JOSSEY-BASS GUIDES TO ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching

How to "Be There" for Distance Learners

Rosemary M. **LEHMAN** Simone C. O. **CONCEIÇÃO**

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PREFACE

Technology has become omnipresent in our lives. It is with us anytime, anyplace, anywhere; we hardly notice its existence; it has become ubiquitous. Technology brings information to us about what is going on in the world through the palm of our hands and allows us to access that information through the tips of our fingers.

From an educational perspective, technology has given us the opportunity to expand our knowledge and extend our reach to people and places we never considered before. The benefits are beyond our imagination: saving us time, travel, and cost; avoiding the necessity to take risks in going to other locations; allowing us to store information and knowledge and carry them with us wherever we go through mobile devices and other "green" technologies; connecting us to diverse people all over the world and bringing us closer together; allowing us to work in virtual communities that are no longer limited to physical places; and giving us the opportunity to be present with each other without boundaries.

This sense of "being there" with each other in the virtual space often happens informally and spontaneously as part of our everyday lives. But when we try to achieve this sense of being there in formal educational settings, we need a different way of thinking, feeling, and behaving from both an organizational and an instructional perspective. From an organizational perspective, the more structured environment requires that policies and practices be followed for the credential process. From an instructional perspective, it involves planning, intention, and design in order to ensure effective learning outcomes and meet quality standards.

The importance of creating a sense of presence in online teaching and learning environments cannot be overestimated. If you think about the basic difference between learning in the classroom and learning exclusively online, it is the separation of the instructor from the learner and the learners from each other. This separation often leads to feelings of isolation on the part of participants and has been a major cause of learner dissatisfaction in the online learning environment (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

"Being there" in our book means being present with others in online teaching and learning in a virtual space. But being there in a virtual space in the formal setting doesn't easily happen; rather, the sense of presence needs to be intentionally created. The concept of presence begins with an understanding of our perceptual nature and the influence of the perceptual system on the creation of presence. It is through learner and instructor awareness that presence can be understood and realized. Learner and instructor are psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally present when they connect with others in an authentic way during the online learning experience. Understanding presence is complex. It requires us to take into consideration the social, psychological, and emotional aspects of presence and the ways in which they influence participants' interactions in the online environment.

Our book provides a model for how to be aware of, think about, and understand creating a sense of presence in the online environment, and it proposes a framework for designing online courses with a sense of presence. Activities that create a sense of presence are described and connected to the model and framework, along with approaches and questions for gathering information on how presence is "there" in online courses.

THE FOCUS OF THIS BOOK

Our book focuses on the need for creating presence in the online environment, explores the concept of presence, and addresses the ways in which the creation of presence can contribute to more interactive online teaching and learning. Based on research and experience, our book provides practical examples through activities, illustrations, and cases that explain how to create, maintain, and evaluate presence throughout an online course.

Our book is based on a learner-centered approach. In this approach, a sense of presence means being there with online learners throughout the

learning experience. It looks and feels as if the instructor has placed the learners at the center of the course development and created the course for these learners. It also looks and feels as if the instructor is accessible to the learners and the learners are accessible to the instructor and each other; in addition, the technology is transparent in the learning process. The learner is also involved in the design process by giving feedback and helping shape the online environment.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM THIS BOOK

The book offers instructors, instructional designers, and practitioners a guide to becoming aware of the concept of presence. Academics who teach instructional design may use this book as a resource for their courses. Practitioners who work with programs or organizations or as consultants may use this book as a guide when developing online courses or working as consultants assisting educators who create online courses.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The first two chapters offer an overview of current research on presence, along with examples. The first four chapters begin and end by following scenarios involving the hypothetical Amanda and Carlos, who illustrate the human experiences of a novice online learner and an inexperienced instructor in the online environment. As the book progresses, both grow and become aware of the importance of presence in the online environment thanks to positive course design and instructor training. These scenarios will help instructors who are new to online teaching and learning cope with their own feelings of insecurity, anxiety, and being overwhelmed in this new venture.

Chapter 1, "The Role of Presence in the Online Environment," discusses why the sense of "being there" and "being together" is so important to online presence; defines the concept of presence and the difference between presence and engagement; and explains the social, psychological, and emotional aspects of presence in the online environment.

Chapter 2, "Ways in Which Presence Can Be Experienced," discusses types of experience, modes of presence, and the dimensions of the learner. These concepts, grounded in perceptual research, help us understand the concept of pres-

ence and make up the Being There for the Online Learner model, which we introduce at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3, "Designing Your Online Course with a Sense of Presence," offers an instructional design framework based on the Being There for the Online Learner model. This framework uses the determinants of presence to design online teaching and learning. Three examples of online courses are presented to illustrate how to use this framework for creating a sense of presence. In addition, the chapter offers an overview of how to get "there" as an instructor and how to get the learners "there" in an online course. Because it is beyond the scope of this book to focus on the design aspects of online teaching and learning, training and design resources are suggested in this chapter.

Chapter 4, "Activities That Create a Sense of Presence in Your Online Course," provides activity examples in the potential sequence in which they may be used (before the course begins, during the course, and at the end of the course).Within each sequence, the chapter explains how to use the determinants of presence and suggests approaches and questions for gathering information to help you know if presence is occurring in the online course.

Chapter 5, "Are You Here or There? Making Sense of Presence," presents three activity case examples. Each one addresses one or more of the three sequences in an online course (before the course, during the course, and at the end of the course). The chapter then provides a sample syllabus that incorporates a sense of presence. It ends with final thoughts and future directions.

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Creating this book was a lively and genuine experience of connecting and being present with each other during the writing process. Either face-to-face or online, we worked together combining our knowledge of the field and practical experience. We used a developmental approach for the writing process through continuous brainstorming and frequent feedback from online instructors and learners.

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We hope this book creates an awareness of the importance of the concept of the sense of presence and an understanding of how to apply it in the online environment. The sense of presence can be an elusive concept, but the more we become aware of it and deeply understand it, the easier it will be to make it happen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rosemary M. Lehman, Ph.D., is an author and consultant in the field of distance education. For nearly twenty years she worked for the University of Wisconsin-Extension. Most recently, she was the Senior Outreach/Distance Education Specialist at Instructional Communications Systems (ICS), University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX), and manager of the ICS Learning Design and Outreach Team, where she supervised the training of faculty and staff in the use of technology for teaching and learning, and taught via technology. She received her doctorate in distance education and adult learning, and her master's in television and media critique, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of *The Essential Videoconferencing Guide: 7 Keys to Success* (2001) and a number of book chapters and journal articles, the editor of *Using Distance Education Technology: Effective Practices* (2002), and the coauthor of *147 Practical Tips for Synchronous and Blended Technology Teaching and Learning* (2007).

Dr. Lehman's research interests include teaching and learning at a distance for all ages; technology accessibility; the relationship of perception, emotion, and cognition to distance learning and instructional design; educational applications for media and technology; and the development and integration of learning objects into learning experiences. She has keynoted and presented at a wide variety of statewide, national, and international conferences and was the recipient of the 2005 University of Wisconsin-Extension Award for Excellence in distance education and leadership.

Simone C. O. Conceição, Ph.D., is an associate professor of adult and continuing education. She teaches courses in the areas of distance education, use of technology with adult learners, instructional design, and principles and

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Dr. Conceição's research interests include adult learning, distance education, impact of technology on teaching and learning, instructional design, learning objects, and staff development and training. Born in Brazil, she has lived in the United States since 1989. Her diverse background brings an international perspective to the fields of education and training. She has researched and identified many aspects of good practice in online environments, and she is an expert in helping instructors and trainers understand Web-based technology tools, software, and design processes. She received the 2006 Early Career Award from the Commission of Professors of Adult Education.

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