Face-to-Face Communication and Computer Mediated Learning: Building Communities with Social Presence

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Blackboard. Lecture Capture. ScribeNotes. Turnitin.com. Wikis. Blogs. Videoblogging. Podcasts. Google Apps.(e.g. Google Talk; Google Docs; Google Reader). Ning. E-Portfolios. Horizon Wimba. Skype. Slide Share. YouTube. Online Photosharing and Annotation. The recent suspension of classes at AUC resulted in faculty and students using a variety of these teaching and learning technologies to supplement face-to-face-communication. The integration of computer-mediated technologies with traditional face-to-face pedagogy is growing in higher education (Brown, 2000) as more learning takes place in a "blended" or "hybrid" instructional environment. Since the concept of blended learning is a relatively new paradigm (Garrison & Anderson, 2003), further research is required to investigate how faculty can advance best practices in instructional design using a combination of face-to-face and online learning domains. Linking students to instructors and material through technology is achieved through learner motivation (Motsching-Pitrik, 2004). When attempts are made to attach motivation with learning material in virtual classrooms, a number of challenges and questions arise. How can faculty and their students perform their roles within and across face-to-face and online environments and in relation to each other? How can we strike a balance between desired instructional outcomes while using the best technology to aid in that effort? How can we customize pedagogical agents to catalyze collaborative, active, reflective, participatory and inquiry-based learning outcomes in face-to-face and virtual environments? The abrupt closing of the university amplifies an exigent need to engage critically with these questions to assess how we teach. Such an assessment will require professional development opportunities to assist faculty with what are in some respects complex learning instructional strategies and design techniques to foster the creation of problem solving activities, collaborative learning, peer evaluation, creativity, intellectual camaraderie, and social negotiation.

Today, as we delve into the throes of make-up classes, computer-mediated instruction is desired because of the many conflicts arising from attempts to schedule face-to-face sessions. Since motivation is integral for learning in any environment, whether the classroom is *face-to-face* or computer-mediated, a student's sense of personal connection to the material catalyzes what some scholars refer to as "social presence" (Richardson & Newby, 2006). Gunawardena (1995), defines social presence as "the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication."
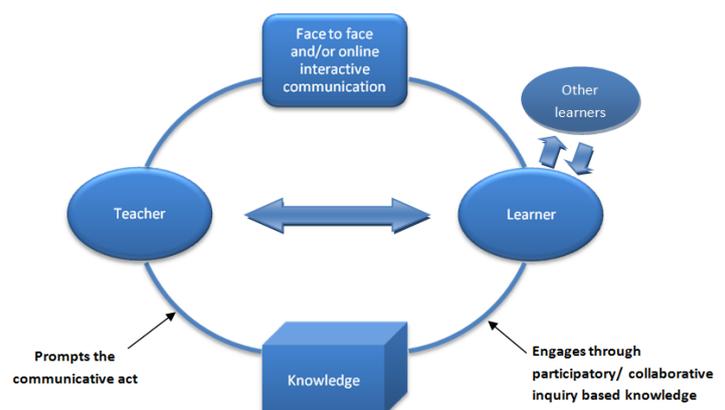

Figure 1.

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"Social presence" can be achieved in the web-based environment when the instructional design initiates a communicative act between stakeholders. Such an act, according to Andrews and Haythornthwaite (2007), can allow students and faculty to see the relationship between the "author/speaker, the listener/audience, and the content of the message," to advance learning outcomes. (See Figure 1).

In this communications model, the instructor prompts the communicative act, however, once initiated, the student must become involved to actualize the successful transfer of learning. Intrinsic to the success of such a model is the instructional design and desired learning outcomes which takes into consideration the needs of learners and what motivates them to learn. Some students are motivated by grades while others are curious about the subject matter. Another interesting characteristic about this model is while it emerges from rhetorical systems of communication, it allows all actors to participate and the dimensions of learning can evolve without any predetermined endpoints.

The Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) has a number of teaching and learning technologies available for demonstration. CLT staff can assist faculty with the design of a pedagogical strategy to fit specific teaching goals and objectives and CLT's Student Teaching Assistants (STAs) can provide the support needed to implement the technology. STAs are also available to assist students in the Learning Commons. CLT's Director, Dr. Aziza Ellozy notes one of the challenges AUC faces is "how to prepare our faculty to supplement their face to face instruction with online opportunities for teaching and learning?" Some of CLT's Educational Technology Showcase includes:

- **Lecture Capture**[*] (digital recordings of lectures streamed over the internet)
- **Blogs, Student Journaling, Reflection** (online chronology of comments)
- **Wikis – Collaborative Writing and Editing of WebPages** (multi-dimensional collaborative center)
- **Podcasting** (audio or visual content that is automatically delivered over a network)
- **Online Multimedia Sharing** and Annotation (upload, tag, browse and annotate multimedia)

Please contact CLT for more information about the possible application of these technologies to your teaching needs.

<u>Sources</u>
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[*] Lecture capture allows instructors to record digitally their lectures (in class or at home) and stream them over the internet. Students see a partitioned screen displaying the presentation materials and video feed, with navigation options. Many AUC faculty have successfully used it. Time on training is minimal.