflect personality. With various outfits, costumes, and even fun poses, the teachers enjoy being fun and showing a quirky side through digital means.

Bitmoji was important to the participants to provide a human side to what would otherwise appear just to be computer-generated material. In the physical classroom, a teacher might hand out and discuss assignments or talk through presentations in front of the class. Bitmoji is the literal stand-in for the online teacher, included on assignments and in presentations as much or as little as the teacher chooses. The participants discussed using Bitmoji in all areas of their online teaching. Some created full banners within the LMS and Bitmoji classrooms, while others incorporated their Bitmoji on slides, announcements, emails, and other messages. Previous studies discussed the Bitmoji Classroom craze during the pandemic (Gewertz, 2020; Van Pate, 2022). The study participants mentioned in passing having created classrooms previously but generally do not feel they have time to devote to it like they used to. One participant mentioned wanting to take a vacation just to create them; another still actively makes them. Adding just a single Bitmoji is an easy copy-paste, a strategy each participant in this study does because they enjoy it with no plans to abandon it.

Interestingly, very few of the Bitmojis seemed of concern when discussed in the focus group interview. Some Bitmojis include what appear to be alcoholic beverages, and certain outfits that can be chosen could be inappropriate for education; otherwise, suggestive Bitmojis can easily be avoided as there are currently over 1200 combinations of poses and other gestures from which to choose (Snap, 2021). Participants specifically enjoyed changing their outfits or donning costumes to match the time of year. Bitmojis can change with the person, and the online instructors in this study took full advantage of that.

Through the documents collected, Bitmoji was easily the most common paralinguistic cue utilized, followed by emojis, then memes, or GIFs. Only one participant expressed that she likes to use memes or GIFs, especially when using humor with her students. She also showed caution with these, as many memes or GIFs can be inappropriate for a number of students, but like other paralinguistic cues, many teenagers are likely to respond well to them. While the interviews asked about ways participants established social presence using paralinguistic cues, specific examples included emoticons, emojis, and Bitmoji. Only one participant mentioned images other than these (or photos). It is possible that other participants used memes or GIFs as well, but those questions were not asked due to the absence of a second interview session.

When participants use Bitmoji, they sometimes show emotion, even frustration, and certainly show humor through the various outfits and poses. Perhaps the Bitmoji can bridge the gap where the tone is missing. Participants stated being very careful with specific strategies, such as using humor and showing certain emotions, even largely avoiding them; however, the same participants talked about using Bitmoji and enjoying how well it can convey their fun side and overall personality. Obviously, it cannot be used everywhere, but perhaps it can be used more frequently to set the tone when our body language and personality are too difficult to convey

through words, particularly with a group (teenagers) that may or may not read the messages carefully or for detail.

The answer to the third research question about how teachers' use of paralinguistic cues contributes to social presence was clear. Emojis are used when our facial features may be needed to support or soften a message. Emojis are a stand-in for a smile when we are talking to students. The Bitmoji contributed the most. Bitmojis proved to be a literal stand-in for the teachers' physical being. They used them in various places with little worry about the message being inappropriate or misunderstood. Bitmojis can convey personality, emotion, and humor, helping teachers overcome the one hurdle CMC provides - tone. Even a Bitmoji wears a cape, which seems appropriate as it stands out as the super-paralinguistic cue in this study.

Implications

This research has several implications in the fields of educational research, practice, and teacher education. While this research helps inform a growing body of research, online education continues to grow as well, possibly more quickly (Barbour, 2019). Research-based strategies should be applied, which can be useful in online and face-to-face classrooms. One of the original researchers of the Community of Inquiry points out that these ideas are not exclusive to one kind of learning or another but can be of value to all types of learning, from online, face-to-face, and blended (Garrison, 2023).

Research

This study supports much of the research regarding social presence. The strategies outlined by Rourke and Anderson (2002) and Tang and Hew (2020) at the university level and DiPietro et al. (2008) and Matteson (2020) at the high school level, for example, were all utilized to some extent. There were some considerations regarding the student's age and how prepared

they may be for online learning, thus requiring extra online support. This supports Borup's research about the Academic Community of Engagement and the students' dual course and personal communities. Additionally, age may be a consideration regarding the need to be extra vigilant about tone and how messages are understood.

However, Bitmoji research is very limited, suggesting that Bitmoji might be a fad, but this study suggests otherwise. Bitmoji is a useful social presence tool that teachers can use online and in the physical classroom. The combination of the age of learners and misunderstandings related to lack of tone may create issues with messages that Bitmoji may help to clear up. Avatars such as Bitmoji are familiar to most learners, online or otherwise, but they are still personal to the user. While some social presence strategies may be problematic in computer-mediated communication, Bitmoji may bridge the communication gap. As an image, it is easily and quickly understood by most and can demonstrate a sense of humor or show emotions in an appropriate manner.

Practice

This study highlights the importance of building relationships with students through social presence on the part of the teacher, as they are the ones who typically initiate most communication. Through engaging communication, satisfying and appropriate student-teacher relationships can be formed. This study particularly highlighted using Bitmoji as an appropriate strategy to help accomplish this. While messages would be personalized to the receiver and feedback specific to the assignments, Bitmoji can also personalize presentations and course materials. Teachers should consider how their personality can be embedded in the coursework appropriately and without reducing the fidelity of the assignments. Additionally, teachers are

more likely to avoid misunderstandings by intentionally choosing their personal practices using Bitmoji or other digital strategies.

Table 4 includes an overview of practices that emerged as important to the teachers in this study. As educators continue to adapt their instructional strategies for a more digital learning environment or the fully online classroom, they will find that some strategies work best for their personality and teaching style, as well as their grade level and content area. No specific strategy is guaranteed to establish the level of social presence a teacher hopes; instructors should practice and then pay attention to the students' engagement. Finally, many of the strategies outlined in Table 4 below are useful in any learning environment, face-to-face, blended, or entirely online.

Table 4

Common practices and strategies to establish and maintain a social presence

Practice	Strategy
Feedback	<p>Provide speedy feedback so students can move on</p> <p>Offer personal (students specific) suggestions and supplemental materials</p> <p>Use student names in comments</p> <p>Use emoji to show emotion, such as happiness, pride, or celebration</p>
Discussion Boards	<p>Use for conversations that are not graded</p> <p>Use for introductions; teachers should begin with their own</p> <p>Introduce Bitmoji in the introduction</p>
Personal Communication	<p>Include photos in introductory newsletters</p> <p>Send personal emails to check in or provide well-done messages</p> <p>Offer speedy responses to questions on assignments</p>
Routines	<p>Orient students to the LMS</p> <p>Guide students on different types of communication and the</p>

	purpose of each
	Help students develop habits like routinely reading messages and course content
Emojis	Use to soften constructive feedback
	Use to reinforce happy or supportive messages
	Add to course content to make it more visually appealing
Bitmojis	Use as a personal touch to messages and course documents
	Use as an extension of personality - including humor and emotion

It should be noted that each participant mentioned that they like Bitmoji for one reason or another. Several mentioned that they were whimsical or fun and colorful; one mentioned that they have their own energy. The teachers actively enjoyed using their personal Bitmoji, even changing it with the seasons and trying out fun poses to use. Positive relationships go both ways, and if teachers find a strategy or tool that helps to keep their own morale in a good spot, perhaps they should use it. A teacher's comfort level matters as much as the students, and the Bitmoji was a happy, positive tool that the teachers used. The energy from it can project into many written messages, both as a visual cue and even helping to provide a more positive tone to the words used. :)

Teacher Education

An important facet of teacher preparation should include the importance of the relationship with the students; teachers do far more than just teach. Although participants in this study pointed out that one of the benefits of teaching online was the ability to teach rather than have to deal with a plethora of distractions that are often present in the physical classroom, they understood that part of that was *being there* for the students in a support role as well. The more

human the teacher can be with the students, the better they feel about their course, and research suggests that the students are then more likely to engage in the materials. The participants even pointed out changing attitudes once their students realized a real teacher was paying attention. This study supports strategies promoting social presence that echo former research, especially using Bitmoji.

Artificial intelligence is growing, including within many educational platforms. Students are using it to write assignments, but teachers are also using the tool to write lesson plans, assessments, and even draft emails to parents. While AI is a tool that should be harnessed, it does not replace a human, and the participants in this study pointed that out multiple times. Teachers can and should understand how AI may impact the classroom at all levels, and then understand how their personal attention to students and their educational journey cannot be replaced. Computer-mediated communication can and should have a social aspect about it, and teachers need to learn to maintain their personal touch.

Teacher education often includes a mentor program, and this study suggests that mentors should demonstrate their practices as they relate to building relationships with students and how they can accomplish that through computer-mediated communication. Mentor teachers with excellent feedback practices, strong communication skills, and effective use of Bitmoji can be examples to new teachers. This is more important than ever with the rise of artificial intelligence; students need to know their teachers are real and there for them as part of their support team. Utilizing the practices that emerged in this study, summarized in Table 4 above, allows the teacher to humanize themselves, even in 100% online environments.

This study punctuates the need to create the most rounded and accessible learning experience for all students, and the elements of the Community of Inquiry proved important. The

study participants discussed their human side, which can often be overlooked when they are also considered pedagogy and content specialists. Knowing how and what to teach is important but should also include the social presence bubble of CoI. Engagement with the students can directly support teaching content, as was discussed by participants in this study. From helping students navigate the online environment to checking in when there was little interaction, the participants demonstrated that effective teaching must include building effective relationships, and teacher preparation programs should include this. One only needs to read beginning-of-the-year teacher Twitter threads to know the importance of building relationships.

Limitations

There are always limitations in research, but they also present opportunities for future work. This research has several limitations. The first was having enough participants that fit the specific criteria and were willing to complete the survey to participate. The site selected has more than enough teachers available to complete the survey and, in turn, determine the participants, even allowing some discrimination regarding participant choice; however, only nine completed the survey. Further, due to the low number of participants who completed the initial survey, a focus group of separate participants with potentially differing viewpoints was not possible. Also, the specific demographics of the participants - how many years of experience and subjects taught - were not especially varied based on the very specific site (only one online school) of research, and gender and race were the same among all the participants. Fortunately, participant demographics are irrelevant in this study but are provided for the use of outside comparisons if they become significant.

There was a concern that the inability to choose specific participants would lead to another limitation of fewer teachers who widely use paralinguage and other social presence

strategies. This did not occur, and it is the opinion of the researcher that only instructors who felt they fit the research expectations filled out the survey. Conducting a focus group of teachers who do not use paralanguage would be beneficial as an alternate perspective, providing a balanced analysis.

The second limitation was associated with the researcher's worldview and opinions related to the perceived engagement of students. It is not the opinion of the researcher being collected or presented but rather those of the participants. There were times when a participant described an experience the researcher may not have agreed with or felt was misperceived. It cannot be determined if they are wrong or right, for the participants presented their reality as they established a social presence as they perceived it. The researcher could record thoughts throughout the process through reflexive memoing, ensuring that any opinions were kept separate from the participant data.

Finally, this study was limited based on the pure fact that it was conducted by a novice researcher. The analysis of this research could have been far more recursive than it was, in particular. Transcripts were reviewed during the data collection phase, and subsequent interviews were adjusted slightly; however, little actual analysis was completed during the interview phase. This could have adjusted the interviews more. More importantly, a second round of interviews would have been ideal once coding using Atlas.ti was completed, and a codebook was created. Due to the schedules of the participants and the researcher, this did not occur. Second-round interviews would have been able to confirm results and potentially add to them, making some of the findings more consistent across the board. It is possible that more participants would agree on some of the topics if asked more specific questions.

Recommendations for Further Research

A natural outcome of scholarly research is recommendations based on the study findings. In this section, recommendations for further research, building on this study's findings, are presented, spanning ideas from elementary through high school, including all content areas and a diverse participant pool.

This study focused on the teachers' perceptions of social presence, considering what they do and why. While participants in this study primarily cited their reasons for their specific practices as for the benefit of the students, the question remains whether the students actually benefit. There are numerous studies centered on the benefits of specific social presence practices for students, especially at the university and high school levels. Bitmoji, though, remains understudied. One clear idea that emerged from this study is that Bitmoji is used most consistently by all the participants, largely because they feel that it adds a human presence to the 100% online course. A future study would be beneficial to determine students' perceptions of Bitmoji. Does it accomplish what the teachers believe it does, or is it just cute? Studies of students in all high school grade levels, both in person and online, through carefully constructed questionnaires or interviews, could shed light, supporting the continued use of Bitmoji.

Additional research should also include a more diverse group of participants. The pool of participants for this study was very limited, resulting in a group of Caucasian women with no fewer than 13 years of experience. Considering the perspectives of teacher rationale and practices that includes newer teachers as well as varied gender and ethnic backgrounds may provide a more complete overview of effective strategies. Previous studies (Bai et al., 2019; Dunlap et al., 2015; Tossell et al., 2012) suggest that women use emojis more frequently than men, and it is uncertain whether this could carry through to the use of Bitmoji. Similarly, various

cultures may understand emojis differently from others (Ge & Herring, 2018), and this, too, may be an issue transferred to the use of Bitmoji.

Understanding social presence online is widely studied at the university level, and is growing at the secondary level, but students of all ages are turning to online learning. More studies should be conducted from both the teacher and the student perspective at all the levels including elementary school. These studies should include paralinguistic cues as images are an important part of language learning in the early years. Research that includes both language development as well as social presence, and how the two combine to accomplish multiple tasks could be conducted. Future researchers could explore how a Bitmoji might play a part in storytelling both at the elementary level or in English support classes.

Specific research can be conducted that focuses on content areas individually at both middle and high school levels, particularly if the participant pool includes a diverse range of educators. Further, is paralanguage used more in certain subjects over others? Two participants in this study pointed out that they tend to avoid using the emoji because they felt it was too informal for their content area; this can be further explored. General or specific research questions can be generated that consider content, level, and other external variables including social media use by either the instructor, student, or both. The possibilities are endless and would continue to inform best practices to establish and maintain social presence via computer-mediate communication.

Conclusion

Teaching is much more than being a content specialist; teachers are trained in pedagogy and learn the best tools to match their curriculum, students, and lesson of the day. This is not enough, though, and teachers must also nurture and engage on a personal level. High school

students are not adults, and they continue to require guidance rather than assumptions that they can figure out what they need, where to find it, and how to engage with it. Certainly, some teenagers are quite self-sufficient, but many tend not to be, and teachers establish a social presence to let the students know they are part of their support team. Online instructors must be very intentional and careful in establishing and maintaining a proper and effective social presence without being physically present.

This study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions of social presence practices in a 100% online learning environment. Specifically, this study focused on teachers of grades 9-12 and their practices that explicitly utilize paralinguistic cues, including emojis and Bitmojis. Along with cognitive presence and teaching presence, teachers who establish and maintain a social presence are more likely to build a community of learners for and with their students (Garrison, 2017). Through in-depth interviews, a focus group interview, and collected documents, the data was clear that building relationships with students is just as viable online as it is in the face-to-face classroom.

This study highlighted several strategies in particular, including providing timely, specific, and personal feedback, utilizing discussion threads outside graded assignments, and communicating with students in various ways to check in and respond to questions. These strategies support prior studies, including using humor and showing emotion. Humor and emotion were problematic to the participants in this study as there was concern that the messages may be misunderstood. Computer-mediated communication was a factor in the online classroom, and tone was of major concern. Participants used the emoji in messages that they felt would normally be accompanied by a smile, for example. They also used other emojis to emphasize positive messages and soften critical ones. Bitmojis emerged as the winner of favorite strategies

to showcase the teacher's human side. With the growth of artificial intelligence, study participants expressly used the cartoon avatar that represented themselves. This helped humanize them in discussion posts, emails, and even course documents. The strategies that demonstrated to students that there was a live person on the other side of the computer working to help and guide them in the content were the most popular in this study. Bitmojis became the literal stand-in for the teachers' physical selves.

Once they understand the importance of establishing a social presence along with cognitive and teaching presence, online educators can learn the best strategies that fit their style and that they feel best reach their students. Teachers, when they pay attention to their students, can often determine when a strategy is working or if it should take a back seat to a new tool. This is no different for online instructors who must do so entirely through computer-mediated means. This study shows that it can be done effectively and with much satisfaction.

Students learn in ways that work best for them. If that means they need to work on a self-paced plan online, there are instructors who are trained to help them. Students are not asking to be taught by artificial intelligence but by a human who understands the content and has a tool belt full of strategies to impart their knowledge. Teachers also have strategies that help them remain human throughout, ensuring the students understand they are there, paying attention, and caring. These strategies may vary from teacher to teacher and in various environments, but the fact remains: teachers place importance on building relationships with students, and social presence strategies, especially the Bitmoji, help.

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Appendix A

Cue the Paralinguistics - Participant Selection (via Google Forms)

Title of Research Study: Cue the Paralinguistics: A Qualitative Case Study of Teacher Social Presence

Researcher's Contact Information: Molly Bowden | 404-354-0526 |
mbowde10@students.kennesaw.edu

You are being asked to take part in a research study participant selection survey. The information in this form will help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please contact the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Description of the Project

I am conducting this research to understand the importance of teachers establishing and maintaining a social presence in a 100% online learning environment. I want to learn through which strategies teachers establish social presence through digital means, with a specific emphasis on paralinguistic cues such as emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis.

Explanation of the Procedures

Participants will be selected based on responses collected from this participant survey. There are important definitions followed by three 5-point scale questions. Finally, there is a section for each participant to add any additional information as well as contact information to be used if selected to take part in this study.

If you are invited to participate in this study:

I will collect information through in-depth semi-structured interviews about your experiences with social presence in the online learning environment. The interview will take approximately 45-50 minutes.

I will ask for two to three digital documents that include examples of social presence with students. No documents will be collected that include any student identifying information.

Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your professional career.

Duration: This survey should take no longer than 5-10 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks or anticipated discomforts in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for you to take part in this study. I hope to use the information collected in this research to better understand the importance of social presence in the online learning environment, including strategies to establish and maintain the teacher's social presence, with a specific emphasis on using emoticons, emojis, and Bitmojis.

Compensation

There is no compensation offered in this study.

Confidentiality

I will take steps to protect your privacy, but there is a small risk that your information could be accidentally disclosed to people not connected to the research. To reduce this risk, I will give each participant a unique number code and pseudonym and remove any identifying information from the analysis.

The information collected will not be used or distributed for future research.

Consent

This survey is completely voluntary. You will be able to withdraw at any time during the study. Any identifying information will be kept strictly confidential and be used only by the principal researcher to develop participant groups, at which point all participants will be given a unique number code and pseudonym.

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, irb@kennesaw.edu.

Any participant may contact the researcher's advisor, Dr. Julie Moore, at any time with questions or concerns at 470-578-4362.

By clicking YES below, you are consenting to take part in the selection process of this study and acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older.

Thank you for your time!

- I agree to participate in the selection process for this study.
 - Yes

- No

Participant Selection Survey

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this research study. The study focuses on the framework of Community of Inquiry by D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer (2000), and more specifically, teacher social presence in the online classroom.

Social presence is generally defined as how well a person is perceived as a real human through computer-mediated communication such as video, audio, and text (Gunawardena, 1995). This study will primarily focus on text communication, including paralinguistic cues such as emojis, emoticons, and Bitmojis.

Based on the research of Garrison et al. (2000), social presence involves three areas: emotional expression, open communication, and group cohesion. Please reflect upon your levels of establishing social presence in your online classrooms relating to these three categories.

- *Question 1: Do you feel you express (appropriate) emotion with your students? (Likert-scale 1-5)*
 - *1 - I show little to no emotion with my students.*
 - *5 - I frequently show appropriate emotion with my students.*
- *Question 2: Do you feel you have open communication with your students? (Likert-scale 1-5)*
 - *1 - I have little to no open communication with my students.*
 - *5 - I frequently have open communication with my students.*
- *Question 3: Do you regularly use emojis, emoticons, or Bitmoji (also known as paralanguage) as part of your classroom social presence? (Likert-scale 1-5)*
 - *1 - I never use emojis, emoticons, or Bitmojis as a part of my classroom social presence.*
 - *5 - I frequently use emojis, emoticons, and/or Bitmojis as a part of my classroom social presence.*
- *Anything you wish to add? (open comment)*

Participant Contact Information

The following information will be used to contact potential participants for further interviews. If you are selected and agree to participate in the study, please provide your name and best email below:

- First and Last Name
- Best contact email

Appendix B

Additional Information Post-Interview

Please let me know just a little more detail to help put my study in context.

1. What is your last name?
2. Do you work at GAVS full or part-time?
 - a. Full-time - just GAVS for me
 - b. Part-time - I also teach face-to-face
3. How many classes are you CURRENTLY teaching at GAVS?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5
 - f. 6
 - g. More than 6
4. How many students TOTAL are registered in your classes THIS SEMESTER?
 - a. 1-15
 - b. 16-30
 - c. 31-45
 - d. 46-60
 - e. 61-75
 - f. 76-90
 - g. 91-105
 - h. More than 105

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview #: _____

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss how you establish yourself as a real person for your students in the online learning environment. My research aims to understand teacher perceptions of social presence in a 100% virtual classroom.

I have requested to interview you as you have indicated that you have some experience with social presence with your students. I have about nine questions for you today, and we should spend about 45 minutes talking. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, please let me know so I may adjust as needed. If for any reason you need to stop, we can resume at a more convenient time.

I will record our session so that I may transcribe it later. I will use a pseudonym in my report and transcriptions, so your name will not appear on any documentation related to my study. All transcriptions and recordings will be kept confidential.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Do I have your permission to proceed with conducting and recording this interview?

Demographic Questions

1. How many years, total, have you been teaching?
 - a. Probe: How many of those years have you taught online?
2. What content area(s) do you teach?
 - a. Probe: What other content areas have you taught in the past?
3. What grade level(s) do you teach?
 - a. Probe: What other grade levels have you taught in the past?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your overall experience teaching 100% online.

- a. Probe: How does it compare to the physical classroom?
- b. Probe: What have been the benefits of teaching 100% online?
- c. Probe: What have been the challenges of teaching 100% online?
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
 - a. Probe: How do you think others describe you as a teacher?
 - b. Probe: How do you think your students describe you as a teacher?
3. What are some things you do to make sure your students see you as a real person?
 - a. Probe: Why do you do these things? Why is it important?
 - b. Probe: How do students react?
4. Describe how you promote collaboration within your virtual classroom.

Social presence is defined as how well a person is perceived as a “real person” through online interactions. Frequently this is done through more social language rather than academic language. Other times a person may utilize symbolic cues such as emojis (the little pictures that symbolize emotion), emoticons (similar pictures we create using punctuation and other symbols on the keyboard), and Bitmojis.

5. How do you establish your own social presence through text with your online students?
 - a. Probe: How do you compliment or express appreciation to your students?
 - b. Probe: How do you use humor with your students?
 - c. Probe: How do you express appropriate emotion with your students?
6. How are symbolic cues used in your online classes?
 - a. Probe: Why do you use these symbolic cues?
 - b. Probe: Why do you think your students utilize symbolic cues?
7. How do the Bitmoji and Bitmoji classroom factor into your online classroom?
8. What else would you like me to know about you, your teaching, your use of emoticons, emoji, and Bitmojis in your teaching?
9. Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion

Thank you for speaking with me today. Teaching online is very different from teaching in person, and I appreciate you sharing your stories and experiences with me. Once I am finished reviewing your interview, I will discuss emerging themes and consult with you to be sure the overview is fair and accurate. My time frame suggests it should be in a month or two, so I will be in touch. Thank you again for meeting with me today.

Appendix D

Documents Collected

Document	Type	Paralinguistic Cue Present	Participant
1	Bulletin Board	Bitmoji (each page 5)	Alice
2	Bulletin Board	Bitmoji (1 page)	Alice
3	Bulletin Board	Bitmoji (1 page)	Catherine
6	Banner	Bitmoji	Catherine
4	Resources	Bitmoji Classroom	Catherine
5	Feedback	Audio and emoji (smile)	Catherine
7	Comment	Personal language (no paralanguage)	Catherine
8	Sway (meet your teacher)	Photos, personal information	Catherine
9	Bulletin Board	Bitmojis (4/9 pages)	Daisy
10	Bulletin Board	Bitmojis (6/8 pages)	Daisy
11	Feedback	Emoji (smile)	Daisy
12	Feedback	Emoji (smile)	Daisy
13	Feedback	Emoji (hand clap)	Daisy
14	Presentation	Bitmoji (8/12 pages)	Daisy
15	Feedback (annotation)	Personal and specific language (no paralanguage)	Daisy
16	Feedback	Emoji (smile)	Fiona
17	Student response	Thanking (personal language)	Fiona
18	Feedback	Emoji (smile)	Fiona
19	Padlet	Personal photo (self)	Fiona
20	Padlet	Personal photo (food)	Fiona
21	Presentation	Bitmojis (22/34 pages - 2 friendmojis)	Gwen
22	Announcements (12)	Gifs, relevant information, extra resources	Gwen
23	Bulletin Board	Bitmoji Classroom (22/29 pages)	Gwen
24	Announcements (12)	Bitmojis (10/12) Emojis (1/12)	Holly
25	Sway (welcome)	3 Bitmojis; photo, personal information, gif (humor)	Holly

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group #: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today to dive deeper into how you establish yourselves as real people for your students in the online learning environment. As you know, my research aims to understand teacher perceptions of social presence in a 100% virtual classroom.

Today, We will discuss your experience with social presence with your students. First, all of you do a great job establishing your social presence with your online students. Clearly, they know you are more than a computer screen. Generally, you share appropriate personal details about yourselves along with photos of your family, interests, and places you have visited. Some differences I have heard center primarily on your use of paralinguistic cues, including emojis and Bitmojis, and this seems to be for a variety of reasons. There is certainly no right or wrong way to use emojis and Bitmojis. It is definitely a user preference.

If you need to pause or take a break, please feel free to do so. If anyone feels uncomfortable with the conversation, please understand that you are not obligated to complete the interview, as this is entirely voluntary.

I would like to set a few meeting norms.

- Please respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing the stories outside this focus group interview.
- Everyone's ideas will be respected; please do not judge what others say.
- Please allow one person to speak at a time.
- Feel free to use the comments section as well as emoji reactions.
- Everyone has the right to pass on any question or request that I circle back to them later.

I will record our session so that I may transcribe it later. I will use a pseudonym in my report and transcriptions, so your name will not appear on any documentation related to my study. All transcriptions and recordings will be kept confidential.

Does anyone have any questions for me before we begin?

Do I have everyone's permission to conduct and record this interview?

Interview Questions

1. How many students typically attend your weekly live sessions?
2. What add-ons or extensions do you use to help with your written communication, and how does it help or hinder your social presence?
3. How quickly do you try to respond to your students and why?
4. Please tell me when you used (or almost used) an emoji or Bitmoji that you realized you shouldn't have.
5. What is the single most important reason you establish a social presence with your students?

Conclusion

Thank you for speaking with me today. Teaching online is very different from teaching in person, and I appreciate you sharing your stories and experiences with me. Once I am finished reviewing the interview, I will discuss emerging themes and consult with you to be sure the overview is fair and accurate. My time frame suggests it should be in a month or two, so I will contact you. Thank you again for meeting with me today.

Appendix F

Document Analysis Protocol

The following questions provided by Guba & Lincoln (1981, pp. 238-239) will help to analyze and establish the trustworthiness of each document:

1. What is the history of the document?
2. How did it come into my hands?
3. What guarantee is there that it is what it pretends to be?
4. Is the document complete, as originally constructed?
5. Has it been tampered with or edited?
6. If the document is genuine, under what circumstances and for what purposes was it produced?
7. Who was/is the author?
8. What was he trying to accomplish? For whom was the document intended?
9. What were the maker's sources of information? Does the document represent an eyewitness account, a secondhand account, a reconstruction of an event long prior to the writing, an interpretation?
10. What was or is the maker's bias?
11. To what extent was the writer likely to want to tell the truth?

Additional questions relevant to the research questions will be added:

1. Why is social presence established or maintained through this document?
2. What paralinguistic cues are used in this document?
3. What is the importance or role of each emoji, emoticon, Bitmoji, or other paralinguistic cues of relevance?

Appendix G

Codebook

Social Presence Strategies		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Show gratitude	Participants use words of gratitude in communication with students.	If they reach out to me, I always begin with thank you for the email and addressing your concern. Thank you for bringing this up with me.
Compliment	Participants use compliments beyond traditional feedback in communication with students.	You did a great job, that kind of thing. I don't want them to think of it as a negative. I'll always include that. But you're doing a great job. Keep doing what you're doing. I like to always compliment them or usually I even start with a compliment first.
Express emotion	Participants express appropriate emotion in communication with students, such as indicating happiness, worry, or frustration.	I wanted to reach out and let you know that I'm really proud. I am a real person. So I'm allowed to say I'm worried. And it's important to allow students to know I'm worried.
Captive students	Participants attempt to garner student interest in the learning content. Teachers provide unique content or use an item in order to hook student interest	March Madness... And I tried it for the first time just to see and encourage students to go ahead and look at Padlets.
Use humor	Participants attempt to use appropriate humor in communication with students.	A good analogy is priceless in science. A bad analogy can cause all kinds of confusion. But if you do the crazy analogy, they will laugh about it forever. And remember.
Use names	Participants use student names or nicknames to personalize communication.	80 to 90% of my feedback has their name. I make notes at the beginning of the term, if they're called by a different name than their first name, their first, you know, given name, they'll have a nickname, they'll have a middle name, you know, whatever they want to be called.
Build personal relationships	Participants actively work to create relationships with students.	I will schedule birthday emails throughout the term at the beginning of the year. So the birthday email will show up the day of their birthday. Even though I scheduled it in August, it may show up in January. Those kinds of things. They're, you know, they're blown away by that.
Social Presence Components		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE

Intimacy	Participants utilize strategies to virtually bridge the physical distance between themselves and online learners.	...just in case they make you feel like I'm a real person and that, you know, I have a personality and everything.
Immediacy	Participants utilize strategies to virtually bridge the psychological distance, such as timely responses.	I try not to ever make them wait, because I know they're trying to work. And I know that they've got jobs and other classes. And those kinds of prompt responses make it so that they're more able to turn their work in on time.
Computer-Mediated Communication		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Personal communication	Participants communicate with students, parents, and other stakeholders using various technologies (outside of group, not-personal communication).	We call everybody, all parents at the beginning of the term and introduce ourselves and explain that this we're your point of contact. We use announcements. We use live learning sessions, we use email, we use Quick inbox messages.
Discussion boards	Participants interact with students on discussion boards.	I also try to respond to every student's discussion post at some point.
Feedback	Participants provide personal feedback to students	I found that, you know, lots of opportunities to provide individualized feedback for students on all assignments, really, which is a plus with online learning
Teacher Improvement		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Reflection	Participants actively reflect on how to improve practices for themselves and the students.	I'm looking for the good balance and the good perfection on my part. So the students feel comfortable, and I feel comfortable. I always ask myself, what can I do better?
Teacher Collaboration	Participants seek opportunities to collaborate or ask for help from colleagues.	Then I sit back and go, Well, let's see what other people are doing. It's exposed me to so many more resources than I was aware of.
Instructor Rationales for Practice		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Age of learner	Participants base a specific practice on the age of the learner.	It's different in a K-12 setting, because you're so accountable, you've got parents that, you know, you've got to, you have to offer a lot more help than you do.

Personal experience	Participants base a specific practice on what worked in the past, whether face-to-face or online.	And we also have a lot of kids that are not native to America, and so they might not understand the humor.
Personal preference	Participants base a specific practice on their own preference for it.	It's minutia. But it's worth it to me to know that I haven't missed anybody at the end of the term. I just like it.
Research-based	Participants cite research for a specific practice.	It has been shown statistically that students that have a high average discussion grade have a high overall average.
School mandated	Participants cite reasons for a specific practice on a school requirement.	The policy's within three days, but I try to do it faster than that, because otherwise, it piles up.
Student motivation	Participants base a specific practice on the belief that the students are motivated by .it	And so I try to make sure that I address them with the idea that they are equally as sensitive as I am, you know, I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings, I don't want to turn them off.
Student need	Participants base a specific practice on the belief that the students need what is offered.	So, I annotate... if they look at it, I feel like that's very helpful. Because it shows where in the document what they did, what they should have done.

Online Classroom Considerations

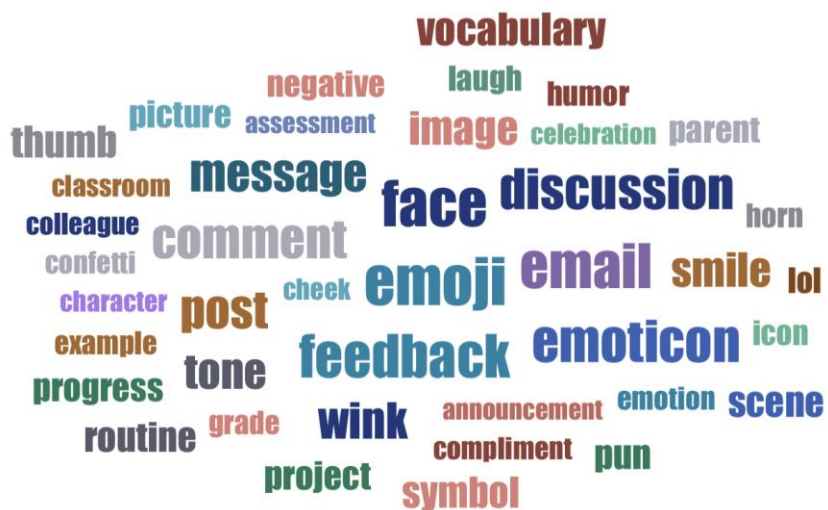
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
ACE	Participants mention a student's Academic Community of Engagement (ACE), a learning support community outside the online environment.	They probably have someone closer to them in their face to face environment.
F2F vs Online	Participants cite differences and similarities between teaching online and their experience teaching face-to-face, particularly as it relates to building relationships.	They knew that there are always, in every school, a good handful of teachers that you knew you could come to, and be honest with. And that has been so hard to let go of when you're a virtual teacher, because they're not coming to me.
Online strategies	Participants discuss specific strategies about how to navigate and be successful online. These are typically targeted toward the student.	We have sort of spend a lot more and put a lot more emphasis on teaching, executive functioning skills for online learning. So how do you locate your calendar? What does your calendar mean? How do you view the feedback that the teacher has left for you? Where do you communicate with your teacher in your online classroom?
Supplemental Materials	Participants create, research, select, implement, and offer supplemental materials and technology in their courses and specifically to individual students based on need.	I'll tell them, hey, I noticed that you said this, and I wanted to go ahead and send you this resource. And I might send them a, you know, a timer, or a white noise, you know, app online, or I have lots of different things that I like to send out to students.

Instructor motivation to teach online	Participants cite specific motivations for teaching online.	I like the flexibility. You know, I get to do something that I enjoy at my pace. I get to do exactly what I love doing. I'm able to give my students one on one time.
Pacing plan	Participants discuss the pros and cons of students having individual pacing plans based on their enrollment in the online class.	We have students that are on week one of instruction, at the same time that some students are in their seventh week of the class. And so they're all over the board.
Why students take the class	Participants discuss reasons or motivations for students to enroll in the online class.	We have some students who do it during their school day. We have some students who do it as an extra class, when they get home. We have had students that are traveling, they're, you know, maybe at a really high level of sports, and they're moving around and going to trainings and things.
Paralinguistic Cues		
CODE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Bitmoji	Participants discuss the use of a Bitmoji - a cartoon version of the user or a personal emoji.	And so, on Halloween, or Valentine's Day, I will send an announcement, like me in a Halloween costume is my Bitmoji or I was like a pumpkin in October or something like that.
Bitmoji Classroom	Participants discuss the use of a Bitmoji Classroom - a cartoon slide presenting resources or other content, including the user's Bitmoji.	I made that into a whole banner at the top that says classroom resources and included my Bitmoji.
Friendmoji	Participants discuss the use of Friendmoji - Two or more Bitmojis together in one image.	So I use friendmojis a lot. And it kind of shows a unified front with the three of us teachers.
Emoji	Participants discuss the use of an emoji - a cartoon-like pictograph representing smiles, hearts, food, and much more.	Laughing face, so I use that one a lot. Smiley face laughing... Oh, if they do a really great job, I'll put like the, like a celebration emoji. I can't remember what exactly it is right now. But it'd be like a horn or confetti or something.
Gifs	Participants discuss the use of a Gif - an image file that is frequently animated (Graphics Interchange Format).	So with all of my announcements, I add a GIF, which sometimes are cute and funny.
Other images	Participants discuss the use of other images such as photos of self, family, or other personal events.	I show them pictures of my grandchildren, and, you know, tell them things about my trips.

Appendix H

Graphic Representations of Data

Word cloud for emoji



Word cloud for Bitmoji

