Discussions in e-learning

Principles and Best Practice

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Our learning objectives

- Understand best practices for facilitating online learning through discussions
- Outline:
  - Understanding Discussions in Learning
  - Principles and Practices

Understanding Discussions

and their place in learning

Discussions are a best-practice, student-centered learning model with long standing pedagogical support

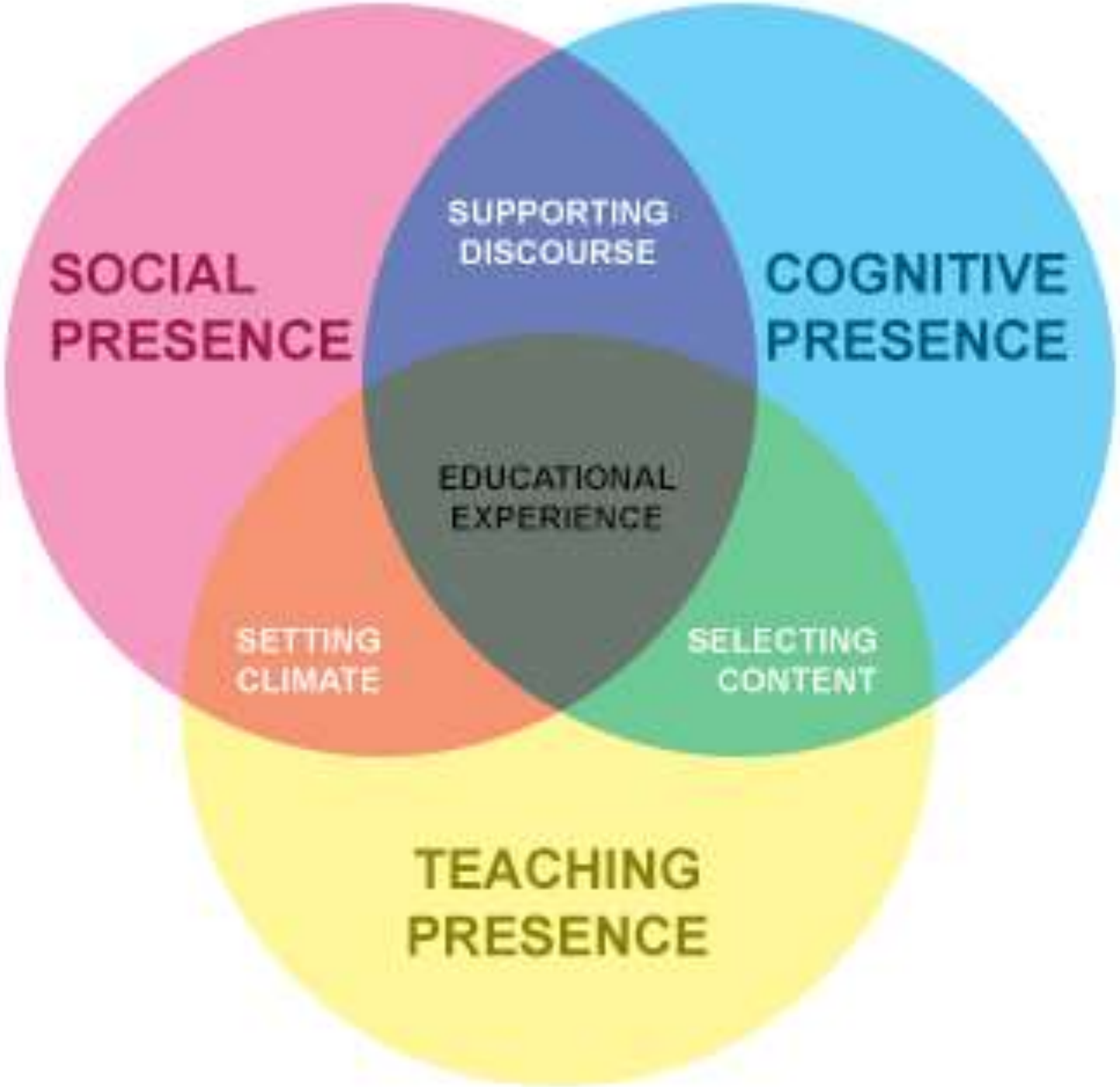
cooperative argumentative dialogue*

Socratic Method

*(Lumer, 1988)

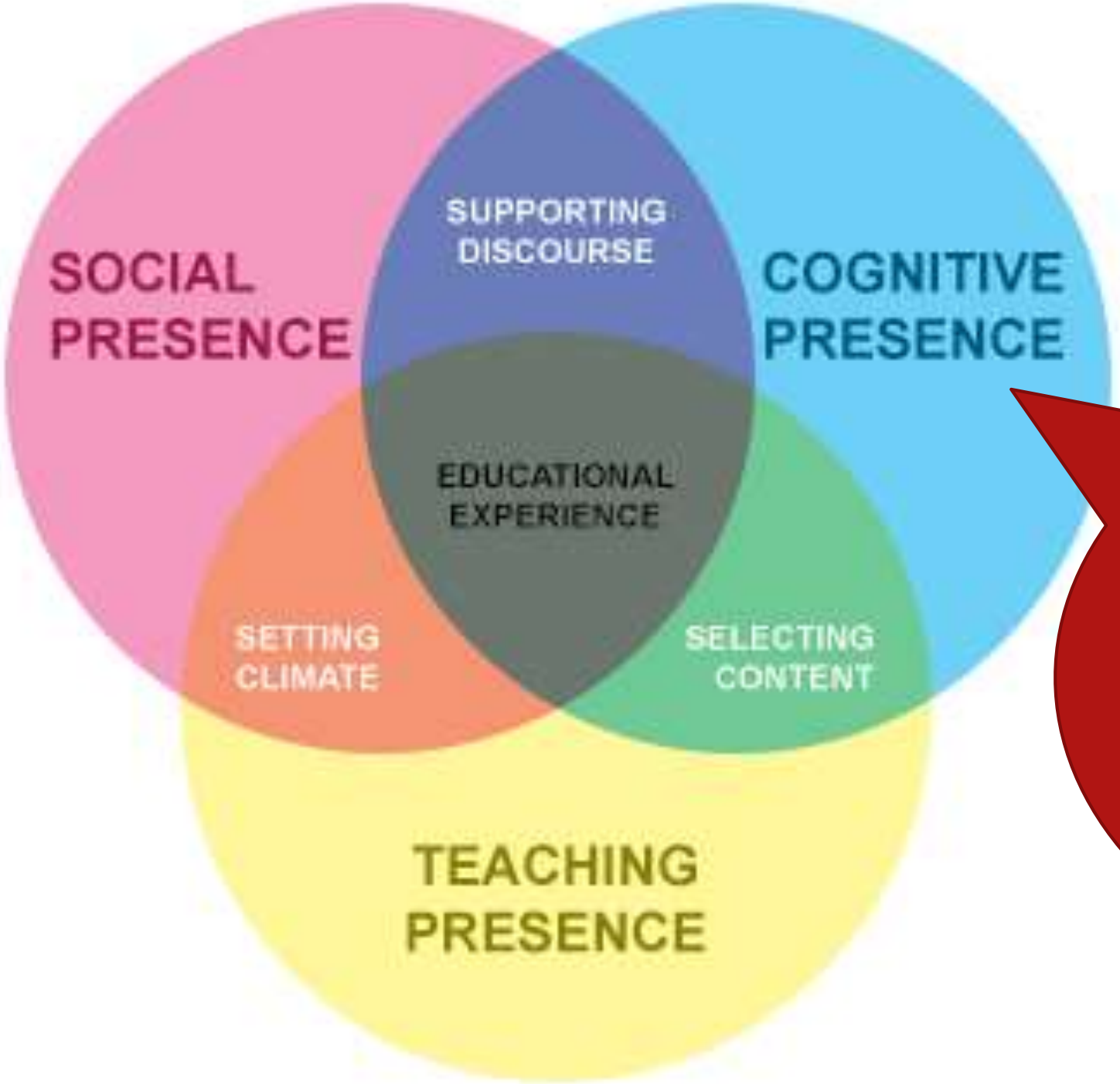
rooted in John Dewey's "Practical Inquiry" (1938)

Reflective practice



Community of Inquiry

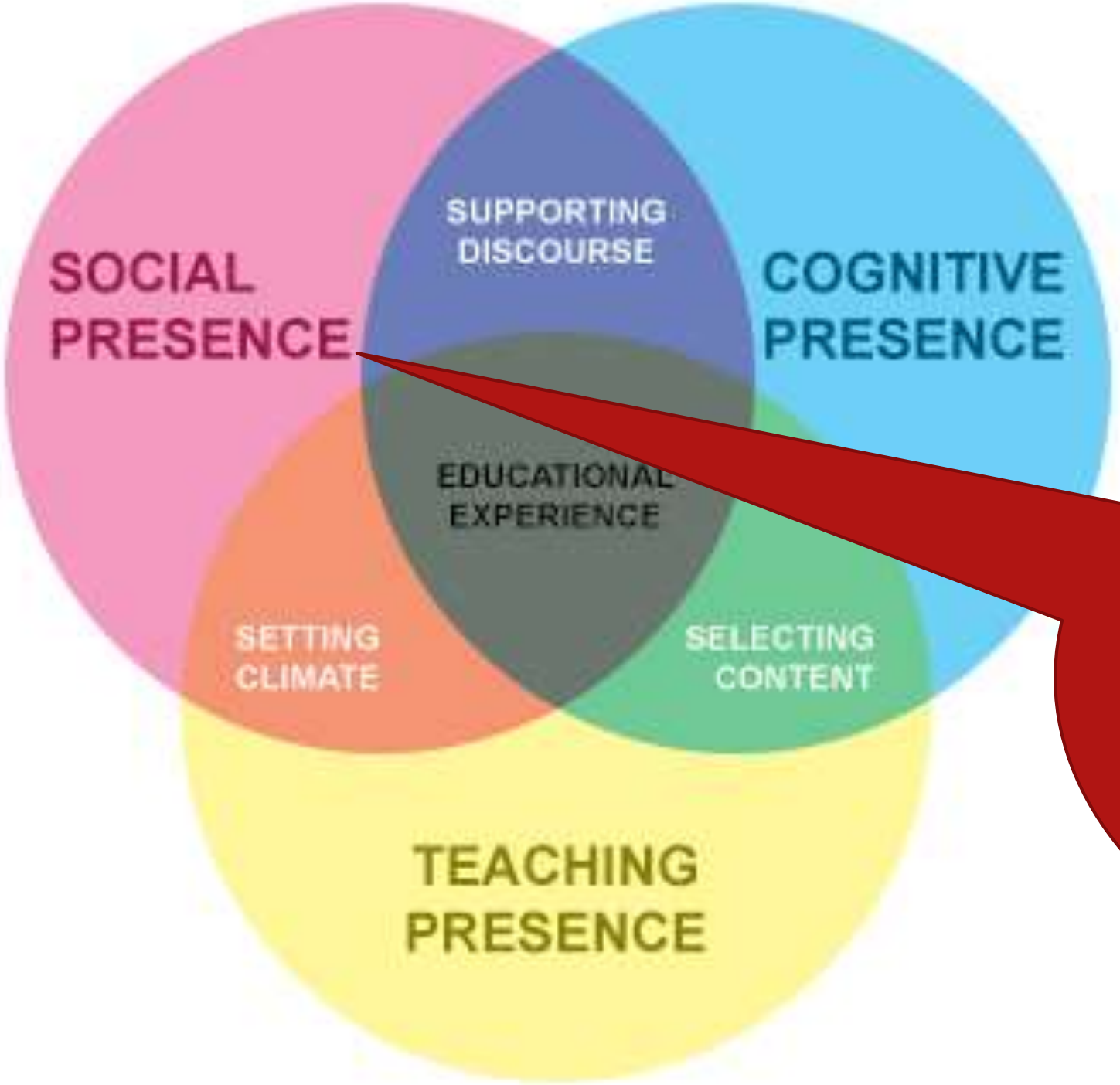
(Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 1999)



Indicators:

Sense of puzzlement
Information exchange
Connecting ideas
Applying new ideas

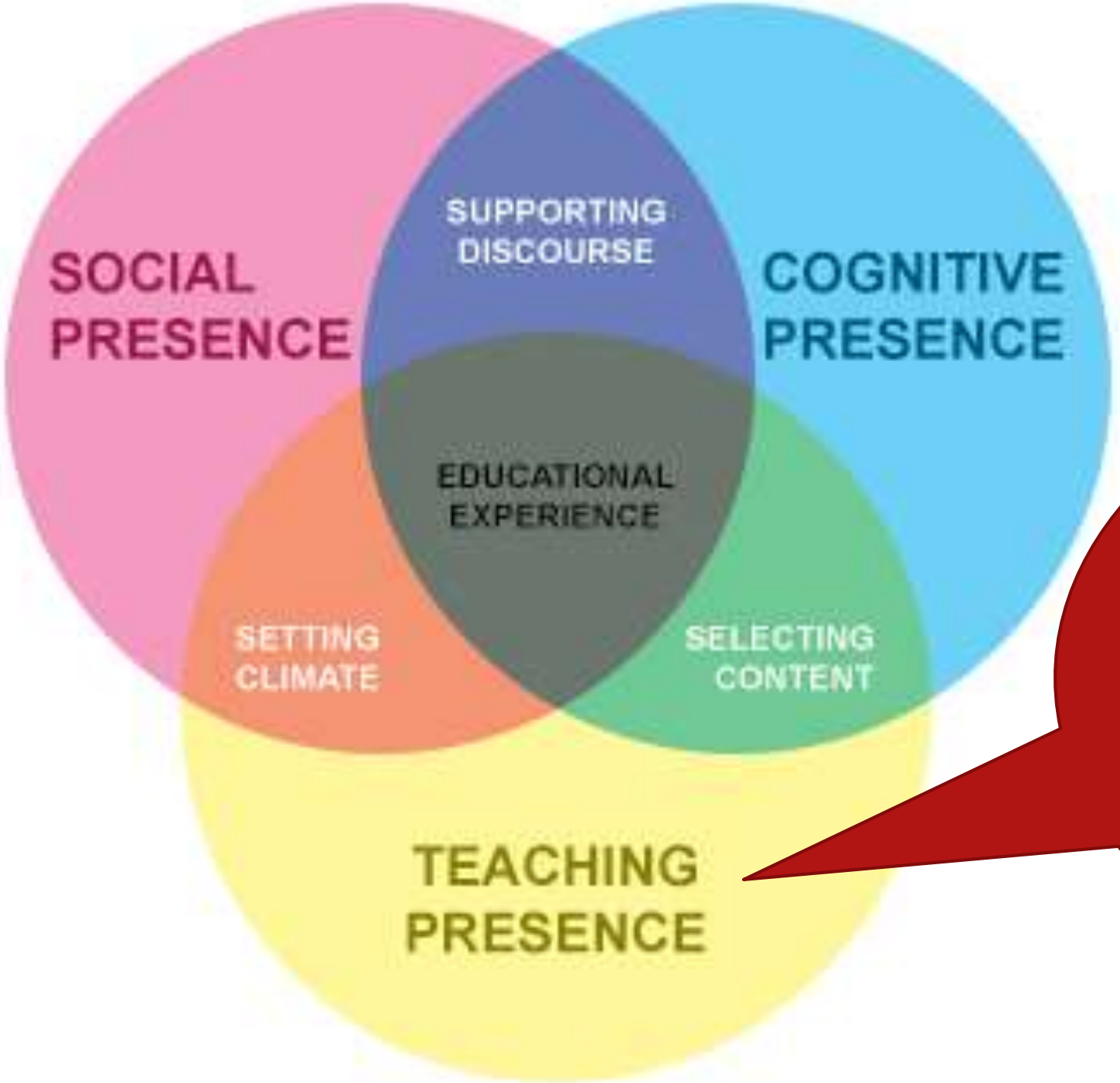
(Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 1999)



Indicators:

Emoticons
Risk-free expression
Encouraging collaboration

(Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 1999)



Indicators:

Defining & initiating discussion topics
Sharing personal meaning
Focusing discussion

(Garrison, Anderson, & Archer 1999)

Goal:
Creating an
engaged
online
learner

As a result of this increased interaction, students understand the concepts to a greater depth, develop a firmer foundation in core competencies, as well as earn a higher grade in the course.

(CRANNEY, WALLACE, ALEXANDER, & ALFANO, 2011)

Principles and Practice

- From Michelle Miller (2014) Minds online : teaching effectively with technology

PRINCIPLE:

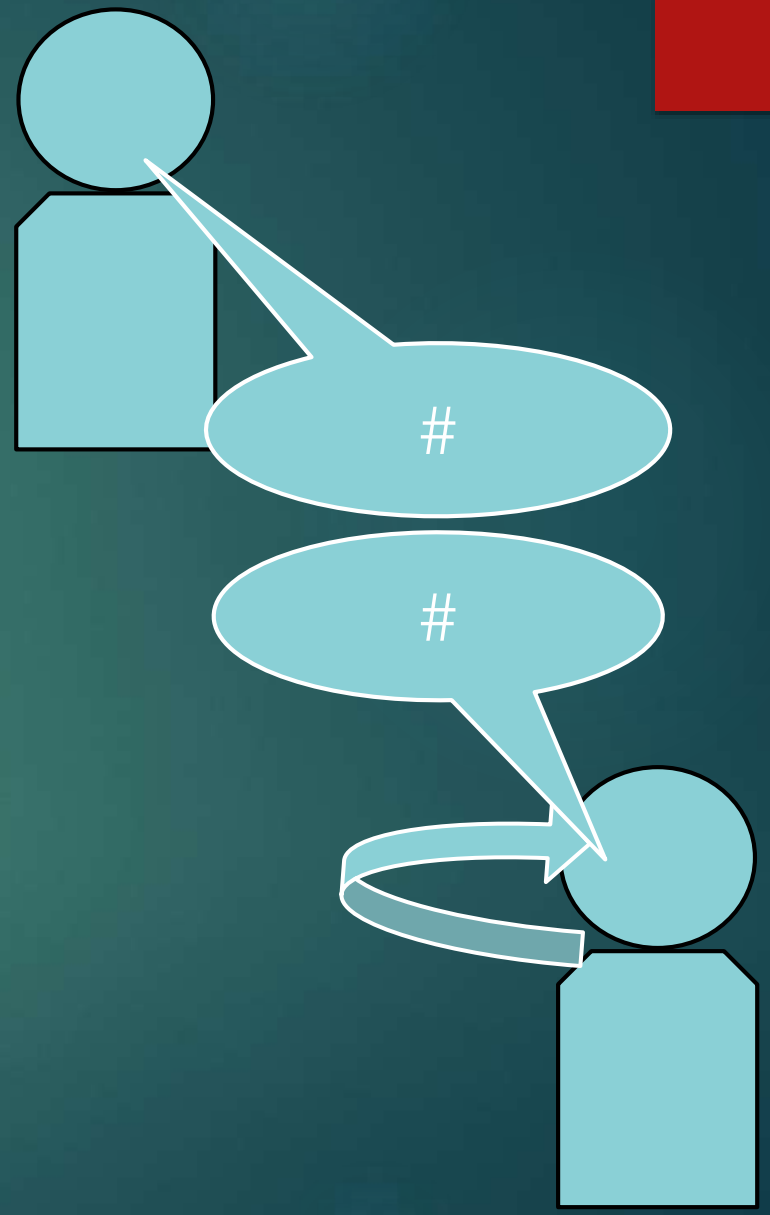
Focusing on meaning, rather than superficial qualities, promotes memory as well as understanding

PRACTICE:

Discussion assignments that require leading and/or summarizing discussion threads

PRACTICE:

Online discussions built around experiences from students' own lives



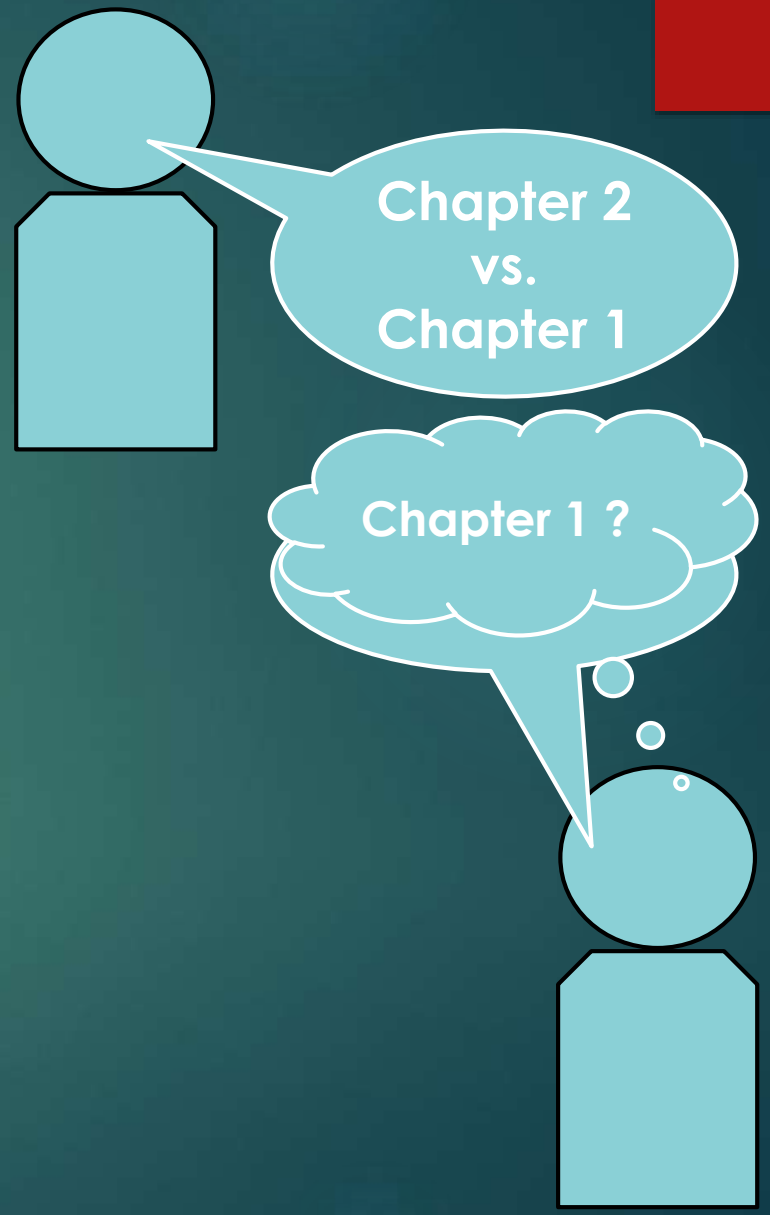
PRINCIPLE:

Memory for new information is powerfully shaped by what we already know

(WE FIT THINGS INTO OUR EXISTING FRAMEWORK)

PRACTICE:

Discussion prompts asking students to relate new information to old information

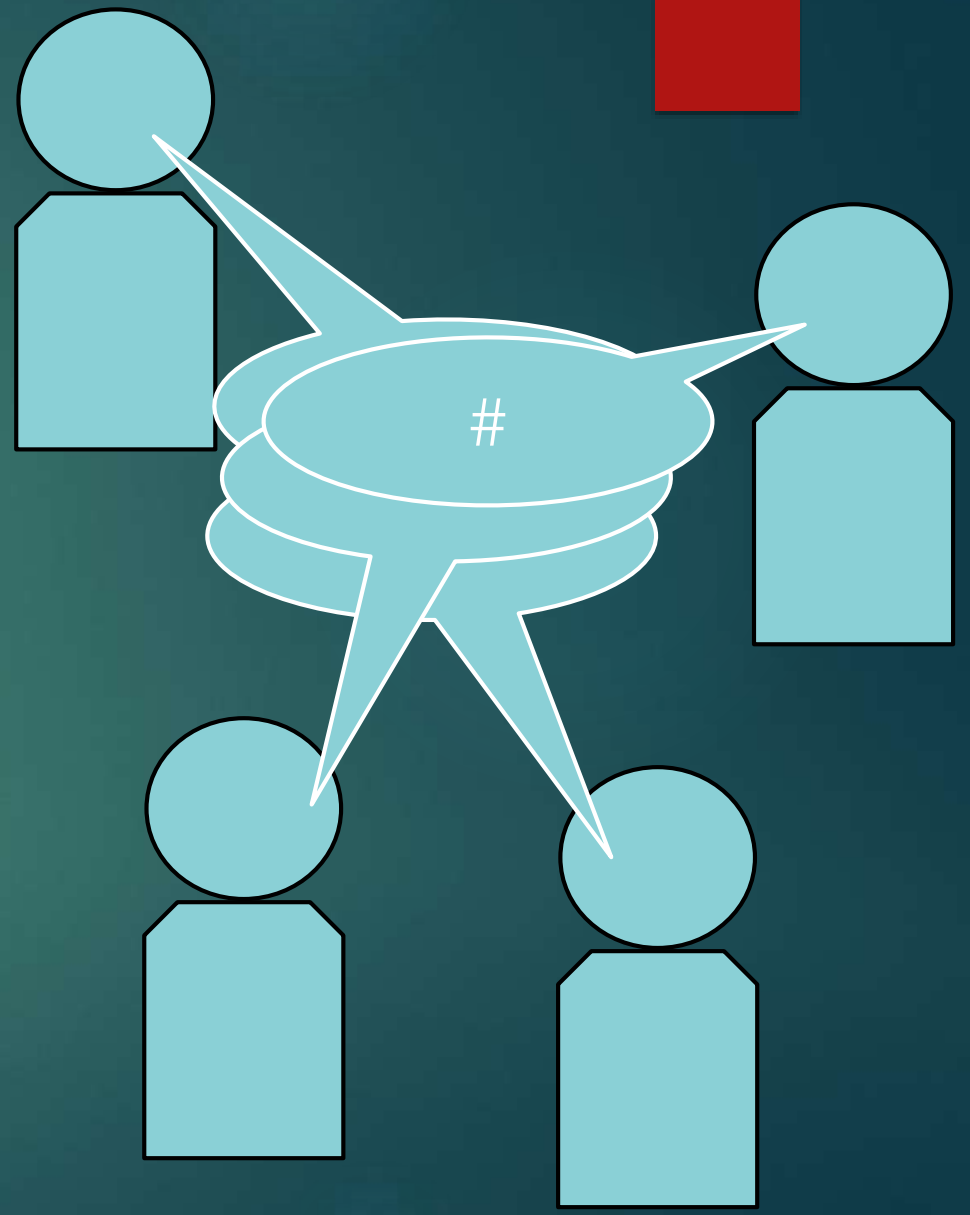


PRINCIPLE:

Discussions can be surprisingly powerful learning experiences when designed and managed the right way

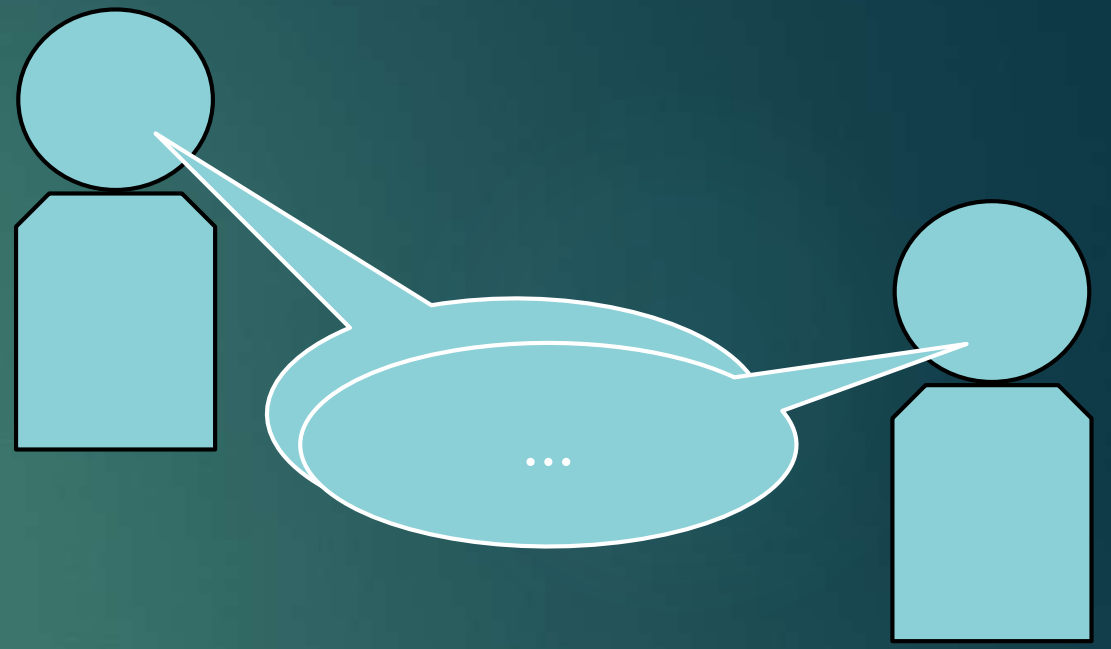
PRACTICE:

- Discussions that start and end at set times
- Short, tightly focused discussions that unfold over two weeks or less
- Icebreaker or "getting to know you" discussion threads
- Give explicit civility guidelines



PRACTICE:

Frequent “lurking” and as-needed intervention by the instructor to keep threads on track and civil



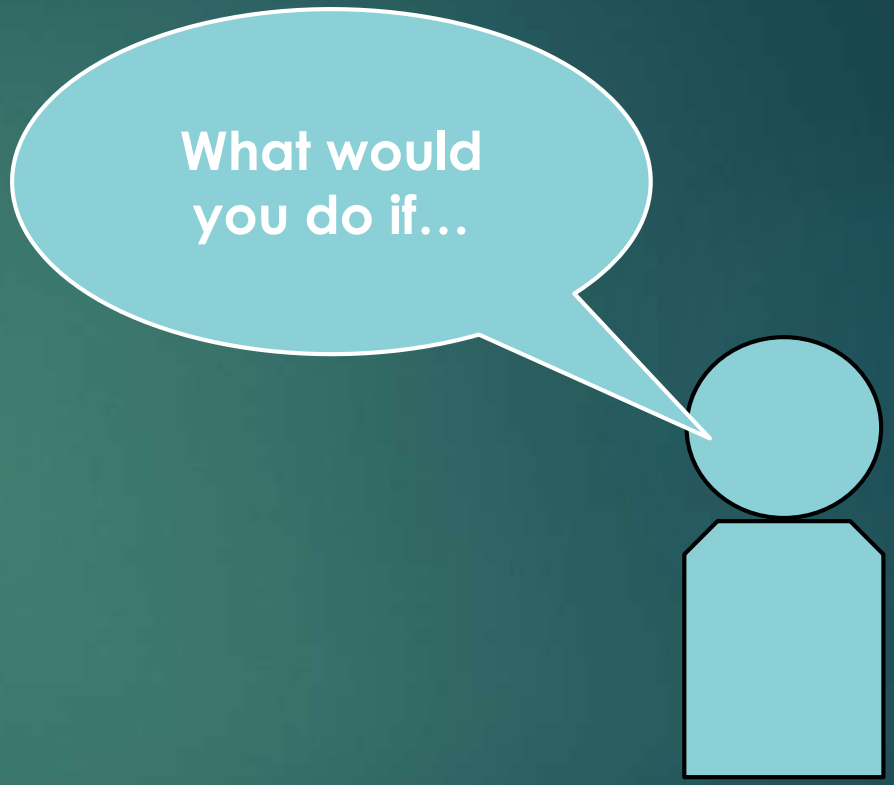
PRACTICE:

Grading rubrics for discussion posts

Criteria	Points
Posted one original thought	3
Cited source	2
Responded to two other students, deepening the discussion	5
Total	10

PRACTICE:

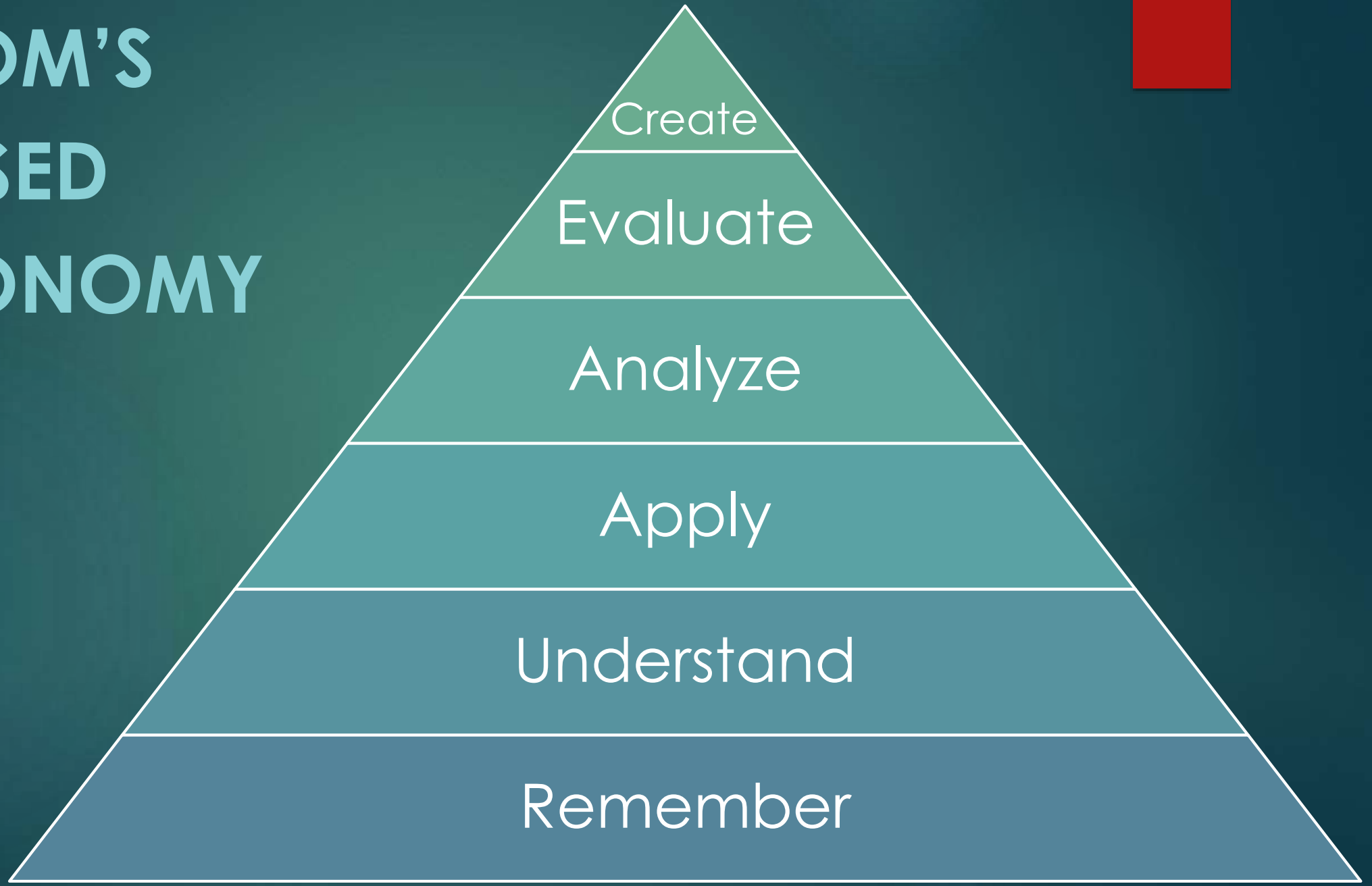
Discussions tied to structured activities such as problem-based learning or case studies



PRINCIPLE:

encouraging higher order thinking

BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY



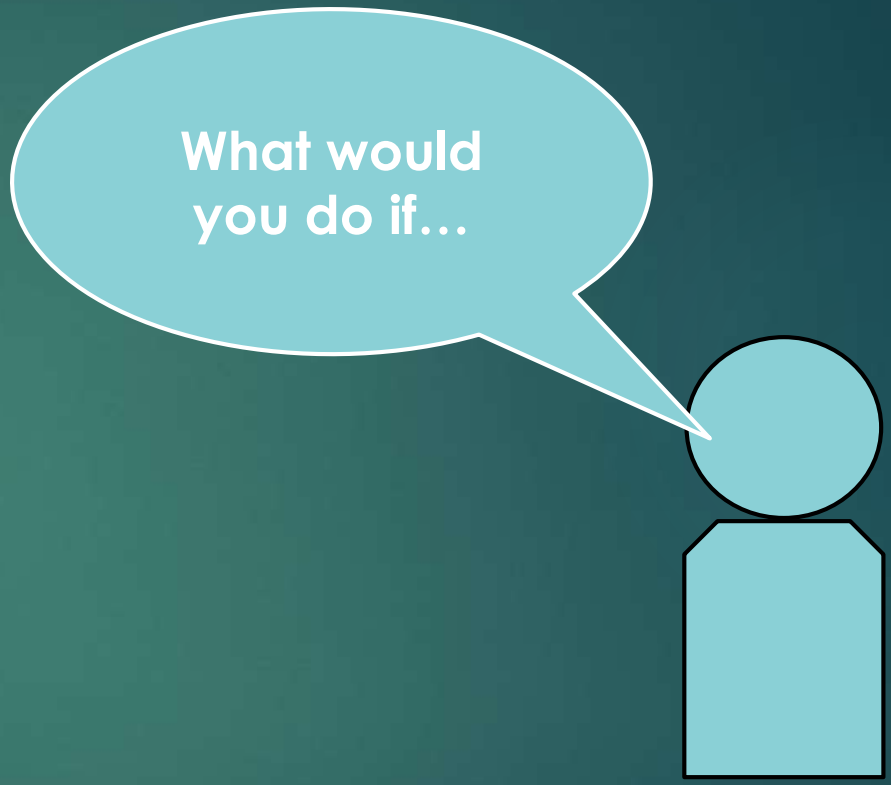
Bloom (1964)
Krathwohl (2002)

“Critical thinking abilities are enhanced by encouraging students to comment on their peers' online discussion postings. They learn to challenge their assumptions and to provide a rationale for their responses.”

(GILBERT & FLORES-ZAMBADA, 2011)

PRACTICE:

Problem based discussions

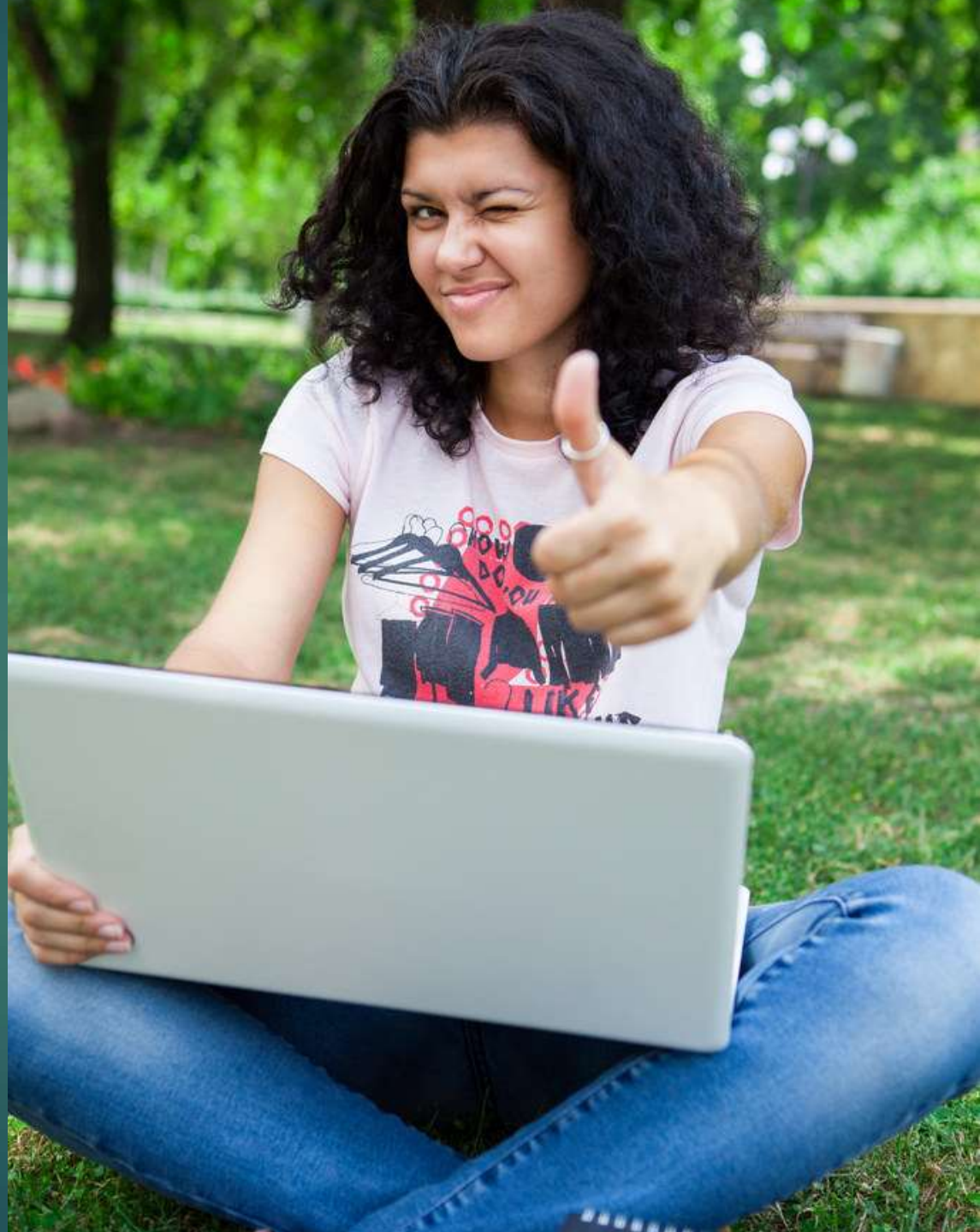


PRACTICE:

Guidelines that emphasize critical thinking and presentation of evidence

Criteria	Points
Posted one original thought	3
Cited source	2
Responded to two other students, deepening the discussion	5
Total	10

Online Discussions Work!



“in-depth online discussions help students gain a new understanding of course-related subjects, emphasizing an increased motivation due to real time interaction and feedback, as well as increased interpersonal connections”

(POWER & ST-JACQUES, 2014)

Now to practice the practice…

- Right now, create an example discussion post applying these principles and practices

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