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Editorial

The Face-to-Face Teaching Role in Open and Distance Education in Asia

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In this Issue we present a group of papers describing how face-to-face teaching is now used in open and distance educaton. The phenomenon of not letting go of this element has several reasons for its continued role in distance education. Some of these reasons are to do with teaching and assessment, and one other may be related to the need for student online social presence.

For more than ten years, practioners have argued against having a face element. Blake (2000) has summarised these arguments well, calling for the subjective and personal aspects to be removed from the collaborative learning environment so that only ideas are deliberated in an objective and uncluttered way. Distance education is often characterised by the absence of the people involved, typified by the Russian term 'zaochny' used for the word 'distance' in 'distance education' which means 'without eye contact'. Not being physical present in the classroom is widely seen as the reason why many students choose to engage distance education. Why then do ODE teachers and ODE courses still hold on to these, and in some open universities even make this element compulsory in every course nationwide ?

For teachers there are several reasons. One is that they can become assured themselves that the students exist, and are aware of ground rules. Teachers also have a legal or moral duty to certify attendance or participation online, and understandably can want to meet to feel more confident. Assessment relies upon accurate identity checks. They can tell each student not to cheat, and to email if there is any problem, and so on - essentially covering the housekeeping rules. There may well be some vaque agenda to meet so as to avoid flaming online between participants after things get moving and potentially heated. The teachers can manage all this through giving the course introductory lecture in face-to-face mode. For most teachers, they started teaching in conventional education and moved over later in their careers to distance education. With expertise and confidence in the classroom and not much online, they are reticent to cut the umbilical cord to conventional lessons.

For the students, the key reason for the face-to-face elements is to get to know their fellow students. Some courses manage to do this through personal blogs, webpages and social media. Even in one open university course presented entirely online (UK OU MA TEFL H801), students contacted each other behind the scenes and met up in coffeeshops to chat face-to-face. It is now well recognised that online social presence is important in the initial stage (only) at the beginning of a course (see Kawachi, 2011 ; 2013). Such online social presence can reduce anxiety and help carry the student towards achieving learning in a group. Students likely enjoy meeting their coworkers face-to-face.

Trust has long been researched particularly in the business field. McAllister (1995) suggested that trust could be divided into affect-based trust and cognition-based trust. He was concerned with how corporate team members could work together efficiently and how inefficiency arose in the interactions with each other. It is likely that affect-based trust could be a term related to social presence to help describe the bonding process for establishing a community of learners. Then cognition-based trust would be that for increasing communicative efficacy during the learning task and related to cognitive presence and transactional presence in the central collaborative stages of learning. Trust is desirable too between the student and the tutor, and between the student and the university, the course materials and the intangiblility of grey material found on the web. All this naturally gives rise to the potential for there being three other types of trust involved in learning ;- the environment-based trust, the metacognitive-based trust, and the management-based trust. So there is a type of trust specific perhaps to each of the five dimensions or domains of learning. Trust is a widely acclaimed desirable attribute for teamwork and efficiency in communication.

The initial face-to-face element in online education may be physical in a classroom together or can involve social media which has a photograph of the student's face clearly. One purpose for this may be to establish trust among the participants - just as in witnesses appearing physically inside a courtroom to take an oath and give evidence. In this sense no photograph on social media website, or an unclear hidden face image may impede the formation of trust. A photograph is usually trusted since it is presumed the physical person attended the place to get the photograph taken - although photo technology has eroded this somewhat. A person may physically present himself at a faraway courtroom and subsequently use telephone or video technology to transfer trust to the required courtroom from one place to another.

Trust is transferred from an initial face-to-face meeting to the following online interactions. Essentially, trust depends upon the experience from the previous exchange or meeting. Even after establishing trust face-to-face, a subsequent interaction online could be less than expected in many ways : in the response-time, in content, in quality, or in received-tone-of-language. Thus even in online discussions without an initial face-to-face component, trust can be developed (increased or decreased) through a series of interactions.

The initial face-to-face meeting is not absolutely required although it may seem expedient or entertaining.

The argument for initial face-to-face meetings draws from studies that have reported discussions and agreement were more successful conducted face-to-face than through email, for example by Rocco (1998). However Zheng, Bos, Olson & Olson (2001) have more recently found that if the students are directed to "get to know each other" through text chat then equivalent outcomes were achieved as when participants met beforehand face-to-face.

Here in this Issue we look at the face-to-face components of online courses - how they are integrated into the course, how necessary they are, and what students learn from them.

The first Paper by Herman is from Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia. This explores the variables correlated to success in the face-to-face tutorials. The second Paper is by Ugur Demiray calling for regional leadership in Eastern Europe, where Turkey is best placed to lead. This is especially true given the variety of distance education institutions in that region and the historical leadership role played by Turkey. This Paper should become a seminal report in the founding of such a regional bloc in distance education. The next Paper is by Maria do Carmo Nicoletti and colleagues in the Philippines where they call for online teachers to better adapt to teaching online. In Sri Lanka, Sandhya Doluweera reports on academic counselling and how they use contact sessions to support learning. Face-to-face interaction is then described in Iran by Abolfazi Khodamoradi and Majid Amerian. They describe notably that student interaction with others, with materials and the technology were poor, and called for the

online courses to become blended courses with a face-to-face element. In the next Paper, Adela Ruiz and Cecilia Junio-Sabio describe the need for reform to achieve a more dynamic quality assurance in the Philippines. Face-to-face meetings can establish trust and could possibly help prevent cheating online. Gerard Ravasco looks at the current state of online cheating and what can be done to reduce this. Then T.R. Srinivasan and J.S. Dorothy report how face-to-face training in an internship can improve online courses.

Lastly we are pleased to have the Annual Report on the AAOU conference given by Kumiko Aoki. This year the conference was hosted by the Open University of Japan. It is most regretable that China pulled out from this conference, particular so in view of the theme topic in this Issue and on the need to establish trust through face-to-face meetings.

In closing, we are eager to encourage colleagues throughout Asia and the world to attend and actively participate in the 27th AAOU conference next year in the first week of October hosted by Allama Iqbal Open University, see their website at http://aaou2013.aiou.edu.pk. We urge your active participation, and look forward to meeting you there.

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