It's never a good feeling when a colleague is having a hard time. It's very difficult for me to see a teacher struggling to connect with their students. I remember when I was a first year teacher, I was lost and confused for the first few months. Now, 10 years later, with more experience, insight, and understanding of the COI framework, I can provide some valuable feedback to my friends in need.

To begin to understand the struggles her students are facing, I would assume that my colleague has a poorly designed course, a poorly designed syllabus, or lack of a getting started section. Student complaints of feeling isolated can also mean that her social presence is lacking. Perhaps her availability is low, or she is taking too long to respond to emails or phone calls. My advice to my colleague right now, would be to immediately create some virtual office hours and actively invite her class to join. Respond to emails within 24 hours, and create a video where you explain how to navigate the course (as it currently stands) and just talk about your investment into your learners success. I think these three immediate changes will mitigate the chaos around how the students and my colleague is feeling. As I am familiar with video editing, I would help her film a short video and do some quick edits using open source software like Kdenlive, or OpenShot. Social presence helps with critical thinking and motivation and is responsible for setting the academic climate (Garrison, 2017). I would immediately take a look at her syllabus and help her set the tone for her availability to students and add a personal touch to her introduction.

Moving forward with helping my colleague plan for next semester, I will need to remind her that social presence is important in virtual and blended learning because according to Garrison, "The implicit denial of community has been the greatest shortcoming of traditional distance education" (p. 35. Counteracting this shortcoming takes effort on the part of instructional designers and teachers to establish meaningful social presence. I would sit with her and reflect on what makes social presence "meaningful". Learning is not done in isolation. Dr. Phil Ice (2015) explains that community is important because it directly impacts student retention. One of the stats that Ice discussed that has stood out to me was the 78% likelihood of disenrollment if a student ranked low on the first two social presence elements. This was also "irrespective of grade" (Human MOOC, 2015). Having students question whether they belong in online learning environments is bad for everyone. To address this, we could work on two things. This first would be to set up an introductory assignment where students can read material on what it takes for online learning and make a plan that serves as a "student contract". Online learners need to learn and develop self-efficacy skills such as goal-setting, time management, communication and knowing when and how to reach out for help (Zimmerman, 2016). For example, I would use Zoom or Skype to have her students check-in with her to ensure they are adhering to a proper study and self-care schedule.

Second, I will have her create a simple Google form survey to see what skills and gaps students already have. Being able to assess digital literacy, time restrictions, family needs, etc is useful for considering overall student success. While this may not be

accurate, I think it's a step in the right direction. Researchers need to create valid and reliable instruments to assess student attributes specific to online learning to determine if students are really ready to take online courses (Kauffman 2015). This is important because currently, there is no assessment instrument that determines if students will succeed in online courses. My colleague can very easily blame herself, when perhaps she is following the proper protocols.

One of the last things I would advise my colleague is to make use of the Canvas discussion boards. Discussion boards do not always have to be tied to an assignment, they can serve as virtual help desks, or places for sharing general questions and information. I admire when my online courses have a virtual "Student Lounge" or "Ask the Professor". Discussions facilitate discourse and shared metacognition provides the ability for learners to individually construct meaning and collaboratively confirm their knowledge. (Garrison, 2017) Shared metacognition helps students legitimize their information within the context of the group. This is not only great for the content of the course, but for overall knowledge of the group.

Teaching is not easy, and neither is learning. It is a delicate and balanced dance between both parties, but its success often relies on the commitment of others for advice, input, discourse, debate, and support. We need these elements in our professional environments and our learning environments. It is the spirit of helping others and taking an active part of their growth that makes learning successful.

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