Enhancing asynchronous engagement for student success in online learning:

Reflections from free on-demand short-learning programmes at the University of Johannesburg

Presentation by Carina van Rooyen and Valerie Kondo,
to the 2024 Siyaphumelela Network Conference in Johannesburg
on 27 June 2024

Generated by Gamma.app

What is academic student engagement?

Learning is not a spectator sport: unless you are actively engaged, you are not learning.

Benefits of academic student engagement

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

~ Paulo Freire (1970:34)

Modes of learning in higher education

In-person

Students learn in the classroom, lab, lecture theatre, workshop, studio or other place-based learning space on campus.

Hybrid

Students have some learning online AND also attend in-person synchronous classes. Online learning may be synchronous or asynchronous. (Online may be called remote learning or extended campus.)

Distance

Students learning is physically removed from a campus. Usually this is online, but can also incl. physical resources. Learning can be synchronous or asynchronous.

HyFlex

Students have the flexibility to choose to attend in-person or join online. Learning is usually synchronous and both groups learn together at the same time.
A third asynchronous group option to learn may be added.

Blended

Students learn in-person on campus through a blend of digital learning activities (using tech) and other place-based class activities. The activities are usually synchronous, but may also include asynchronous pre-class tasks e.g. flipped learning.

Self-directed

ALL students engage in additional independent learning activities e.g. class prep, research, wider reading, practise, groupwork, revision, assessment, using feedback, co/extracurricular activities.

WHAT IS SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING?

Takes place in real-time with groups of learners

Can be done online via live webinars, instant messaging, and virtual classrooms

Collaborative and feedback-friendly

WHAT IS ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING?

A more learner-centered approach

Can be completed through online courses, email, blogs, pre-recorded videos or webinars, online discussion boards

Learners complete courses in their own time and regardless of location

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Angela Jones
@drjonessoc

Do folks have successful strategies for fostering student engagement in asynchronous courses that are not discussion boards and not group work? #AcademicTwitter #AcademicChatter

Keri Cronin 😷
@profcronin

Has anyone come up with a way to build community and foster student engagement in online asynchronous courses that doesn't involve forum postings? #teaching #onlineteaching

Building Blocks of Information Literacy
Short Learning Programme
100% FREE, 100% ONLINE,
START NOW, WORK AT YOUR OWN PACE,
NO LECTURES TO ATTEND.

(240AFRINY1) AFRICAN INSIGHTS

Artificial Intelligence in the 4IR

(241SDGAAO1) INTRO TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Advanced Information Literacy
Short Learning Programme
100% FREE, 100% ONLINE,
START NOW, WORK AT YOUR OWN PACE,
NO LECTURES TO ATTEND.

Financial Literacy Be Money Wise

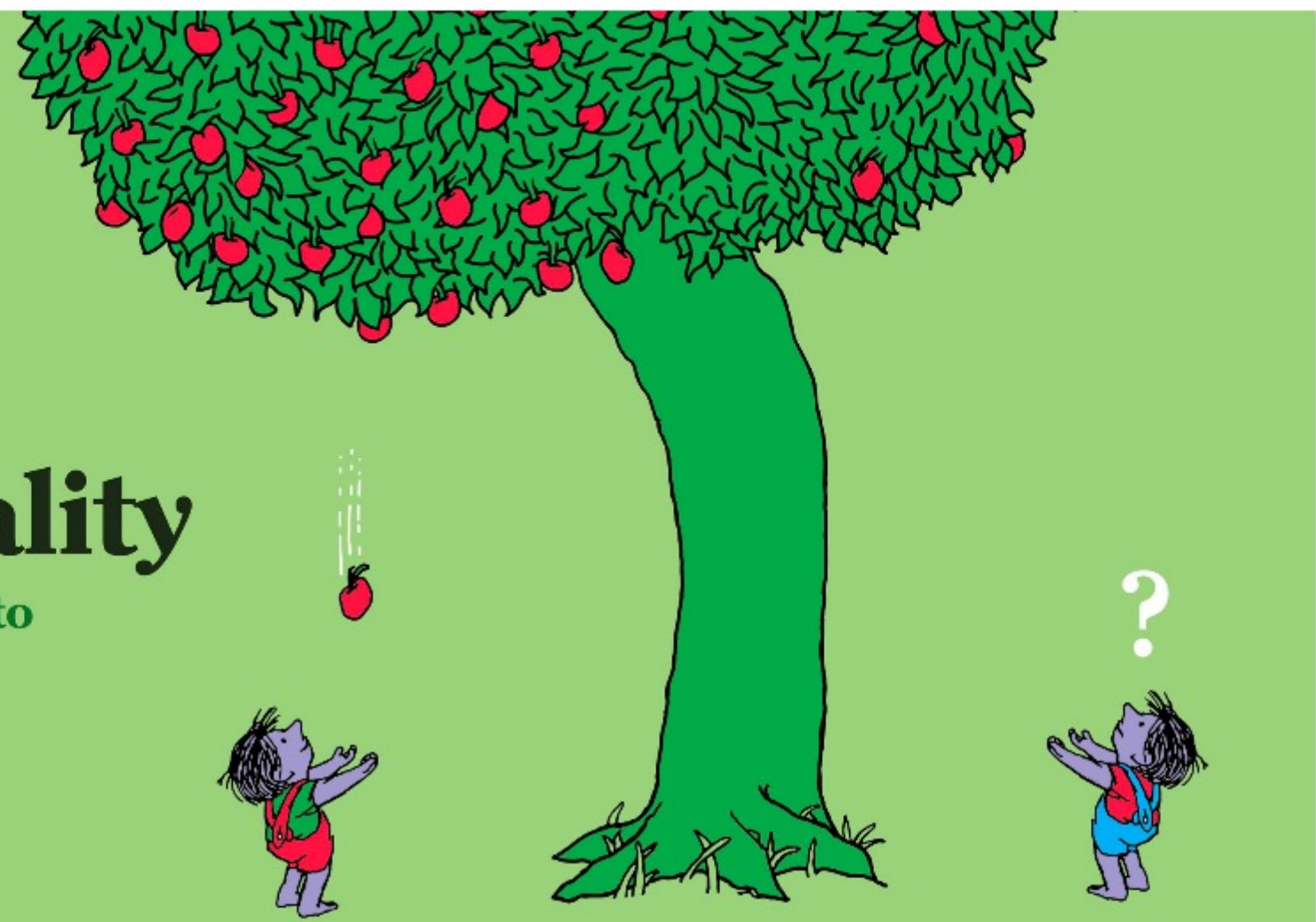UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d3/University_of_Johannesburg.jpp
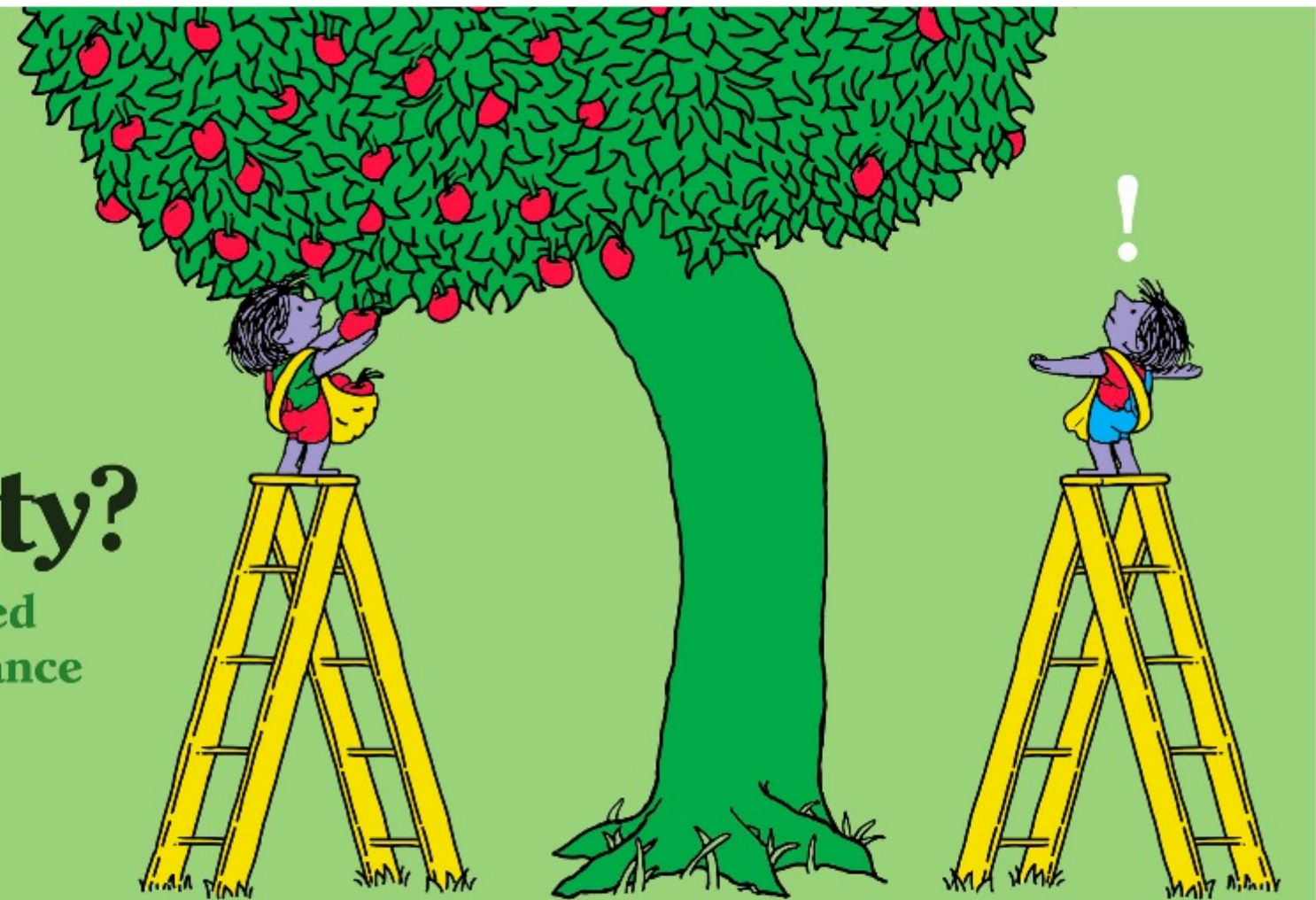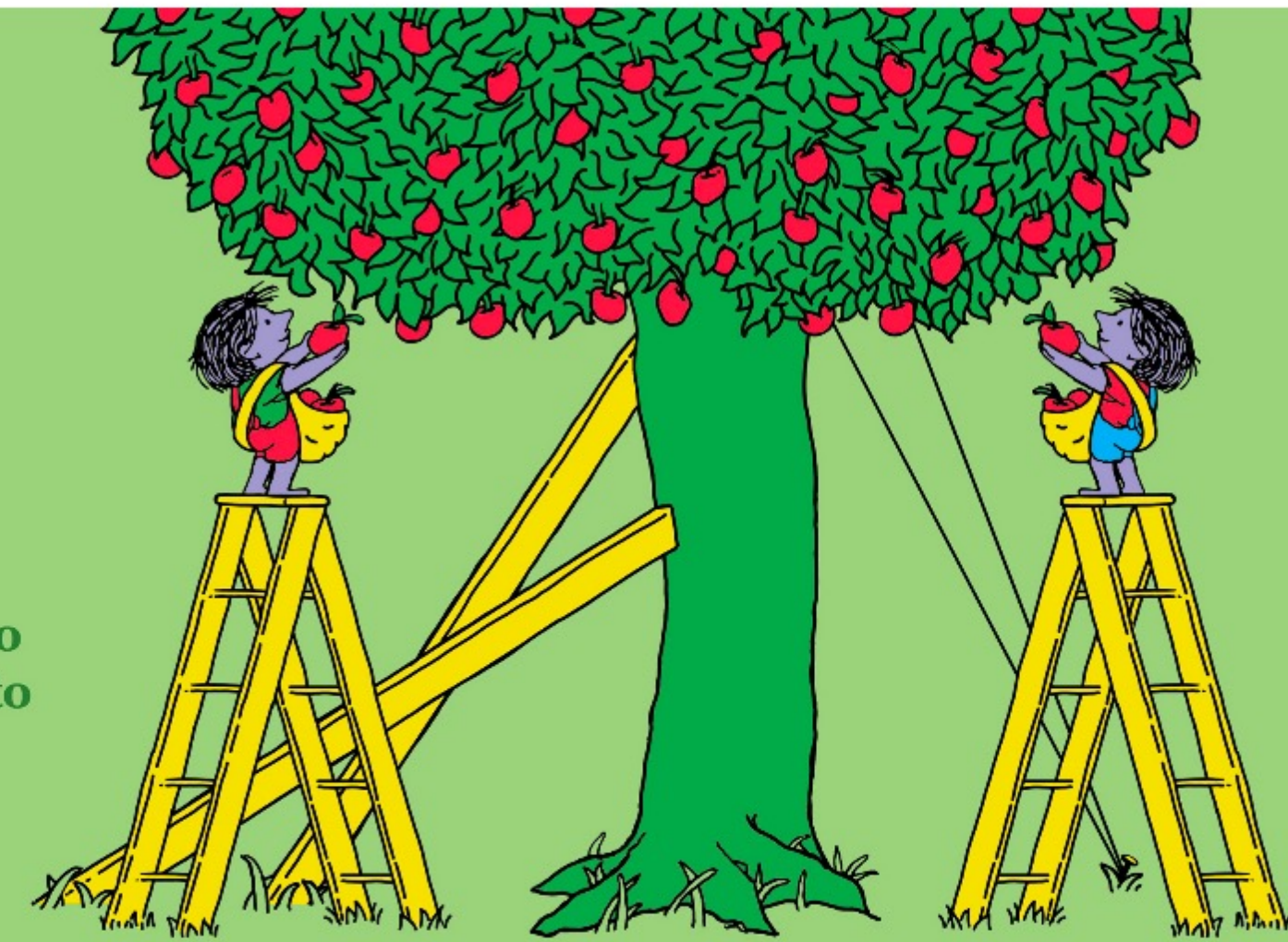
How can we improve asynchronous engagement in online learning keeping social justice in mind?

Community of inquiry model
(Garrison et al 2000)
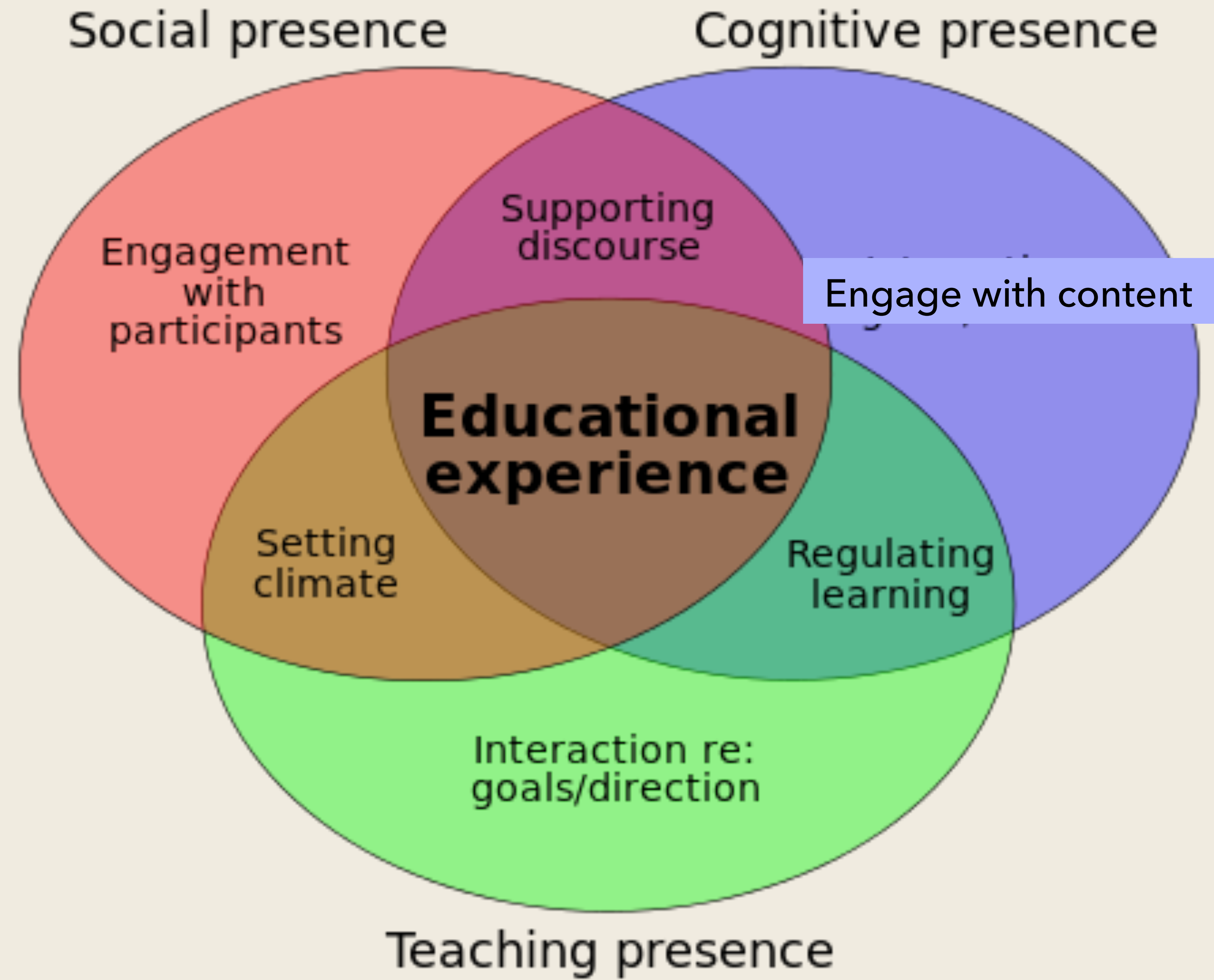
COI model revisited by Karen Costa (2022)

Social presence
Teaching presence
Cognitive presence
Regulatory presence
Existential presence
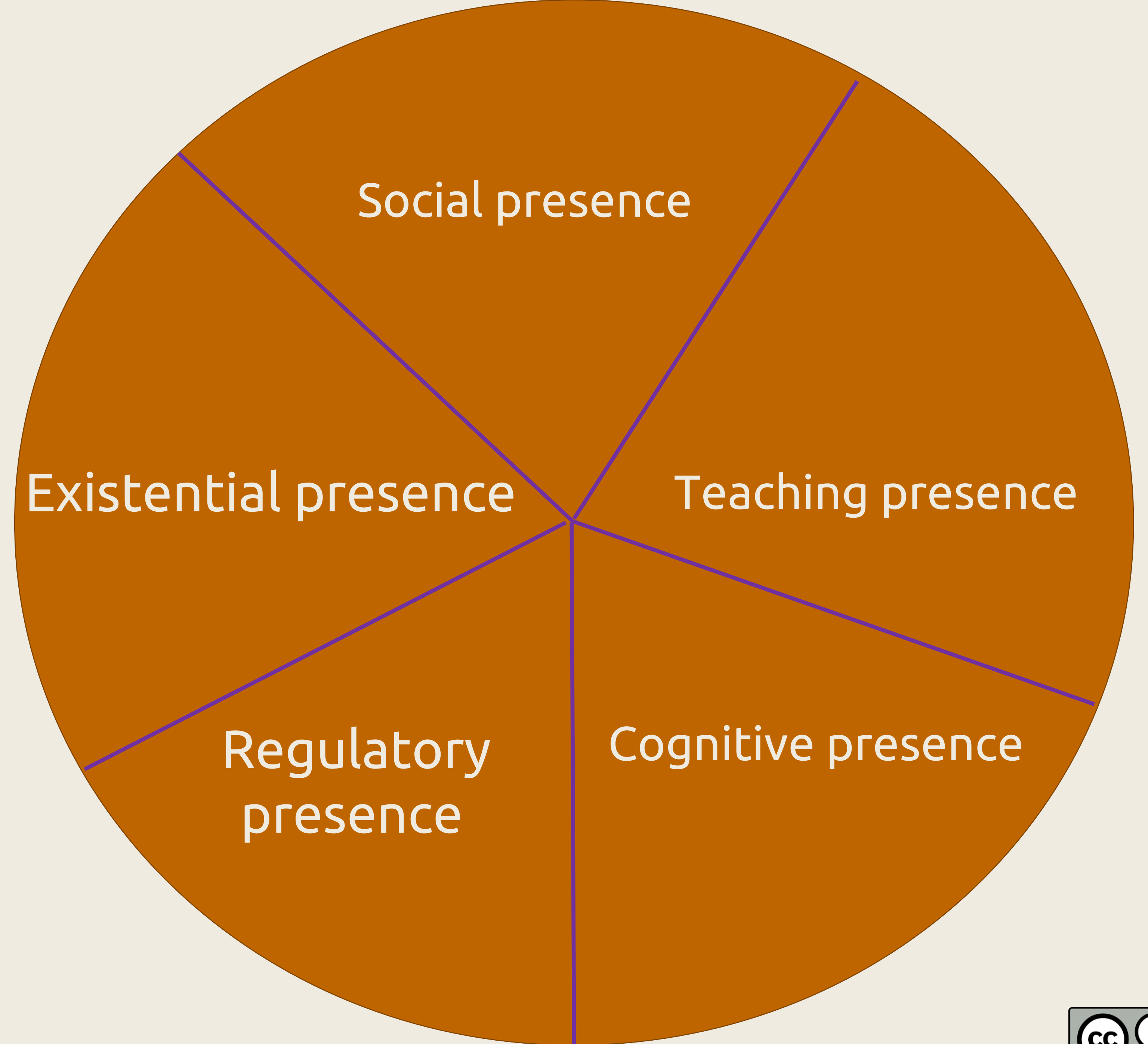
Learning worth crying about

Wonder

Ambiguity

Controversy

Posed Questions

Answers
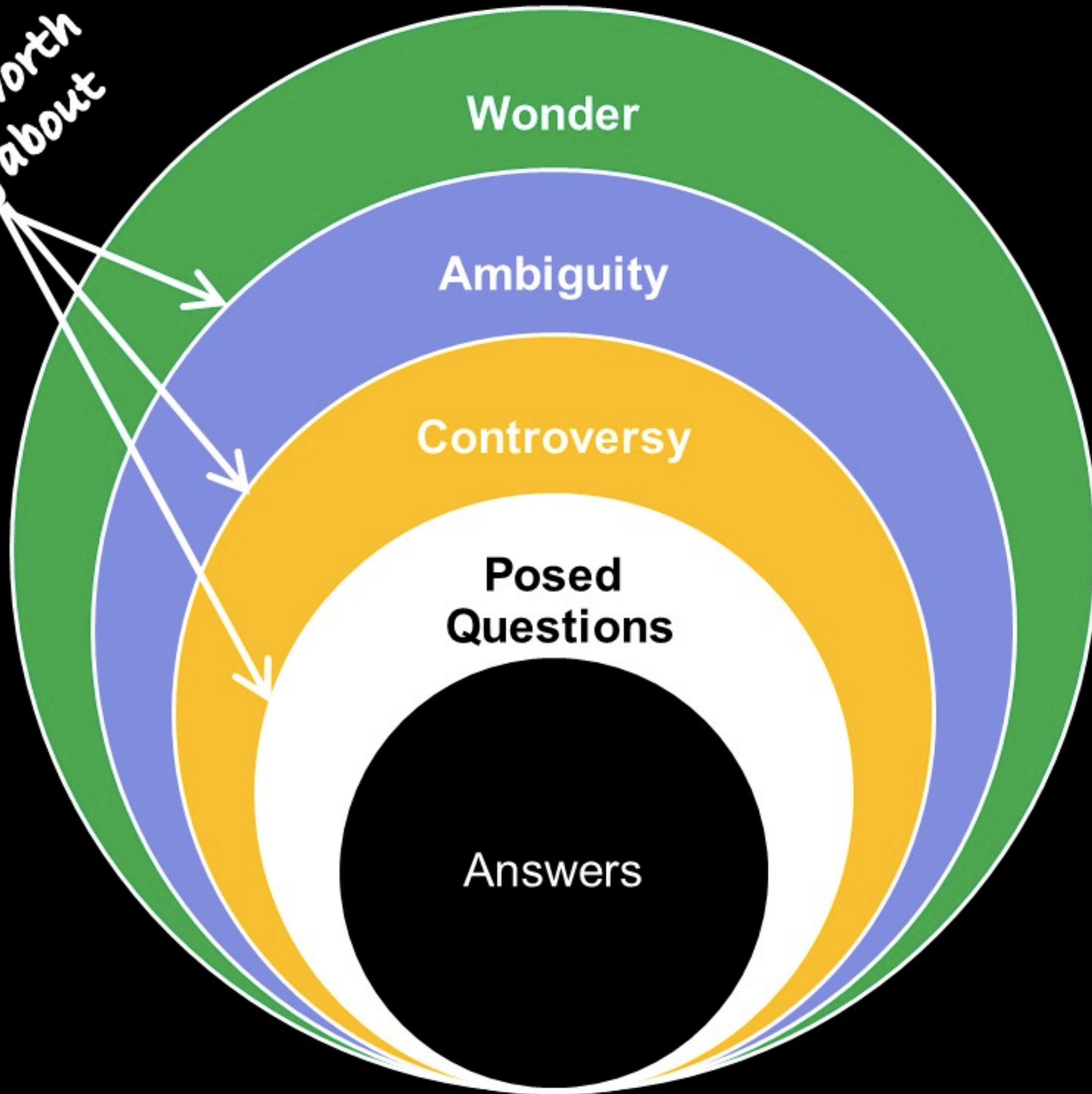
Our reflections on asynchronous student engagement in our SLPs

Getting to know your facilitators

Immediacy behaviours

Voluntary synchronous webinars

Orientation resources

Course email address

Teaching presence

Targeted messages to specific students based on LMS reports

Weekly personalised 'announcements'

Tea room: Q&A space

Prompt & caring responses to emails

Student feedback on teaching presence

"I appreciate the communication that kept on being sent as reminders to complete the course."

"I liked how the course was structured. It was very insightful and easy to navigate. Learning was surely made easy and fun with interactive videos and gamification throughout the course."

Activity completion related to teaching presence

SLP	Activity completion (% of students who completed the course, who completed the activities)
African Insights	95%
AI in 4IR	79%
SDGs	53%
Fin Lit	Not tracked

Cognitive presence

Knowledge, skills and values

Facilitator-initiated text- & video-based discussion forums

Text-based and video-based content discussion forums

Spaces for students to add content

Short videos & activities

#Course hashtag for social media

Student feedback related to cognitive presence

"I found the course to be informative and valuable. ... The course content was well-organised and presented in a clear manner, allowing me to grasp complex concepts effectively."

"The quizzes also helped to develop and enhance my critical thinking skills."

"I found the module refreshing because it challenged my preconceived notions about Africa. This exposure to new narratives and diverse experiences is eye-opening."

Activity completion related to cognitive presence

SLP	Activity completion (% of students who completed the course, who completed the activities)
Africa Insight	89%
AI in 4IR	100%
SDGs	96%
Fin Lit	100%

Social presence

Use of UDL principles

'Meet one another'

Text-based and video-based content discussion forums

Continuous asynchronous engagement after webinars

Social annotation

Heartwarmers

Student feedback on social presence

"I would say to make this course a more collaborative course, e.g., discussions and activities.."

Activity completion related to social presence

SLP	Activity completion (% of students who completed the course, who completed the activities)
Africa Insight	82%
AI in 4IR	47%
SDGs	80%
Fin Lit	75%

Self-initiated discussion forums

Regulatory presence

Reflective & self-assessing activities

ID big ideas / takeaway messages

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Student feedback related to regulatory presence

"This course helped me to understand the interconnectedness of health, social and environmental factors …Additionally, by integrating sustainability ideas into my work, I can contribute to creating a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable world for future generations."

"I have since after completion of the course, registered for UNITAR's Implementation of Core SDG Indicators for Sustainability Reporting by Companies."

"How to teach these concepts and crucial ideas in foundation phase?!"

Activity completion related to regulatory presence

SLP	Activity completion (% of students who completed the course, who completed the activities)
African Insights	66%
AI in 4IR	81%
SDGs	76%
Fin Lit	90%

Why sections

Reflect on your life in light of …

Existential presence

Student feedback related to existential presence

"Thank you so much for the insightful program! It changed my thinking in terms of how I looked at the world before attending the course and after."

"[This] course has been an eye-opening and enriching experience, providing me with a broader understanding and appreciation for Africa's diverse culture, history, and contemporary issues. I have gained valuable insights and learned positive lessons that have expanded my knowledge and worldview, and will undoubtedly inform my perspective on Africa and its people in the future."

"I'd like to find out how young people like myself, who are so driven to assist to make an impact; how can work with/for the SDG project at large."

"The better future is in our hands!"

Activity completion related to existential presence

In none of the SLPs do we track via
activity completion existential
presence

"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears" ~ Nelson Mandela

Make every day
Mandela Day!

UNIVERSITY
OF
JOHANNESBURG

List of References

Barkley EF (2010) Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty.   San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Berry LA & Kowal KB (2022) Effect of role-play in online discussions on student engagement and critical thinking. *Online Learning* 26(3): 4-21.

Costa K (2022)

Davidson-Shivers G, Rand A (2022) Asynchronous tools for interaction and collaboration. In Zawacki-Richter O, Jung I (eds) *Handbook of Open, Distance and Digital Education.*

Freire P (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Seabury Press.

Frieseman Y (2016) Developing digital empathy: A holistic approach to media literacy research methods. In Yildiz MN, Keengwe J (eds) A*dvances in media, entertainment and the arts.*: 145-160.

Garrison DR, 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.

Redmond P, Heffernan A, Abawi L, Brown A, Henderson R (2018) An online engagement framework for higher education. *Online Learning* 22(1): 183-204.

Richardson JC, Arbaugh JB, Cleveland-Innes M, Ice P, Swan KP, Garrison DR (2012) Using the community of inquiry framework to inform effective instructional design. In Moller L, Huett JB (eds)*The next generation of distance education*: 97-125.