Chapter 21
Expanding the CoI: Finding the Hidden Wholeness in Online Learning and Online Working

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores how the foundational principles of the Community of Inquiry survey can be used to assess and evaluate parallel processes for Knowledge Workers, given that online teaching and learning is quite similar to “online working.” The phenomenon analogous to teaching presence in online learning is a knowledge worker’s ability to create and disseminate knowledge. Communities of Practice provide a measurable phenomenon analogous to social presence. Finally, data-driven decision-making’s use for evaluation, coupled with innovation, serves as a phenomenon parallel to cognitive presence. Together, these three measures, developed in parallel with teaching, social and cognitive presence, provide an effective framework for evaluating online work, which is quite similar to online learning.

INTRODUCTION
The late writer and Trappist monk Thomas Merton sought solitude at Gethsemane, and in separating himself from the other monks, he discovered a remarkable paradox. Ironically, the reflection in solitude at his hermitage ultimately prepared him for the discovery of what he referred to as “a hidden wholeness.” Outside the confines of his abbey and hermitage one day, during a daytrip to nearby Louisville, Kentucky, Merton made the connection:

...the conception of “separation from the world” that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion... We are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest (Merton, 1966, pp. 140-141).

Imagine if you would that Merton were instead an academician, and that the single word monastery in his passage above was changed to university. Have we not all in the Academy heard

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the criticisms from outside the ivory tower about our inability to connect with issues of real-world policy, social justice, technology innovation, dissemination of ideas, and commerce? Have we not all at one time considered our uniqueness as academicians? How might our views as teachers, researchers, students, and programmatic leaders be changed if we were to seek our own hidden wholeness with the outside world?

This idea is not only Merton’s. Other writers have alluded to the same universal truth. Norman Maclean, author of *A River Runs Through It* (himself an academic) found his own version of hidden wholeness in the beautiful trout streams of his native Montana. “Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it” (Maclean, 1976). This principle of hidden wholeness is certainly not limited to theology and fly fishing. The educator Parker Palmer explored the implications for hidden wholeness on the field of education. In his book titled, *The Hidden Wholeness*, he explores the use of Circles of Trust to help educators find the hidden wholeness in their work (2004).

This seemingly mystical introduction to a chapter on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) may seem misplaced. Yet this chapter focuses on this very hidden wholeness. The major premise of this chapter is that the world of online teaching and learning is not that much different from what the knowledge worker experiences during a typical day at the office. The chapter responds, in part, to a challenge my colleagues and I posed in an earlier manuscript exploring the CoI. Continued investigation and application of the CoI framework, we argued, is clearly needed given the importance of evaluating factors that promote growth in online communities, regardless of whether they involve conventional online universities or online communities of practice that continue to define the typical workday in the Knowledge Society (Díaz, Swan, Ice, & Kupczynski, 2010). In other words, there exists a common experience, a hidden wholeness in the teaching and learning processes assessed by the CoI survey (Arbaugh, Cleveland-Innes, Diaz, Garrison, Ice, Richardson, Shea & Swan, 2008) and the processes typically experienced by a contemporary knowledge worker.

We should no longer think of teaching and learning and work as disparate elements. Teaching/learning is work, and vice versa. As Friedman warns, the first, and most important ability a person can develop in a flat world is to “learn how to learn” (Friedman, 2007, p. 309). The importance of the production and dissemination of knowledge continues to increase as our knowledge economies emerge. Clark Kerr posited that “knowledge has certainly never in history been so central to the conduct of an entire society…and the university is at the center of the knowledge process” (2001, p. 66).

A variety of factors seek to camouflage this hidden wholeness. First and foremost, the scrutiny that is being applied on online education, especially in the for-profit sector, seeks to frantically distinguish online learning from conventional face-to-face instruction, often for the sake of self-preservation and resistance to change. Research and evaluation focused on refining this distinction all too often misses the mark. This approach distracts educators from focusing on more foundational principles of curriculum and pedagogy that transcend modes of delivery. Regrettably systematic efforts of scrutiny such as the committee hearings initiated by Iowa Senator Tom Harkin have much more to do with emerging economic competition than they do addressing foundational pedagogical principles of accountability. Further compounding these efforts at divisiveness are academicians’ tendencies to overemphasize their unique specializations. There is a fine balance between developing one’s own focused expertise while maintaining relevance and connection to the outside world.

Spiritually speaking, we in the Academy are at times a disjointed enterprise as we attempt to negotiate our role in the new knowledge society. As we deal with unprecedented changes that are bound to change irrevocably the nature of our work, we often act (quite justifiably) as lost souls. In par-
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