



Facilitation

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Online Teaching and Learning

ONLINE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

3 Facilitation

You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he will continue the learning process as long as he lives. (Bedford cited in Geerdink, 2013, n.p.)

INTRODUCTION

The existence of this book is testimony to the interest in, and value of, blended learning environments. Of particular interest is the role that faculty play. This role is key to a successful blended learning environment, and a particular requirement called *facilitation of learning* is an essential piece. In contrast, blended learning experiences created by adding online access to course documentation and content material, without instructor presence and interaction, are blends of content but not learning experiences. Instructors must learn and employ the skills “to teach and learn in increasingly networked, technology-rich, digital (and face-to-face) classrooms”

(Clifford, Friesen, & Lock, 2004, p. 19); virtual classrooms become the teaching and learning spaces in blended learning.

According to Bonk, Kim, and Zeng (2004), “Blended learning is typically more complicated and multifaceted than either fully online or face-to-face learning ... instructors must know when to shift gears or add new tasks or resources and when to let the learners wander off and explore their own interests” (p. 17). This speaks to the piece of blended teaching that is facilitation—arranging and supporting learner activities and learning, in both online and face-to-face classrooms. Facilitation exists as the central activity of teaching in an educational community of inquiry that emerges from the activity between students and instructor. Facilitative actions, on the part of both the students and the instructor, create the climate, support discourse, and monitor learning such that presence can emerge and inquiry occurs. In the act of facilitation learners connect to each other and the instructor, engage with the content, are cognitively present as intellectual agents, and carry out all actions central to the development and maintenance of the learning community.

This chapter revisits the notions of teaching presence, its central elements, and how facilitation aligns with other elements of teaching presence in blended learning environments. This allows detailed consideration of the facilitation of social and cognitive presence and the principles that guide blended facilitation. Of all aspects of the Community of Inquiry framework, the activities of facilitation are the most critical; facilitation manages the overlaps between all three presences and is at the core of the dynamics of a community of inquiry.

TEACHING PRESENCE REVISITED

Teaching presence is explained as the effort and activity around the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes in learning communities created to foster inquiry, for the purpose

of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning. It is the central element around which other activities in a community of inquiry manoeuvre. The three elements of teaching presence—design and organization, facilitation, and direct instruction—are distinct but not mutually exclusive. *Design and organization* must include activity appropriate to the facilitation of a community, a constructed learning environment, and the engagement of students and teachers and learners. *Facilitation* is the facet of teaching presence that ensures that social presence is established among community members and, in turn, that cognitive processes are directed to personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile outcomes. Facilitation remains distinct from direct instruction in that too much domination on the part of the instructor will intimidate learners and diminish engagement. *Direct instruction*, however, provides necessary leadership for content accuracy and boundaries. Facilitation, much richer in nuance and engagement, is the action of choice for as long as the learners are reaching the learning outcomes.

Facilitation is described as the necessary support and guidance provided for learners. While chiefly required for the facilitation of reflection and discourse, facilitation in a blended community of inquiry becomes multitudinously complex. First, it requires that all the necessary components outlined for facilitation of an online community of inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001) be appropriately created face-to-face. Second, it requires that the key overlaps between the necessary presences of a community of inquiry—setting climate, supporting discourse, and monitoring and regulating learning—be appropriately facilitated both face-to-face and online. And third, through facilitation the online community of inquiry will be experienced as linked and contiguous with the face-to-face community; while they can emerge separately, in a blended learning environment they must converge as one.

It is important to note that the term *teaching presence* refers to the action and role of teaching, and not uniquely to the instructor of record. Facilitators must acknowledge and support the role of teacher

among students, when appropriate. Students in a community of inquiry are engaged in a way that fosters self-regulation and monitoring, of themselves and fellow learners. It is for this reason that we refer to this element as *teaching* presence and not *teacher* presence. In other words, everyone has the opportunity to contribute by way of facilitation and direct instruction. In a blended environment, the faculty member, as facilitator, must provide the opportunity and allow similarly for such peer interaction and teaching face-to-face as well as online. The challenge, of course, is allowing for such activity while staying connected enough to redirect any inappropriate actions on the part of any particular student. This issue can be pre-empted with action to set an appropriate, respectful climate at the beginning of the course.

PRINCIPLES OF FACILITATION

The combination or blending of online and face-to-face interactions results in a new learning environment that necessitates significant role adjustments for instructors; there is a need to understand the concept of teaching presence for deep and meaningful learning outcomes. While we present this as something necessary for blended learning environments, it is, in fact, an imperative for education in a new society (Cleveland-Innes & Garrison, 2011; Keller, 2008). The following principles of facilitation for social and cognitive presence in a blended learning environment are part of this required change.

SOCIAL PRESENCE

For students to be socially present they must have the opportunity to interact. The importance of social and academic interaction in the experience of students, first socially, and the impact on deep learning through cognitive presence, is well established (Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005).

PRINCIPLE: *Establish community and cohesion.*

A community of inquiry emerges and maintains itself through the purposeful engagement, interaction, and relationships between members of the group. The facilitator begins the work of each community by encouraging, modeling, and supporting these activities, such that each member of the group may become familiar with, and possibly find a link to, other members of the group. The strength and tenor of these links becomes a measure of the amount of cohesion found within each group; this determines whether the group becomes a community or not. The more developmental and meaningful the engagement and interaction, the stronger the links, the greater the cohesion, and, once community is established, the more likely deep and meaningful learning will occur. In the initial meeting of a group of students, the facilitator plays a key role in ensuring that community develops. In a blended environment, this requires modeling and encouraging such activity both face-to-face and online.

It would be a significant error to assume that social presence does not have to be fostered and managed face-to-face. In reality, it may more difficult and fraught with more challenges than being socially present online. This is particularly true in large classes; hence the benefit of blending online interaction in support of the community that also meets face-to-face.

Social presence requires that one present oneself, socially and emotionally, in honest and valid ways. In front of the classroom, instructors present varying demeanours, across time and people. In the all-important overlap between teaching presence and social presence, setting climate occurs. First, in the hands of the role of the teacher, this requires that the instructor set the tone of openness, fairness, safety, and debate. Development of such a climate and community can be fostered in both the face-to-face and online learning environments of a blended course or program. Table 3.1 presents a series of strategies for facilitating social presence in the face-to-face and online components.

TABLE 3.1. Facilitating social presence face-to-face and online

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FACE-TO FACE</i>	<i>ONLINE</i>
Provide opportunities for initial introductions and ongoing social interaction.	As indicated previously, this may appear challenging where student numbers are large. First, acknowledge to the class that interaction is important and will be particularly fostered online. Second, provide the opportunity for small group interaction in at least the first few classes, continuously if possible. The less “talking head” (transmission by the instructor) the higher the engagement.	Ask for and create the appropriate virtual space for introductions, including text and photos, audio, and/or video clips. Be explicit about the need to get to know each other, to encourage social interaction online (but separate from academic discussion).
Set agreed-upon, shared norms for operating together in the learning community.	This is best done in the first class, after some one-to-one interaction among students has occurred. Ask students to reflect for a moment on their most valuable and satisfying classroom experiences, and consider what informal rules or norms were at work in this setting. Ask for suggestions and document them. Process for the following types of group norms:	Ensure students understand norms set face-to-face apply online, but clarify any unique implementation. How many, and what type of, posts characterize being there. How much is too much? Post agreed-upon norms, with clarification, in the virtual classroom. Remind students of the norms when necessary.

1. Everyone shows up.
2. Everyone participates.
3. Start on time.
4. Respect the airtime.
5. Respect individual perspectives.
6. Agree to disagree.
7. No hurtful, hateful comments about individuals or groups.

Once documented, ask if anyone has significant concerns about any of the norms. Process and reword as necessary. Tell the students the same norms apply online, and the list will be posted in the virtual classroom. Remind students of the norms for each class early in the term; provide reminders when necessary.

Discuss the unique nature of each learning mode and the blending of such.

Be explicit about the similarities and differences between the face-to-face and virtual environments. Be clear about expectation regarding presence in both. Outline any marks assigned to presence or participation, where appropriate. Process for any questions or concerns.

Post about, and discuss online, the similarities and differences between the face-to-face and virtual environments. Reiterate expectations regarding presence in both. Post online any marks assigned to presence or participation, where appropriate.

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FACE-TO FACE</i>	<i>ONLINE</i>
<p>Outline required activities and arrange support for students concerned about role requirements.</p>	<p>Document questions and concerns. Students experience significant role adjustment when learning online, which will be no less significant when working in a blended environment. Discussing these possible issues face-to-face, ahead of significant engagement online, may waylay such concerns and increase adjustment and comfort working online. Data suggests that online students are challenged by the new role identity of learner, the use of the learning technology, the design of new learning activities such as text-based discussions, the increased level of interaction, and the role of online instructor (Cleveland-Innes, Garrison & Kinsel, 2008).</p>	<p>Discuss the possibility that students may experience significant role adjustment when learning online. Provide opportunity for students to state any concerns about the online environment —or anything related to the course. Create a FAQ (frequently asked questions) area online to present information about the technology and working online.</p>
<p>Discuss the unique nature of each learning mode and the blending of such.</p>	<p>Traditionally, social interaction is frowned upon in face-to-face classrooms (no whispering or passing notes in class!). Online environments provide the opportunity to allow for social interaction separate from the content-based, academic discussions.</p>	<p>Separate discussions areas that relate strictly to social discussions and community development, and forums related to the content and key questions related to the material and learning objectives. Early in the course, be explicit about these expectations.</p>

	<p>Provide opportunities for students to introduce themselves face-to-face if possible. Emphasize that social interaction will be allowed, even encouraged, in appropriate areas or discussion boards online. As community develops, students will use pre-class and post-class time to greet and converse with each other.</p>	
<p>Provide explicit directions for all course activities; outline and discuss course content, skill and activity goals, and expectations.</p>	<p>Use early classes' face-to-face time to outline and answer questions about activities, readings, assignments, and schedules. Create an explicit syllabus with detailed outcomes, expectations, assignments, and timelines. This document can be handed out in paper and posted online.</p>	<p>Post questions and answers online that emerged face-to-face about activities, readings, assignments, and schedules. Post the explicit syllabus with detailed outcomes, expectations, assignments, and timelines.</p>
<p>Be clear about learner choice and flexibility.</p>	<p>Where possible, provide learner choice in activity, assignments, content, and leadership. Be clear about these opportunities in the first class.</p>	<p>Be clear about online learner choice in activity, assignments, content, and leadership. For example, provide opportunities to facilitate discussion, post questions of interest and interesting and valuable resources related to the course subject.</p>

STRATEGY	FACE-TO FACE	ONLINE
Provide activities for instructors and students to share experiences and support one another.	Arrange opportunities for instructor-student interaction—one-on-one and group based—for social and academic interaction. Interaction between student and instructor fosters trust and reduces barriers to learning. Be present socially, as a real and affective person. As community develops over time, social interaction will fold into academic discourse (Akyol, Vaughan & Garrison, 2011).	Use synchronous and asynchronous tools to support instructor-student interaction – one-on-one and group based – for social and academic interaction. Arrange virtual office hours for synchronous chat. Ensure students know how to use these tools. Be present online socially, as a real and affective person.

COGNITIVE PRESENCE

Facilitating social interaction fosters engagement and a sense of trust, safety, and familiarity such that social presence may emerge; this is central to setting the climate for rigorous debate and discourse and collaborative activity. Pushing beyond social interaction to academic interaction and critical discourse moves the community from social presence to cognitive presence and into deep and meaningful learning.

PRINCIPLE: *Establish inquiry dynamics (purposeful inquiry).*

The inquiry process is both embedded in, and an outcome of, a cohesive community of learners. The inquiry dynamics are the engagement and interaction at multiple levels of complexity and meaning. The practical inquiry process, fundamental to cognitive presence, requires increasing amounts of cognitive effort and complexity. This process of changing complexity must be facilitated

through appropriate discourse—from triggering event, exploration, and integration, to resolution. Facilitation is most critical in the earliest stages of interaction; direct instruction becomes more important as complexity increases. In other words, facilitation is necessary to set in motion the inquiry dynamics, but direct instruction may be employed where facilitation of discourse no longer moves the inquiry to integration and resolution.

The opportunity for increased interaction, timely reflection, and continuous debate online provides a very supportive environment for inquiry dynamics. The following indicators of facilitation can be used to support inquiry face-to-face and online:

1. Maintain a comfortable climate for learning.
2. Focus the discussion on specific issues.
3. Identify areas of agreement/disagreement.
4. Seek to reach consensus/understanding.
5. Encourage, acknowledge, and reinforce contributions.
6. Draw in participants, prompting discussion.
7. Assess and make explicit the efficacy of the process.
8. Refer to resources, e.g., textbook, articles, Internet, personal experiences.
9. Summarize the discussion.

These strategies, and others, can be used to support required facilitation of cognitive presence. Table 3.2 presents strategies for the face-to-face and online component.

TABLE 3.2. Facilitating cognitive presence face-to-face and online

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FACE-TO FACE</i>	<i>ONLINE</i>
Facilitation is based on collaboration and discourse; use collaborative learning	Inquiry dynamics are supported through questions that trigger use of subject matter.	<i>Discourse</i> refers to the dialogic interaction characterizing online discussion. To make

*STRATEGY**FACE-TO FACE**ONLINE*

principles in small group discussion and joint projects.

Triggering events must be preceded by attention to the required content for considering answers to the question or curious attention to the material. The instructor can bring readings, and other self-regulated student activity, to life by bringing attention to key points. This can be done with visuals, stories, questions, problems, and presentation of information. Collaboration of learning activity can include instructor to large group (e.g., asking questions, showing visuals for analysis, showing video clips for discussion). It can also include group work, with groups that include or exclude instructor input. Collaborative learning can extend beyond triggers to exploration and integration, and eventually to resolution (e.g., what will/might/should occur?).

discourse collaborative requires that the instructor move out of the role of expert and into the role of process leader and learning support. Link student comments to the content, to examples, and to each other. Create small groups of discussion and the opportunity for joint projects in assignments and activities.

Model and encourage responsiveness and immediacy behaviours in interactions with students.

Show up early and ready to lead the class. Be responsive to students with eye contact, nods, smiles, and interaction. Attend to any queries

Be regularly present online without taking over the discussion. Rather than respond to each individual post, provide synthesis and encouragement.

	or concerns right away, even if it is just to make a date to explore the question or issue further.	
Model and encourage affective expression by sharing experiences and beliefs in discussions.	Recent findings indicate the presence of emotion in education environments, particularly in relation to achievement motivation and engagement. Affective expression is acceptable and possibly beneficial, in appropriate amounts.	Be real and affective, rather than cool, calculating, and objective. The online environment requires accommodation for the lack of non-verbal cues that transmit information about tenor and emotion. Share your thoughts, feelings and experiences – where appropriate to the context and content.
Share the facilitation of discourse by having students summarize discussions.	Enhance the possibility of cognitive engagement by allowing students to lead discussions and/or present content. Share the lead in class.	This is somewhat trickier online; if students are off the mark in their summations, it is in text and semi-permanent. Monitor and make corrections with care.
Model and encourage critical questioning, divergent thinking, and multiple perspectives in discussion through provocative, open-ended questions.	Ask reflective and critical questions during class: So, what does this mean? What's missing in this? What else might be influencing this?	Online, you can also ask reflective and critical questions. Here the link to the material becomes somewhat more important as students can't ask for clarification and get an immediate response. Open-ended, abstract questions can be augmented with clear reference to content or examples.

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FACE-TO FACE</i>	<i>ONLINE</i>
Model and request practical applications of knowledge and/or formulate and resolve a problem in small group discussions.	Using a problem-based approach, provide opportunities to explore, apply, and integrate subject matter content to well-known, meaningful issues – in small, medium, and large group activities.	The above supports this strategy as well. Use questions that go beyond the immediate factual knowledge into practical application. Text can get tedious here; use audio or video inserts wherever possible. Facilitate to resolution – what do the students think could or should be done?
Encourage and support the progression of inquiry in discussion and small group activities through triggering events, exploration, and integration to resolution.	Make the cognitive progression explicit. Assist students through layered activities that build on each other through triggering events, exploration, and integration, to resolution. Teach committed relativism; have students take a position and defend it, knowing that there are multiple perspectives and layers of authoritative knowledge (Perry, 1981).	Again, make the cognitive progression explicit. Layer the discussion so it builds through triggering events, exploration, and integration, to resolution. Reemphasize committed relativism; have students take a position and defend it, knowing that there are multiple perspectives (Perry, 1981).
Use development or scaffolding of both content and processes to support behaviours that move discourse through integration to resolution.	Use questions, debate, quotations, and evidence in varying degrees to demonstrate to students multiple strategies of argument.	Along with Perry's notions of committed relativism are important tenets of argumentation. Post questions and encourage debate with sound evidence in varying degrees to demonstrate to students multiple strategies of argument.

<i>STRATEGY</i>	<i>FACE-TO FACE</i>	<i>ONLINE</i>
Use discussion summaries to identify steps in the knowledge creation process.	Reflect back to students their important points about process and content – what worked, what needs work.	This is easier to do online! However, summaries must be inclusive (try to find something from posts by each student) and corrections carefully made.
Use discussion material to illuminate course content and encourage students to incorporate content from discussions in their assignments.	Identify the link back to course content; use course material with additional support from student experiences and additional resources.	Discussion forums become course content, when accurate and academic. Make sure students recognize and use valuable forums in their learning activities and assignments.
Use peer review to engage students in a cycle of practical inquiry.	Once the practical inquiry cycle is understood and is in use, allow students to provide this same level of feedback to each other. Observe and support. Maximize collaborative activities, such as problem-solving tasks, projects, and small-group discussions. Over time, reduce instructor presence in discussion and increasingly facilitate student-led academic discourse.	This is also a little trickier online. Review norms of operation so peer review is done with respect and support. Provide opportunity for students to facilitate their own forums. Maximize collaborative activities – problem-solving tasks, projects, and small-group discussion.
Maximize virtual connection and collaboration by including synchronous communications; chat, collaborative		Text can get very dry! Use the technology to augment interaction but ensure students are competent or adjusting – don't assume all can

whiteboards, interactive video, blogs, wikis, YouTube, Flickr, MySpace, etc.

use, or are comfortable using, any technology tools.

FACILITATING THE BLEND

The face-to-face learning environment has long been dominated by a lecture format, with students passively listening and instructors presenting. This has been criticized as an ineffective way to facilitate learning, and many strategies have been suggested to change this. The opportunity for interaction, discussion, and debate in the online environment has provided more evidence of the value of such activities.

Discussion is not left for the online environment. The notion of blending learning environments through the combination of learning activities face-to-face and virtually is discussed in other places in this book. This review of facilitation in blended environments considers that equal weight, with differing actions, be given to both face-to-face and virtual environments. We share two key critical strategies: make explicit links from activities in one mode to the other, and, where possible, use audio/video clips of face-to-face activity to link to activity online. In other words, make reference in the face-to-face environment current and key activities occurring online, and vice-versa. This mends any seam that may occur between two environments, making the community seamless.

It may be difficult to think of blended facilitation as performing the same action in each environment. In fact, this may not be possible, or desired. However, the desired outcomes related to creating social presence and cognitive presence must be considered as necessary in each environment. In other words, we cannot expect that learners who socially and cognitively present online will also do so when meeting face-to-face. The opposite is also true. This means that, while the instructional activity may or may not be the same,

facilitation of each presence must be attended to in each environment, and in the notion of the blend. While it is not necessary to do the same thing in each environment – in fact, this may be difficult – doing some of the same in each environment with explicit reference to the activities at other times and in the other format provides continuity.

It may be that we know more about how to create social and cognitive presence online than face-to-face. This is because of the opportunity for time-independent interaction; learners and the instructor can offer ideas and considerations when, and for as long as, they like. Facilitation strategies that can be variously employed face-to-face or online have been described in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative communities emerge, and are sustained, through shared purpose, joint activity, and interaction. These commonalities must be identified, illuminated, and fostered through the leadership of the teacher to facilitate these aspects of community. It is through facilitation that social presence emerges and cognitive presence evolves.