Leading (Designing and Facilitating) Dynamic Discussions

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Quick Facts

- A teacher asks more than 1000 questions per week (Kerry, 1982)
- About 35% to 50% of a lesson is spent on discussion (Moore, 2011)
- Lecture and discussion are most popular methods. Effects on learning:

Method	Recall 3 hours later	Recall 3 days later
Lecture	70%	10%
Discussion	72%	20%
Lecture + discussion	85%	65%

- 1/3 of all higher education students in the US took at least 1 course online in 2012 (Allen & Seaman, 2013)
- Feeling of isolation from others in the course is a core reason for student dissatisfaction in online courses (van Tyron & Bishop, 2009)

(Online) Learning and Discussion

- Defining learning:
  - To learn is to participate (Lave and Wenger, 1991)
  - Learning is interactional achievement (Stahl, 2009)

- Definition of discussion:
  - A conversation or debate about a topic
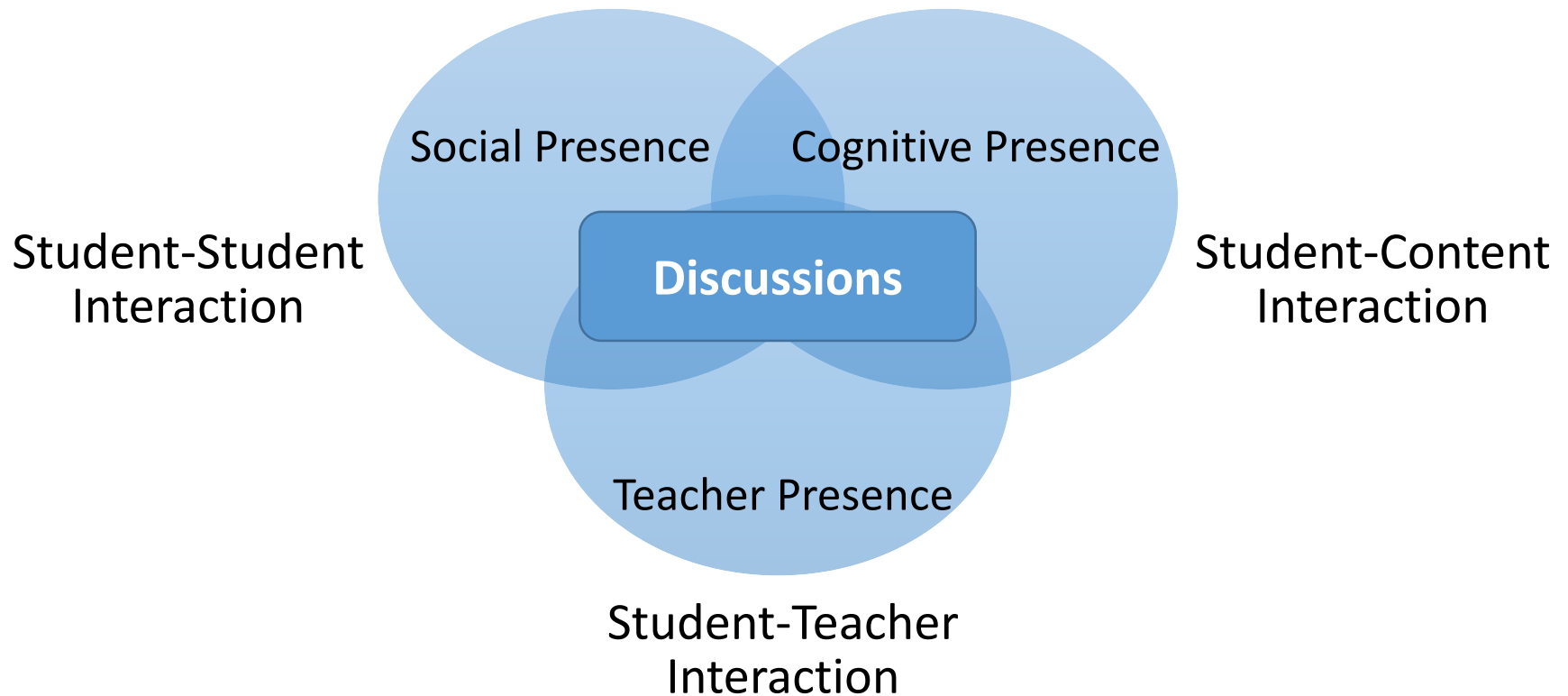
Instructional Benefits of Discussions

- Build connections and sense of community
- Explore a diversity of perspectives
- Increase awareness of and tolerance for ambiguity and complexity
- Help recognize our assumptions (create cognitive disequilibrium)
- Help become connected to a topic
- Show respect for student voices and experiences
- Help learn the processes and habits of democratic discourse
- Affirm students as co-creators of knowledge
- Develop the capacity for clear communication of meaning
- Develop habits of collaborative learning
- Make students more empathic
- Help develop skills of synthesis and integration

https://goo.gl/uZAL9h

Role of Discussions in Online Learning

Transactional Distance

Community of Inquiry

Social Presence　　Cognitive Presence

Student-Student
Interaction

Discussions

Student-Content
Interaction

Teacher Presence

Student-Teacher
Interaction

Levels of Discussion Questions

- **Closed**

Who started the cognitive revolution in psychology?

- **Convergent**

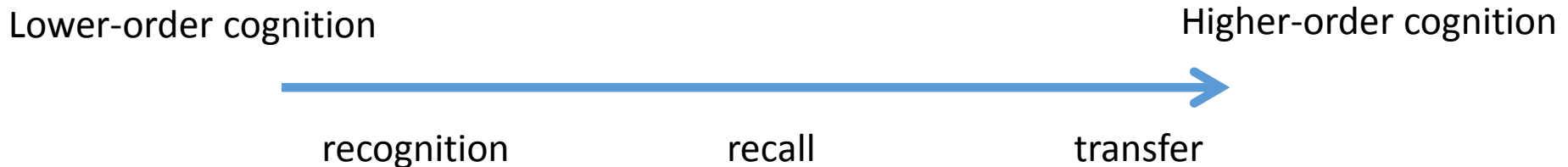How did zebra mussels spread in North America?

- **Rote**

- **Open**

What brought about the cognitive revolution in psychology?
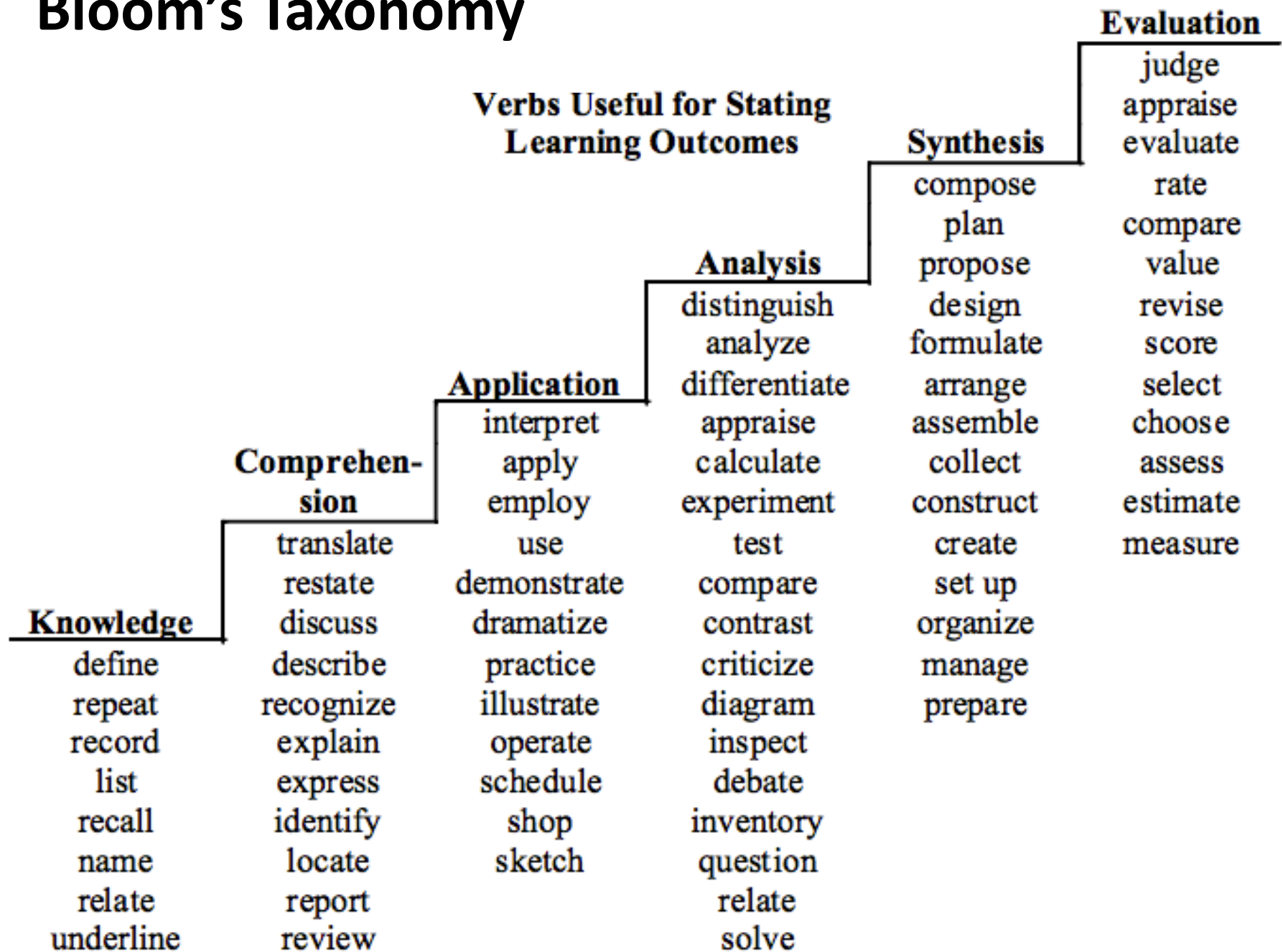
- **Divergent**

What are the impacts of zebra mussels on ecology, biology, economy, human health etc?

- **Meaningful**

Lower-order cognition   Higher-order cognition

recognition   recall   transfer

Bloom's Taxonomy

Verbs Useful for Stating Learning Outcomes

Knowledge	**Comprehension**	**Application**	**Analysis**	**Synthesis**	**Evaluation**
					judge
					appraise
					evaluate
				compose	rate
				plan	compare
			distinguish	propose	value
			analyze	design	revise
			differentiate	formulate	score
		interpret	appraise	arrange	select
		apply	calculate	assemble	choose
		employ	experiment	collect	assess
	translate	use	test	construct	estimate
	restate	demonstrate	compare	create	measure
	discuss	dramatize	contrast	set up	
define	describe	practice	criticize	organize	
repeat	recognize	illustrate	diagram	manage	
record	explain	operate	inspect	prepare	
list	express	schedule	debate		
recall	identify	shop	inventory		
name	locate	sketch	question		
relate	report		relate		
underline	review		solve		

Designing Effective Discussion Prompts

- Short (discuss topic A) to long (a printed page of instructions)
- Invoke personal experience, attitudes (e.g., what is your definition of X?)
- Open-ended enough for students to each have a unique response
- Hypothetical scenarios (e.g., you are designing a PD workshop…)
- Analysis and synthesis (e.g., claims vs. evidence in an article)
- Use videos, pop culture and media (e.g., TED Talks, interviews etc.)
- Debate (groups defending their position)
- Select the most important quote from a reading and interpret (or you can select a quote for discussion)
  https://voicethread.com/myvoice/#thread/6189431/31815143/33283277
- Identify and share 3 resources for accomplishing task X and discuss their utility
- Compare and contrast

Expectations and Assessment

- Postings should be evenly distributed during the discussion period (not concentrated all on one day or at the beginning and/or end of the period)

- Postings should be a minimum of one short paragraph and a maximum of three paragraphs.

- Avoid postings that are limited to 'I agree' or 'great idea', etc. Say why you agree by supporting your statement with concepts from the readings or by bringing in a related example or experience.

- Address the questions as much as possible (don't let the discussion stray).

- Try to use data and quotes from the articles that support your ideas.

- Build on others' responses to create threads (reply to at least 2 peers).

- Bring in related prior knowledge (work experience, prior coursework, readings, etc.)

- Use proper etiquette (proper language, typing, etc.).

Instructor Presence

- "Unmanaged discussions invite chaos" (Baker, 2011)
- Sign up for notifications and reply but allow students to reply first
- Post messages to suggest postings are being read. Expressing appreciation, agreement, support, and encouragement. Avoid being sharp or too critical.
- Ask probing questions rather than reply directly. Those who claimed to exhibit challenging questioning methods actually answered questions 68% of the time, shutting down the conversation (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2007) .
- Maintain a focused discussion and periodically summarize what has or needs to be done (MacKnight, 2000)
- Provide closure to discussions (or assign students to do so)
- Attend to problems that can disrupt student discussions, particularly aggressive communication that can silence some students
- Deal tactfully and privately with students who dominate discussions or who remain silent
- Publicly recognize the work students have accomplished, paying particular attention to low status students

Canvas Affordances

Options
- ☐ Allow threaded replies
- ☐ Users must post before seeing replies
- ☐ Enable podcast feed
- ☑ Graded
- ☑ Allow liking
  - ☐ Only graders can like
  - ☐ Sort by likes

Edit Discussions Settings ✕

My Settings

☐ Manually mark posts as read

Student Settings

☐ Create discussion topics
☑ Edit and delete their own posts
☑ Attach files to discussions

[Cancel] [Save Settings]

Group Discussion
☐ This is a Group Discussion

Points Possible 10

Display Grade as Points ⬍

Assignment Group Assignments ⬍

Peer Reviews
☐ Require Peer Reviews

Canvas Rubrics

Cultural Differences

- Hall's contextuality theory (1977, 1990)

	Low-Context Cultures	High-Context Cultures
Non-verbal communication	Low Overt	High Covert
Verbal communication	Explicit Informal	Implicit Formal
Social orientation	Individualistic Reveals	Collectivistic Conceals
Thought patterns	Inductive Linear	Deductive Non-linear

Cultural Differences
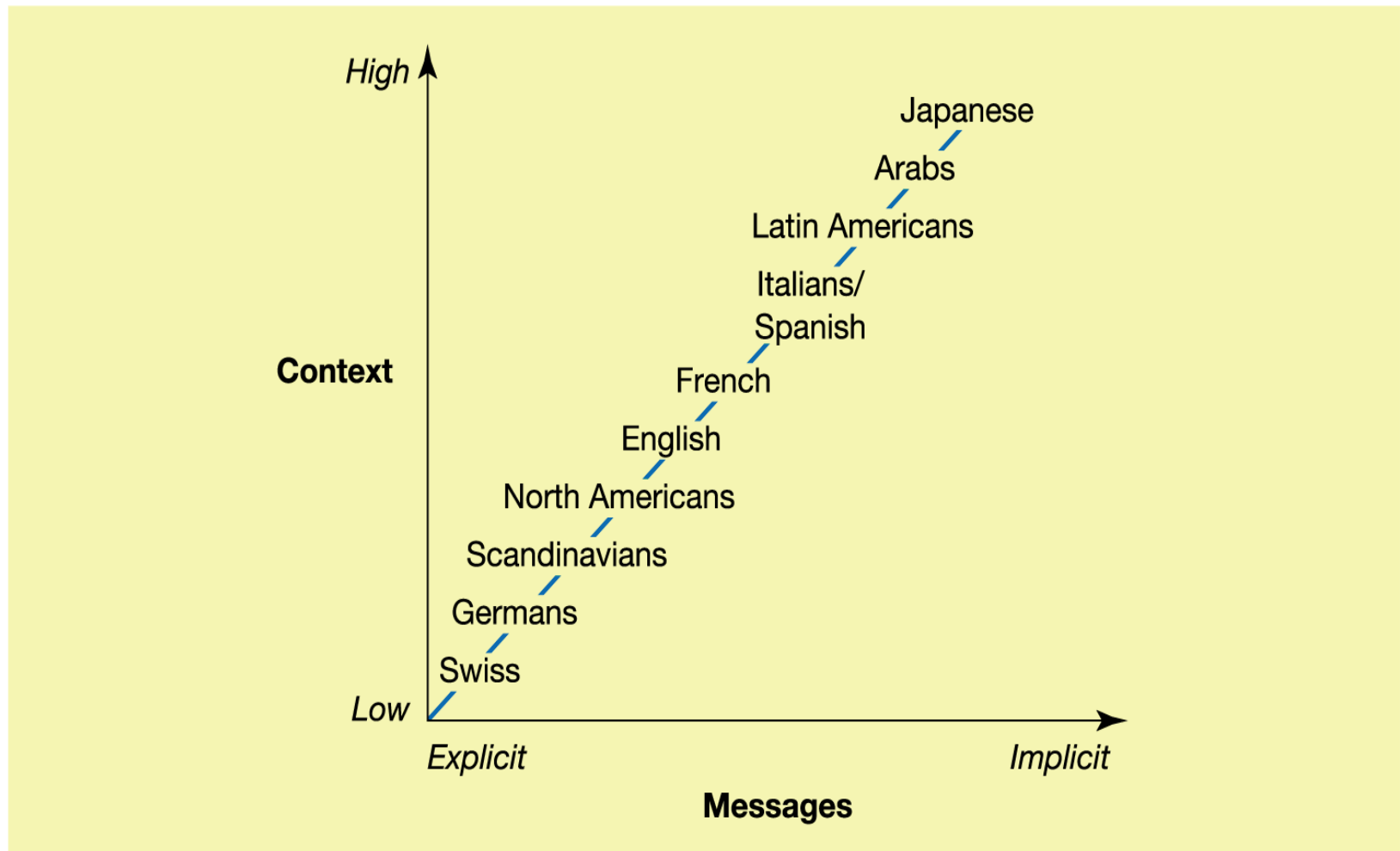
Gender Differences

- (Most) men have a more **independent** voice that emphasizes self-sufficiency, autonomy, and competition
- (Most) women have a more **connected** voice that emphasizes socialization, caring, cooperation, consensus, and the indirect resolution of conflict
- Discourage competition and encourage cooperation and consensus building

Rovai, A.P. (2007)

Other Tips

- People **need** other people! (e.g., popularity of social media)
- Discussion Forum is not a Dropbox!
- Deadline for the initial post and deadline for responses
- An informal discussion forum (emotional engagement)
- Be a model! Participate!
- Use rubrics to set expectations and grade
- Use synchronous sessions
- Correlation between number/quality of posts and final grade
- Result: students feel more connected than in a F2F course