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Using Community of Inquire to explore teachers' responses to a reading-for-meaning course

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Background: Although one of the most significant educational goals is to teach learners to comprehend written texts, the Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2021) identified that many children and adolescents have not acquired the minimum proficiency in reading even at the end of their secondary school career. South African literacy rates have remained with approximately 78% of Grade 4 learners unable to answer basic literal questions.

Objectives: To explore teachers' responses to an 18 h online course on reading for meaning for Grade 4–7 teachers, using the Community of Inquire (CoI) framework.

Method: An interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative approach and a case study design, was used for this 18 h online study which was conducted between February and March 2022. Ten teachers were purposively selected for this research article.

Results: After inductively and deductively analysing the data collected from the post questionnaire survey and the online Telegram application comments, the teachers' responses to the three CoI presences are presented.

Conclusion: When reflecting on the conceptualisation of using the CoI framework, the social presence dominated. The teaching presence became important when the teachers reflected on their teaching experiences. The cognitive presence then interacted with both the teaching and social presences as the teachers began to be more aware of their own changes in how they taught.

Contribution: The study found that using the CoI framework was appropriate for understanding the teachers responses to an online course for reading-for-meaning.

Keywords: Community of Inquiry framework; comprehension strategies; critical thinking; online; qualitative; professional development.

Introduction

Education is a basic human right, as reported by the World Development Report (2022), yet the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic forced many schools to shift from face-to-face education to online education. This was true in South Africa with Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2022) reporting that online education led to further deepening the divide in access to education, making it more unequal. Provincial Minister of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) Schäfer (2022) shares the 'dire' results of the WCED 2021 Systemic Tests in October 2021. They are compared to the 2019 tests as testing could not take place in 2020. The results indicate that the Grades 3, 6 and 9 language pass percentages were down 8.0%, 3.4% and 3.5%. Schäfer states that the language scores have fallen up to 70% of a school year behind previous cohorts, with the greatest learning losses seen in the Foundation Phase. She believes that the younger learners did not have the same 'self-discipline, maturity or structure that the older learners would have when managing the rotating timetables and learning at home' (2022).

Worldwide, disadvantaged learners have been the most seriously affected by the pandemic. The Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2021) posits that online platforms, which allowed for the continuity of education, were used more in high-income countries (96%), compared to middle-income countries (92%) and low-income countries (58%). In low-income countries schools were closed for longer than in high-income countries. Although the South African Department of Basic Education (DoBE) designed remote learning programmes, only 11.7% of schools offered online schooling, while other schools offered rotational options, thus deepening the urban-rural divide where twice as many learners chose rotational learning in urban areas compared to rural areas (Stats SA 2022). Disadvantaged learners struggled with not having their own space for working

at home and they had less access to digital assets, with 70.5% of Grade 7 learners not owning mobile phones (Stats SA 2022). Urban learners had more access to internet and Wi-Fi than rural learners, and school children needed to fulfil childcare responsibilities and experienced less support at home and school. These inequalities have consequences that reinforce disparities between urban and rural contexts and these schools may continue to have less access to plans that address learning recovery.

Although one of the most important educational goals is to teach learners to comprehend written texts, the Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2021) identifies that many children and adolescents have not acquired the minimum proficiency in reading even at the end of their secondary school, stating that schooling does not necessarily lead to literacy skills acquisition. Equally, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) for 2006, 2011 and 2015 results show that South African literacy rates have remained very low, with approximately 78% of Grade 4 learners unable to locate explicitly stated information (Howie et al. 2017). Recently, many researchers have conducted research into teachers' inabilities to teach comprehension skills (Howie et al. 2017; Olifant et al. 2021; Pretorius & Spaull 2016; Rule & Land 2017).

Public education cannot be easily reformed, but with the fast shift to digitalisation during the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems need to keep up to date and will have so much to gain if they do. Hence, the purpose of this article is to use the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework to explore teachers' responses to an online course on reading for meaning.

Data were collected using two online platforms: surveys and the Telegram online application.

Literature review

The PIRLS document states that reading is a 'constructive and interactive process where meaning is constructed through the interaction between the reader and the text' (Howie et al. 2017:6). For the older primary school learner, once 'reading skills have been automated, and reading is relatively fast and accurate' (Pretorius & Spaull 2016:6), either before, during or after reading, the reader draws from their prior experiences and background knowledge and is able to construct and reflect on their reading experiences. In the older grades, there are longer and more complex texts, with learners being expected to engage critically with a text, make inferences, integrate their prior knowledge and background with texts to construct deeper meaning and understand the underlying relationships of the texts.

Comprehension skills

Elleman and Oslund (2019:4) state that 'reading comprehension is one of the most complex behaviours in which humans engage' as it requires both linguistic and cognitive processes, 'word reading abilities, working memory, inference generation, comprehension monitoring, vocabulary and prior knowledge'. Duke and Cartwright (2021:S28) extend this definition of comprehension teaching by suggesting the foundational constructs include word recognition and language comprehension, while broader constructs include 'culture, content and pedagogical knowledge, and vocabulary'. There may be a mismatch between knowledge assumed by the teacher and the knowledge of the reader; this may be in the form of race, religion or socio-economic status, hence the reason why 'social justice concerns are relevant' (Elleman & Oslund 2019). Similarly, Ntshikila et al. (2022) concur that pedagogical approaches, language differences and socio-economic factors contribute to the complexity of the teaching of comprehension.

Despite a plethora of research studies conducted on understanding the teaching of comprehension in South African schools, learners continue to read with little understanding (Beck & Condy 2017; Duke & Cartwright 2021:S28; Elleman & Oslund 2019; Fatyela et al. 2021; Ntshikila et al. 2022; Pretorius & Spaull 2016). These researchers report that reading is a learned skill yet it is necessary for teachers to know 'how their learners construct meaning' (Bruggink et al. 2022:3). Teachers are ill prepared to understand how to teach reading for meaning and the foundational reading skills, and do not receive adequate input in literacy instruction during their undergraduate studies.

The PIRLS assesses four levels of text comprehension. The lowest level of comprehension – retrieving explicitly stated information – expects learners to locate the answer in the text. The ability to make straightforward inferences is the next level of comprehension skill level. This type of questioning allows readers to 'move beyond the surface of texts and to resolve gaps in meaning' (Howie et al. 2017:24). These two skills are generally the least difficult of the comprehension skills. The third level of comprehension is 'interpreting and integrating ideas and information' where learners construct meaning by linking personal knowledge and knowledge of the world with the meaning in the text (Howie et al. 2017:25). The highest level of comprehension is 'evaluate and examine content, language and textual elements'. Mullis and Martin (2013) state that learners at this stage are able to adjust their thinking from not only making meaning of the text but also being more critical of the text.

Motivation and engagement

Duke and Cartwright (2021:S31) suggest that motivated and engaged readers experience high reading abilities; and that 'not only does motivation impact positively on the ability to comprehend a text, but good comprehension skills impact on the motivation to read' (Bruggink et al. 2022:12). Teachers who explicitly set out to encourage learners' reading interests, help them build strong decoding skills to enable comprehension, and create a positive sense of value

of reading often bring about reading success. Bruggink et al. (2022:34) state that having successful critical reading skills 'is more important for motivation, than motivation for success'. Learners like to have control over their reading processes and this leads to further motivation.

Reading comprehension strategies

When using a variety of comprehension strategies either before, during or after reading lessons, the teacher explicitly sets goals to scaffold readers' efforts to decode passages and understand vocabulary with the ultimate aim of effectively constructing the meaning of passages and enhancing comprehension. Bruggink et al. (2022:28) argue that 'teaching reading strategies should never be seen as the goal in itself, but as a means to achieve better comprehension of passages'. Since 'reading comprehension takes place in the mind of the reader without being explicitly visible', it is challenging for teachers to know how to help their learners read in ways that enhance comprehension and how to effectively select appropriate reading comprehension strategies (Bruggink et al. 2022:28).
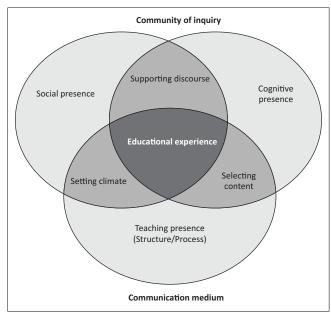
During the Intervention Programme (IP) the teachers were introduced to five reading comprehension strategies:

1. The Anticipation Guide was originally developed by Herber (1978) as a strategy used to take the process of reading content material from a passive state to active participation and discussion where students predict, activate their prior knowledge, make connections to their lived experiences and understand inferences, ultimately strengthening their comprehension (Sari & Sari 2019). There are a set of statements to which students respond individually, and the value lies in the discussion that takes place after the exercise. This process, which can be used across all subjects, is easy to implement, is enjoyable and increases learners' motivation.

2. My Turn Your Turn is an oral strategy where teachers and learners read through texts, occasionally stopping to take turns talking and discussing (Olifant et al. 2021). The teacher role models higher-order critical thinking skills such as: predicting, connecting, inference, clarification and paraphrasing. This strategy goes beyond verbal communication, as it is a learner-centred approach.

3. Cloze Procedure is used widely for measuring students' comprehension ability. Typically, a passage of appropriate length and difficulty has every nth (5th, 6th or 8th) word deleted, yet there is no strict law. Two sentences are left intact with no deletions: the topic sentence that carries the main information and the concluding sentence that provides the summary of the text. Students use their linguistic, textual and lived knowledge to read the text and understand it, determining the logical relationship between the sentences (Ereke & Okonkwo 2016).

4. Graphic aids such as a Feature Matrix, Venn diagrams and Concept Circles are aids used to enhance students' understanding and interpretation. It may be that concepts are buried in the text, and particularly charts and tables are helpful to readers by summarising, comparing and organising information. Students learn to recognise and interpret separate elements presented in graphic aids, they are able to analyse and understand the relationships between the elements, they pose questions and seek answers to the issue being discussed, and they make inferences and draw conclusions from graphic aids (Vacca & Vacca 1986).

5. Philosophy for Children is a pedagogy originally developed by philosopher Lipman (2009). Although there are some differences in the way it is practised, it is generally used to create a space that encourages dialogue and student engagement where they learn to think for themselves, reason logically and make judgements as a community of shared inquiry. They attempt to seek answers to life questions that interest them. The teacher's role is to provide a safe and respectful space that facilitates democratic and reasoned collaborative inquiry.

Theoretical framework

Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) CoI framework, as shown in Figure 1, underpinned this study. It was deemed appropriate as it provided a sense of order and a theoretical base to this online synchronous research project. Garrison et al.'s study was originally based on John Dewey (1938) who viewed teaching and learning as a collaborative constructivist educational experience using the principles of interaction and continuity. He believed 'that learners were able to construct and confirm meaning' through collaboration where learners took responsibility for their learning (Swan, Garrison & Richardson 2009). More recently, Armellini and De Stafani (2016:1202) state that 'it is through such interactions that ideas are communicated and knowledge is constructed, while it is through continuity that the foundations for future learning are laid'. The CoI is a dynamic framework constantly seeking balance among

Source: Garrison, D.R., Anderson, T. & Archer, W., 2000, 'Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education', *The Internet and Higher Education* 2(2–3), 87–105. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6

FIGURE 1: The Community of Inquiry framework.

the three presences, with the intersection being crucial for a successful educational experience.

The CoI framework embraces a constructivist paradigm seeking to understand how people construct knowledge and what the interaction and relationship is between the teaching, cognitive and social presences (Akyol et al. 2009:123). Armellini and De Stafani (2016:1203) suggest that the *teaching presence* is 'the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realising personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile outcomes'. This definition includes the teacher's role as being a complex one: developing the programme, the teaching of appropriate activities as well as role modelling critical discourse and reflection. Effective teachers attempt to maintain a balance between content, pedagogy and technology knowledges.

Armellini and De Stafani (2016:1023) describe the *cognitive presence* as 'the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a CoI are able to construct meaning through substantiated communication' leading to a higher level of cognition. Dewey (1938) believed for reflective and critical thinking to be successful, there were five phases of reflective thought, namely suggestion, intellectualisation, guiding area, reasoning and testing, ending in a resolution. These reflect the four categories of cognitive presence (Garrison et al. 2000), namely triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution. The cognitive presence, as described by Armellini and De Stafani, suggests that critical learning moves through different levels of cognitive processing from a triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution. The PIRLS (Howie et al. 2017:6) reading passages, developed by the international test designers, were selected to target four levels of cognitive processes of comprehension: Level 1 – focus on retrieving explicitly stated information, Level 2 – make straight forward inferences, Level 3 – interpret and integrate ideas and information, and finally Level 4 – evaluate and examine content, language and textual elements.

Kreijns et al. (2014:8) add that the *social presence* 'is associated with the degree of participation and social interaction among the collaborative group members and, as such, is therefore considered a critical variable for learning'. More recently, Armellini and De Stafani (2016:1203) proposed that the social presence contributes to augmenting and supporting the cognitive presence. Armellini and De Stafani argue for a re-conception and an extension of the definition of the social presence to include the ability of teachers to identify with building a sense of community, to communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and to develop inter-personal relationships when working online by projecting their different personalities. They, therefore, view the social presence as being a core online component, mediating between both the teaching and cognitive presences and central to achieving critical thinking in the 21st century.

Throughout the online workshop, and in her planning, the researcher focused on integrating the three presences to achieve an in-depth understanding of the five reading comprehension strategies, extending the participants' critical thinking and learning outcomes.

Research design and methods

An interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative approach and a case study design, was used for this small online study which was conducted between February and March 2022. The aim of this article is to establish the roles that cognitive, social and teaching presences (Garrison et al. 2000) played during an 18-h online reading-for-meaning workshop with Grade 4–7 teachers. The online lessons took place on Microsoft Teams over four Wednesday evenings for 1.5 h and four Saturday mornings for 3 h, with a total of 18 h over 5 weeks. The researcher worked with one teachers' union who advertised the workshop nationally to only their Grade 4–7 teachers and on completion of the course the teachers received 18 Continuous Professional Teacher Development points.

Participants

Thirty-five teachers voluntarily enrolled for this workshop which was advertised throughout South Africa, and all teachers completed the pre questionnaire. The purpose of the pre questionnaire was for the researcher to understand what experiences, if any, the teachers had of the comprehension strategies she had planned to share during the workshop. The results indicated that the majority of teachers had not heard about these comprehension strategies, hence she designed the online reading-for-meaning course to cover all five comprehension strategies. All 35 teachers were invited to join the online Teams and Telegram application platforms, yet many teachers experienced connectivity issues and teaching commitments during these times. They were encouraged to upload, onto the Telegram application, photographs and videos of their teaching literacy techniques and to involve themselves in participant-researcher and peer communications in the form of public postings. Ultimately, only 10 teachers were purposively selected (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004) for this research article as they attended all eight teaching sessions and completed the post questionnaire. The demography of the 10 teachers is shown in Table 1.

Data collection

The researcher designed the course content based on the Grade 4–6 Basic Education Department's Workbooks for Terms 1 and 2, where she role-modelled the different comprehension strategies using the participants as students. Debriefing sessions followed each teaching session, discussing the new learnings and teaching.

At the beginning of the 18 h reading-for-meaning workshop, the teachers completed an online pre questionnaire where

TABLE 1: Demography of the participants.

Number	Participant ID	Gender	Home language	Grades taught	Subjects taught
1	P1	F	English	Grade 5	English
2	P2	M	Afrikaans	Grade 4	All subjects
3	P3	F	English	Grade 3	All subjects
4	P4	F	English	Grade 4	English HL
5	P5	F	Afrikaans	Grade 4 5 7	Afrikaans HL & FAL
6	P6	F	Afrikaans English	Grade 6	All subjects
7	P7	F	English	Grade 7	English HL & Mathematics
8	P8	F	Afrikaans	Inclusive education team	English
9	P9	F	English	Grade 6	Afrikaans FAL
10	P10	F	English	Grade 5	All subjects

HL, Home Language; FAL, First Additional Language.

they were asked to self-evaluate their prior content knowledge and their level of confidence and ability related to their teaching and understanding of the five comprehension strategies that were included in the workshop. At the end of the workshop they were asked to complete a similar online post questionnaire and to re-evaluate their understanding of the comprehension strategies and provide reflections on the following topics: What were the strengths of this course? What were the challenges of this course? How could this course be improved? What can you say about how the workshops were presented? How has this course influenced your teaching? Would you like to add any other comments? This data, together with the comments posted on the online Telegram application, assisted the researcher to interpret the experiences and interactions of the 10 teachers. This online Telegram application was used as a textual and non-textual source of information and a knowledge-sharing tool. During the online workshop, participants were able to immediately reflect on their learning after each session using the Telegram application, which saved time and costs and overcame place limitations (Alawadhi & Dashti 2021).

Data analysis

Underpinning this qualitative study, the researcher used the CoI framework in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences when interacting with critical comprehension skills. Thus, a combination of deductive (theory driven) and inductive data (data driven) analyses was used throughout the data collection process. The researcher constantly searched for similarities and outliers (Henning et al. 2004), developing smaller meaningful units.

Ethical considerations

At the beginning of the workshop the participants signed consent forms and were informed that they could withdraw at any time. In this research article, they have been allocated pseudonyms such as Participant 1 (P1) and Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 2 to protect their identities. CPUT Faculty of Education: Research Ethics Clearance Certificate. Dr Candice Livingston as the Chairperson signed and dated this form on 28 August 2019. EFEC 2-8/2019.

Results and discussion

The researcher attempted to answer the research question: 'How could the CoI framework be used to explore teachers' responses to an online course on reading for meaning?' It was difficult to code these three presences in separate categories as they often overlapped. In the evidence provided, the teachers refer to their experiences of using the five reading comprehension strategies. The spelling, grammar and punctuation in the participants' responses have been retained to capture the authenticity of their comments.

An example of Community of Inquiry's 'cognitive presence'

Within learning communities, the cognitive presence (including the four-phase categories of triggering event, exploration, integration and resolution), according to Garrison and Arbaugh (2007:161), is 'the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse'. Their four-phase process is explained below with evidence from teachers' comments uploaded on the Telegram application and taken from the post questionnaire:

1. A triggering event: An issue or problem is identified for more inquiry:

   a. I am starting a new topic next week and have planned the comprehension question strategies discussed in Workshop 1. I would like to implement some of the vocab strategies from today. I look forward to giving feedback next Saturday.

   b. I agree wholeheartedly with the fact that we neglect our strong learners, which frustrates them.

   c. I absolutely agree … We are forced to complete curriculum instead of focusing on the learners at the level they are to help the get to the level they need to be.

   d. Very true …, especially with FAL [*First Additional Language*]. They are hesitant to look silly in front of their peers.

2. Exploration: Teachers explored difficult and puzzling curriculum issues through critical reflection and discourse. They may have had these views before the workshop, yet this safe space allowed them to voice and explore their current concerns:

   a. Here is the Feature Matrix strategy [*a picture is uploaded of her Feature Matrix*]. I tried to incorporate with a language exercise in my Afrikaans class this week.

   b. I love this!! Do you mind if I steal this for revision next term.

   c. [P10 uploaded a video on Telegram about Cloze procedure.] P9 responded by saying: I know of Cloze procedure but have never used it in my class. Will definitely try to use it soon.

3. Integration: Where teachers constructed meaning from the ideas developed during exploration:

   a. … listening to other teachers and how they implemented these strategies in their classes.

   b. … hearing how other teachers approached the topics and how they implemented them constructively.

   c. … the ability to provide feedback following implementation.

d. The feedback each week. Loved the different methods teachers are using and how it works in their schools.

e. That we could go back to school and apply the topics and give feedback the following session.

f. … giving feedback after using the strategies.

g. I have used the Venn diagrams but I will try the Concept Circle.

h. Very practical strategies and ideas – 'boots on the ground' approach that ensures we are able to do it in the classroom.

4. Resolution: Where the teachers applied the newly gained knowledge in their classrooms:

a. … I could identify with your challenges and experiences. I found paired reading works well and I use simpler texts taken from lower grades to assist learners with reading problems.

b. I must say that my level of anxiety around the children not being able to read with understanding has diminished tremendously, due to having more and different tools and strategies.

c. I always had a special word for the week and an idiomatic expression on the discussion board.

d. I've used the feature matrix for categorizing the pets, wild animals and domestic animals. I've incorporated the My Turn, Your Turn strategy because of this learner is very impulsive, shouting out randomly, and it worked so well.

Discussion

From the start of the reading-for-meaning workshop, this group of teachers was explicitly and regularly encouraged to develop inter-personal relationships both on Teams as well as on the Telegram application. It is through these interactions that ideas were communicated and new knowledge was constructed (Armellini & De Stafani 2016). Despite Swan et al. (2009) claiming that in their research, they discovered the online inquiry rarely moved beyond the CoI's exploration phase, the researcher was pleased to notice that there was evidence that some teachers seemed to experience all the cognitive presence phases from expressing a triggering event to exploration, integration and application. This may have been as a result of the content and process of the teaching presence where the workshop was explicitly planned to introduce teachers to a variety of new comprehension techniques. They were encouraged to apply these strategies in their own classrooms and feedback was provided during the next lesson. These goals were specifically voiced at each workshop and from the participants' comments, the feedback from the researcher-directed debriefing sessions were valued (Swan et al. 2009). The designed learning activities created a safe and cohesive space for the teachers to make sense of the complex new comprehension techniques, moving the teachers towards asking more critical questions. This suggests that, with time, the teachers' confidence, success with using these strategies and motivation levels grew (Bruggink et al. 2022), resulting in cognitive shifts in their understandings of the comprehension strategies. It was hoped that this continual dialogue, within the cognitive presence, would lay foundations for improved and sustained critical literacy teaching and discourse.

An example of Community of Inquiry's 'teaching presence'

This is a reflective discussion between P9 and her lecturers, after she applied the Anticipation Guide strategy in her own classroom:

'I did an anticipation guide for my poem that the learners will start tomorrow and they LOVED it. I will post a copy of it here [*Telegram*]. … The engagement was amazing. We did a lot of discussion in English but I told my learners that next time would be done more in Afr. [*Afrikaans*] [*smiley face, smiley face*] … Thank you for the valuable lessons and strategies that you have given me.' (P9, female, teacher)

Response from Lecturer 1:

'P9 your experience of the Anticipation Guide is totally delightful [*smiley face*] I'm so pleased you did it in your poetry class – and your discussions in English – no worries as you do more of these activities their confidence in speaking Afrikaans will increase – especially if you are having fun [*smiley face*].' (Lecturer 1, female, Adjunct Professor)

Response from Lecturer 2:

'Hi P9 Wow!! That is awesome dear!! I think you will definitely see a difference with the FAL [*First Additional Language*]. Greater confidence and greater engagement will follow!!!! Thank you for your participation and for always sharing!!! Wish you well with the strategies dear [*smiley face*].' (Lecturer 2, female, post-doctoral fellow)

Discussion

The 'teaching presence' is defined as the planning and the teaching of activities, through modelling of critical discourse and reflections (Armellini & De Stefani 2016). In this scenario, P9 used the Telegram application to freely express her ideas of using the Anticipation Guide in her class while two lecturers responded to her comment. P9's metacognition and independent reflection of her experiences of using an Anticipation Guide with her learners, before a poetry lesson, shows her cognitive reflective ability that she socially constructed (Armellini & De Stefani 2016). The teaching presence is evident in two different phrases offered by the two lecturers as support:

'[*A*]s you do more of these activities their confidence in speaking Afrikaans will increase – especially if you are having fun and I think you will definitely see a difference with the FAL.'

This is evidence of the modelling and critical discourse, encouraging social interactions between the lecturers and P9. These statements indicate that the teacher's ability to transfer this new comprehension strategy to her poetry lesson led to bidirectional motivation between herself and her students resulting in the engagement that 'was amazing' (Bruggink et al. 2022). There was a clear intention to support and make sense of P9's existing literacy knowledge by confirming her understanding of using

this new technique and providing her with peer support. The use of smiley faces indicates these interactions were of a social nature.

This is an example of a learning experience resulting in meaningful overlaps between the teaching and cognitive presences which became social. However, since this online discussion was an experience shared only between P9 and her two lecturers, it did not enhance cognitive responses from other participants on the Telegram application.

An example of Community of Inquiry's 'social presence'

This is a reflective discussion after the Philosophy for Children lesson was modelled. We used the starter e-text *It's a book*. The times at which the messages came through the online Telegram application are inserted, to indicate how quickly the teachers responded to having experienced this activity:

P3:   We respected each other and enjoyed ourselves while learning from each other (10:32)

P9:   I thought it was an interesting discussion. It made everyone's opinion count and be valued by all. We were respectful, we listened to each other and gave each person an opportunity to speak. I ALMOST changed my mind about the books … (10:34)

P5:   I liked the way the question was debated on a friendly and respectful manner, it made everyone think about their own answer (10:34)

P10:   Definitely respect for all opinions. Made me think that I should give e-books another try … (10:34)

P8:   A good exercise to respect each other's opinion … (10:35)

        Yes I was always part of an extra mural at high school, a debating group, where we had evening events and this activity reminds me of that experience (10:45)

P10:   It allows them to think of deeper questions that leads to discussions (10:48)

P3:   You can make suggestions or guide (10:48)

P8:   I referred to the question asked where to use this strategy (10:51)

P10:   Definitely history as well (11:17)

P3:   Definitely across the board will develop fabulous vocabulary (11:18)

P8:   It is a good strategy to enable all learning styles (11:21)

Discussion

After the Philosophy for Children activity, where an e-book *It's a book* was used as a starter text, followed by teachers engaging in an inquiry, the teachers were asked to share their reflections of this technique using the Telegram application. As can be seen by the evidence provided, as well as the times at which the comments were posted, that it is through the social, public 'collaborative constructivist' dialogue that ideas were expressed and deeper knowledge was created (Garrison et al. 2000:92).

The social presence, as an outcome of the teaching presence and essential for the cognitive presence, was evident in the various modes of Teams' online discussions. In this scenario, the teachers responded verbally, put their hands up and contributed when it was their turn, wrote comments in the chat room as well as posted comments on the Telegram application. The social presence became a mediating variable between the teaching presence and the cognitive presence (Armellini & De Stefani 2016) as P10's comment on Telegram highlights: *It allows them to think of deeper questions that leads to discussions.* This linked to what Garrison et al. (2000:94) believe is the cognitive presence, which is defined by participants constructing meaning through sustained communication, creating pathways towards critical thinking.

To enhance the cognitive presence and to reach critical thinking that was 'rich, coherently organised and persistently exploratory' (Garrison & Anderson 2003:19), the teachers offered comments relating to the learning domains of evaluating and creating. Examples of evaluating comments are: *It made everyone think about their own answer*, *respect each other's opinion* and *It is a good strategy to enable all learning styles*. One teacher offered a suggestion on how to expand the learners' knowledge by stating: *You can use it* [Philosophy for Children] *in History* and *Across the board which will develop fabulous vocabulary*. These statements promote Dewey's (1938) principle of interaction and continuity and link with Bruggink et al. (2022:12) who state that 'success is more important for motivation, than motivation is for success'.

Conclusion

This research study set out using an interpretivist paradigm in an attempt to answer the research question: 'How could the CoI framework be used to explore teachers' responses to an online course on reading for meaning?' The teachers were introduced to a variety of previously unknown comprehension strategies.

When reflecting on the conceptualisation of using the CoI framework and the nature of the findings of this online study, the social presence dominated. The teachers engaged with each other, built on each other's experiences, shared their opinions, provided positive responses to some of the strategies, shared their enthusiasm about their application experiences, and discussed how this workshop broadened their knowledge and use of a variety of comprehension strategies for reading for meaning. The socialisation of the content occurred independently and in groups, discussing the comprehension strategies, which led to sustained knowledge of teaching these new strategies.

The teaching presence became important when they reflected on their teaching experiences. Through these reflective sessions, teachers were interacting and communicating with each other, constructing deeper knowledge of the

comprehension strategies. The teachers could safely voice their experiences and difficulties when applying these strategies within the curriculum and across subject areas, dealing with large classes, working with differently abled learners and how to manage the many learning styles of their learners. By regularly discussing the comprehension strategies, the teachers began to develop a more critical discourse of each strategy.

The cognitive presence then interacted with both the teaching and social presences as the teachers began to be more aware of their own changes in how they taught, managed and monitored their comprehension learning; they were becoming metacognitively aware. The teachers were developing cognitively, while socially sharing their teaching experiences. The researcher concurs with Armellini and De Stefani (2016) that it is through the social presence, being the core component of the CoI framework, we may achieve critical and sustained thinking.

The juxtaposition of these three presences positively impacted the teachers' ability to teach these new comprehension strategies, at the same time developing their motivation, and encouraging them to use them more frequently in different subject areas.

This study was limited to reflecting on 10 teachers' experiences of participating in the 18-h workshop on teaching comprehension skills. It was limited to being presented only online using Teams and the data collection was limited to using comments from the online Telegram application and data from the pre and post questionnaires. The results may not be generalisable to other groups of teachers. Future studies may include longer workshops with follow-up face-to-face interviews and possible classroom visits where one could observe how teachers model the strategies, ask appropriate questions and provide face-to-face feedback.

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Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

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