Chapter 18
Fostering Social Presence in a Blended Learning Faculty Development Institute

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ABSTRACT
To help faculty develop well-designed blended courses, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) was used to design and deliver a ten-week Hybrid Course Development Institute (HCDI) for faculty members from a variety of disciplines. The faculty experienced a blended format and developed courses based on the three components of the CoI framework: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence, the last of which is particularly challenging to achieve. This chapter provides an overview of the HCDI structure, content, and assessment, and suggests ways to foster social presence in and beyond a blended learning institute for faculty members.

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we aim to describe how we used the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000) to undergird a ten-week Hybrid Course Development Institute at the University of Washington Bothell, focusing most keenly on social presence. The social presence construct, and the CoI framework in general, proved to be remarkably successful linchpins for faculty members learning to design blended learning courses from the ground up. We describe in detail the HCDI, explain how social presence operates on three levels in our conception of blended learning on our campus, and present the methods and results of assessing the Institute among the faculty members who participated and among the students enrolled in those teachers’ blended-learning courses. We conclude by providing some additional lessons we learned from our first HCDI.

HYBRID COURSE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The UW Bothell Hybrid Course Development Institute (HCDI) was created in response to increased individual faculty interest in blended teaching and learning, demonstrated efficacy of well-designed blended learning courses (Means B, Toyama Y, Murphy R, Bakia M, Jones K, 2010; Sorg, 2002), popularity of blended courses with students, a need for coordinated faculty development in blended teaching, the opportunity for external funding to support the pilot project for the Nursing Program, and matching internal funding to extend this project to the campus. We received funding from a Promise of Nursing for Washington, Nursing School Grant Program administered by the Foundation of the National Student Nurses’ Association in July 2010 to work on increased student access to nursing education. We created a 10-week faculty development course that was delivered in a blended format during Autumn Quarter 2010. Six Nursing faculty members participated in and completed this blended course; each focused on either the development of a new course, or the revision of a current course into a blended format combining face-to-face and online content. For the HCDI, a blended course was defined as having between 30% and 70% of student coursework online (adapted from Sloan Consortium, 2010). In addition to the Nursing faculty, the UW Bothell Teaching and Learning Center sponsored an additional five faculty members from other academic programs on campus who also completed the HCDI. This cross-program mix of faculty was greatly appreciated by all faculty participants as they formed relationships and partnerships within and across program boundaries on our campus.

We based the HCDI on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework developed by Garrison et al. (2000) because, as Shea and Bidjerano (2009) note, “faculty can benefit from understanding, emphasizing, and integrating the components of the model to guide the development of online [and, we would add, blended] courses” (551). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has been used widely as a model for structured learning. In an educational context, a community of inquiry is “a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding” (Garrison, 2011, p. 15). The strength of this framework lies in its articulation of three interrelated concepts: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence. In their well-known Venn diagram, Garrison and Vaughan (2008) show that any two of the elements in the trio interact with one another, while the intersection of all three components results in the holistic educational experience. We designed the HCDI to demonstrate the main elements of the CoI: Cognitive Presence, Teaching Presence, and Social Presence. The faculty participants received a copy of the Garrison and Vaughan (2008) book as a text for the HCDI and we both modeled the