Enhancing the facilitation of online groups in higher education: a review of the literature on face-to-face and online group-facilitation

Glyn Thomas
School of Education, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, Australia
Stephen Thorpe
Engineering, Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Introduction

One of the new difficulties in the higher education sector is the challenge of offering enriching and interactive group-learning experiences despite increased student numbers and the growing imperative for leading-edge technology to deliver more with less. The massification of higher education has forced academics to do more teaching with fewer resources creating new workload pressures (Palmer & Schueths, 2013). Some emerging solutions include: the elimination of courses with low enrolments; finding economies of scale by increasing class sizes, particularly in the first years of pro- grammes; and an increased dependence on leading-edge, online-learning technologies (Harasim, 2017). These changes are not without consequences for the higher education sector, and in particular, the increased reliance on online education has outpaced our understanding of how these offerings should be designed and moderated to optimally support student learning (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013). It is not clear that teachers and students are ready for the increased use of, and dependence on, online education.

Many universities are "flipping" the classroom (Reidsema, Kavanagh, Hadgcraft, & Smith, 2017), adopting a blended learning approach (Garner & Rouse, 2016), and offering massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). These modes of teaching are being prioritised despite uncertainties about the efficacy of learning in online environments (e.g., see Xu & Jaggers, 2013). Kennedy (2014) warned that there may be negative consequences of large, online-learning initiatives if they lead to reduced educational interactions between teachers and students and students with their peers. Moreover, Teräs (2016) warned that transforming the way teachers approach the facilitation of collaborative online learning "requires changes in perceptions of educators, not merely learning new techniques" (p. 258). To optimise online learning, Harasim (2017) suggested that teaching online requires new pedagogies that reflect the challenges and opportunities afforded by new digital realities. However, the nature and form of these new pedagogies is less clear. More- over, the faster we adopt new online-learning technologies the further our existing pedagogies need to stretch to meet the needs of a learning environment they were not designed for. We cannot assume that our old pedagogies will continue to be relevant and effective.

In recent times, there has been a proliferation of interest in the interpersonal interactions that occur during online teaching. Consequently, several new terms have emerged to describe the characteristics of these interactions including instructor immediacy (D'Agustino, 2016), teaching presence (Zhao & Sullivan, 2017), and social presence (Garner & Rouse, 2016). We believe there is a need to critically reflect on current facilitation practices with online groups and draw on the available research to improve practice. While we heed Baran et al.'s (2013) warning against trying to replicate face-to-face teaching practices when teaching online, we believe that the wisdom in the

group facilitation literature provides new insights into this review of online group facilitation practices.

It is becoming clear that higher education is amid a paradigm shift – a digital disruption from within. New theory may be needed to guide higher education teachers in the modern landscape of online education. Therefore, the aim of our paper is to identify in the relevant group facilitation and online education literature some key principles that can inform the development of new pedagogical theory. Theory for twenty-first century higher education that, despite its increased reliance on digital technology, still engenders a learning environment that fosters students' personal growth in communication, collaboration, creativity, and leadership as well as developing their skills and knowledge. This paper focuses particularly on the interpersonal dimension of online and face-to-face group facilitation, to provide some signposts that might guide online course designers and teachers in their quest for new pedagogies that foster transformative learning for students in the twenty-first Century. To set the stage for this work, we will first outline some of the theories described in the literature, underpinning the work of online group learning and the important interpersonal dimensions of learning.

Theoretical foundations for online group facilitation

Researchers on face-to-face group facilitation have argued that effective practice requires more than learning new tools, tips and techniques, and must also include exploration of the theories and values which underpin facilitation practice (Schwarz, 2017; Thomas, 2008b), and should also focus on the personal qualities and presence that facilitators bring to the group (Thomas, 2008a; Thorpe, 2016). In a similar way, Jaques and Salmon (2007) and Harasim (2017) posited that successful online teaching depends on effective online pedagogies, critical human skills, and understanding. Hence, the ability to create collaborative, transformative online learning processes is dependent on the course facilitator's presence and their pedagogical expertise – not just the adoption of the latest technological tool. Clearly though, both are important, and it is the "convergence of the technological and pedagogical developments that is driving e-learning innovation in higher education" (Garrison, 2011, p. 1).

In the recent online learning literature, social constructivism is the dominant learning theory used to underpin and guide most practice in online and blended learning (Baran et al., 2013; Harasim, 2017; Reidsema et al., 2017). Harasim (2017) provides a comprehensive discussion of learning theories in online education, and she favours online collaborative learning theory (a form of social constructivism) for its capacity for knowledge building and its potential to reshape formal, non-formal, and informal education in the knowledge age. In online collaborative learning, students:

> …work together online to identify and advance issues of understanding, and to apply their new understanding and analytical terms and tools to solving problems, constructing plans or developing explanations for phenomena. Online collaborative learning emphasizes processes that lead to both conceptual understanding and knowledge products. (Harasim, 2017, p. 88)

A critical part of online collaborative learning is peer discourse, which provides the platform for students and facilitators to interact in a social environment without the boundaries of time and distance, promoting critical thinking and reflection on their ideas (Baran et al., 2013; Crawford, 2016; Garner & Rouse, 2016; Hew, 2015; Phirangee, Demmans Epp, & Hewitt, 2016). Hence, it is important to be intentional about the theory that underpins a teacher's online teaching practice (Baran et al., 2013) and "the ability to reflect upon one's own instructional understandings can support instructor

immediacy and authenticity by understanding one's own belief systems and efforts" (Crawford, 2016, p. 23).

Asynchronous online discussions in higher education

Asynchronous online discussions are one of the most common pedagogical tools for collaborative knowledge building. They are typically used to encourage social interaction, to allow discussion of assignments and other assessable work, as a collaborative tool for individual project groups, and as a central part of the teaching strategy (Mazzolini & Maddison, 2003; Park et al., 2015; Woods & Bliss, 2016). Participation in asynchronous online discussions (AODs) can be voluntary, a hurdle requirement, or made an integral part of assessment.

In an older, but important, contribution to the online learning literature, Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) used learning analytics to analyse the nature and impact of instructor involvement in online discussion forums. They noted the role of the online group facilitator may vary from the sage on stage, to the guide on the side, to the ghost in the wings. The optimal role for an online group facilitator to take in a situation depends on the purposes of the asynchronous online discussion and the individuals and group concerned. The findings of their research suggest that frequent postings by facilitators did not lead to more student postings and the more facilitators posted, the shorter the discussions threads tended to be. They also noted that facilitators who actively initiated discussion threads did not appear to stimulate more discussion than usual – and with advanced students it may even limit it. They postulated that students are more inclined to respond to student-initiated discussions – in order to help each other out, but may respond more cautiously to facilitator-initiated discussions. Since Mazzolini and Maddison's (2003) research, there have been numerous studies discussing the optimal role for online facilitators and students, but the results are inconclusive. Of these studies, some of them (e.g., Phirangee et al., 2016; Szabo, 2015) should also be interpreted tentatively because of weak research designs using single class groups and small sample sizes. In an age of learning analytics, it seems odd that larger data sets do not feature more prominently in the research we found.

Parks-Stamm, Zafonte, and Palenque (2016) conducted a methodologically strong study involving an even mix of 7477 undergraduate and graduate students across a diverse sample of 500 courses. They found that teacher participation in online discussions positively predicts student participation, they reported no evidence for the assertion that high levels of teacher participation hampers discussion as the number of teacher posts did not reduce levels of student participation. Other research found that students preferred teacher facilitated discussions because the teachers were perceived to be the content and process experts and are more "able to keep discussions on topic and ensure equity and are better at guiding learning" (Phirangee et al., 2016, p. 149). Jaggers and Xu (2016) found that students in their sample valued student-instructor interaction more strongly than student-student interaction and they disliked imposed requirements for peer interaction. Jaggers and Xu noted that "the sense of caring, which was communicated through interpersonal interaction, seemed particularly salient to students in their conversations about course quality" (p. 281).

Tsai (2016) noted that many academics are still discovering how their roles change in online learning environments. Some online educators have proposed new paradigms where the teacher shares control of the learning environment and recognises students as autonomous, independent, self-motivated managers of their own learning (Baran & Correia, 2009). One pedagogical approach that fits these paradigms is the use of peer-led, online groups. Park et al. (2015) found that levels of participation in online discussions remained stable when the discussions were led by students rather than instructors. Research by Hew (2015) found that peer facilitated discussion groups "made students feel more at ease in expressing their ideas in the online discussion" and there was less

"worry or anxiety that their postings would be judged or assessed when an instructor gets involved in the discussion" (p. 33). Hew's suggestion was to use peer facilitators:

> …when the purpose of the discussion is to stimulate frank exchange of opinion among students. … [but] if the purpose of the discussion is to achieve some specific learning or to attain a consensus of opinions, it would be better to get an instructor to facilitate the discussion. (p. 35)

Research by Szabo (2015) found the use of peer facilitation in online forum discussions positively impacted student participation and content quality, but that teacher-led discussions produced more higher order reflections and more discussion of prescribed readings. Her concluding recommendations were to use peer-facilitation to improve the forum participation, and to get teachers to monitor initial discussion prompts to increase the quality of discussions.

If students are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and support to peer-facilitate online groups the potential benefits include: promoting active participation and meaningful student dialogue (Baran & Correia, 2009); allowing students to be active knowledge-generators who assume responsibility for constructing and managing their own learning experience (Jaques & Salmon, 2007); encouraging students to ask questions and challenge the statements of others freely without being inhibited or intimidated by a teacher's presence (Conrad & Donaldson, 2011); fostering more meaningful and interactive discussions creating a stronger sense of community (Baran & Correia, 2009); and creating deeper levels of understanding, increased metacognition, increased motivation and divergent thinking (Abawajy & Kim, 2011).

To optimise the benefits of peer-facilitation, Jaques and Salmon (2007) concluded that "success in an online learning environment depends on the use of instructional strategies that support the shift in roles and the development of self-direction" (p. 148). The importance of having group facilitators who can establish group processes that keep the group on track to fulfilling its goals is a strong feature of the face-to-face group facilitation literature (Hunter, 2012). However, this usually only occurs when participants have demonstrated appropriate maturity and readiness and only after provision of training and support for effective functioning beyond the careful eye of the facilitator (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2013). In the next section of the paper, we will discuss the importance of presence in online group facilitation in the light of the literature on face-to-face group facilitation.

Presence in online learning

In the last five years there has been significant writing and research exploring the interpersonal dimensions of online facilitation and the concept of presence has featured strongly. In this section we will define, review and critique some of this work. Again, some of the published research is based on single studies, with a small number of participants (less than 30), and typically from one higher education course or an organisational unit (e.g., see Garner & Rouse, 2016; Orcutt & Dringus, 2017). Consequently, some of the findings must be regarded cautiously.

Teaching and social presence
Teaching presence and social presence were identified as essential elements of an effective online education community of inquiry by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). Social presence is the affective dimension that determines the "level of interaction and effectiveness of learning in an online environment" (Mykota & Remoundos, 2017, p. 2). On a practical level, developing social presence with an online group involves "creating a climate that supports and encourages probing questions, skepticism and the contribution of explanatory ideas" (Garrison, 2011, p. 32). To clarify the relationship between the two different types of presence, teaching presence has been referred

to as "instructional methods used to develop and support valuable instructional experiences … while social presence refers to the degree of connectedness to others felt by participants in an online instructional environment" (Richardson, Besser, Koehler, Lim, & Strait, 2016, p. 84). While teachers play a key role in the development of social presence, students can also positively or negatively impact on social presence in online groups. In the balance of this paper, we will focus our discussion primarily on teacher presence, which is different to teaching presence in subtle but important ways.

Teacher presence
The terms *instructor presence*, *teacher presence* (and in some cases *instructor immediacy*) appear less frequently in the literature than the terms *teaching presence* and *social presence*. For simplicity we will use the term teacher presence as the overarching term that describes "the specific actions and behaviours taken by the [teacher] that projects him/herself as a real person … [and] is more likely to be manifested in the 'live' part of courses – as they are being implemented – as opposed to during the course design process" (Richardson et al., 2015, p. 259). There is a range of different ways of conceiving and enacting teacher presence with online groups. Some authors describe teacher presence in a mechanistic way, choosing to focus on the behaviours, actions and strategies that teachers use to enhance communication between students, moderate group discussions, provide feedback, and set the tone for the group (Dreon, 2016; Garrison et al., 2000; Olubukola Afolabi, 2016; Orcutt & Dringus, 2017). Other authors describe teacher presence as being a more complex mix of the teacher's persona and include characteristics such as his or her openness, humanness, humility, authenticity and engagement with the group (Baran et al., 2013; Crawford, 2016; Elander, 2016; Richardson et al., 2016). We perceive these differences as two ends of a spectrum rather than dichotomies. Interestingly, the same observation can be made regarding the literature for face-to-face group facilitation.

In a study on how group facilitators are prepared to work in the profession, Thomas (2008b) distinguished between technical facilitator education and person-centered facilitator education. The technical facilitator education texts focused on the tips, tricks and strategies that can be used to facilitate groups. The more comprehensive group facilitation texts also provided discussion regarding the theories and values that underpinned the choice and effective use of those strategies. However, some texts also explored the person-centered dimension of facilitator education because of the way they focused on the important role that the person of the facilitator plays when working with groups. In the section that follows, we will focus on this latter dimension and consider more closely it's application within the online group facilitation context.

The person-centered dimension of online teacher presence
Ringer (2002) argued that a facilitator's role in a face-to-face group is established "less by technique than by a 'presence' aided by conscious awareness of one's own subjectivity" (p. 18). The challenge, he suggested, is to remain fully present with the group and to avoid relying on "'algorithmic' step-by-step recipes that are intended to substitute for the judgement and experience of the group leader" (p. 38). Similarly, Jenkins and Jenkins (2006) described presence as:

> …the magical quality of someone who combines care for others as individuals, in groups, and as societies. Such people are sensitive and insightful … they act at the boundary between the possible and the impossible. When they are present life seems more meaningful, more possible, more exciting. Yet they are not a domineering force, but one that enables others to be greater that they are. Presence is not something that is reproduced in a cookie cutter process … each person who answers the call to be a presence brings his or her unique gifts to their time, no two are ever alike. (pp. 262–263)

When working with online groups the person-centered dimension of online teacher presence acknowledges the importance of "being a real person" (Richardson et al., 2016, p. 84) as a way to connect with students and help their learning. Several authors have noted that online group facilitation is made challenging because of the absence of non-verbal cues, students' hidden identities, and limited verbal communication (Baran et al., 2013; Chang & Kang, 2016; Garrison, 2011; Thorpe, 2009). Teacher presence helps to overcome these barriers, but it is not just a matter of following a prescribed actions or strategies it "is also a mindset for extending activity between student, instructor and content beyond just being there" (Orcutt & Dringus, 2017, p. 16).

An effective teacher presence in face-to-face groups creates a learning environment that is welcoming, and in which, students feel comfortable to take the necessary risks to participate and learn effectively (Allen & Blythe, 2015; Weimer, 2013). In an online environment, Crawford (2016) maintains that this is equally important and applicable, and uses the term cognitive vulnerability to describe the online teacher's "ability to engage with each learner on an intellectual as well as empathic level of understanding, towards meeting the intellectual and cognitive needs of the learner" (p. 20). The teacher's presence and authenticity help him or her to establish a learning climate that normalises vulnerability and enhances the students' comfort, confidence, and willing-ness to participate. The online facilitator establishes the course culture and tone for the rest of the students by engaging in the instructional environment, demonstrating a humanness, and by being a reflective practitioner (Crawford, 2016).

Crawford's cognitive vulnerability theory is congruent with Ringer's (1999) call for face-to face group facilitators to work with their group members to establish a safe container by ensuring that the group is: purposeful; bounded in terms of membership, physical space, time, and roles and tasks; and that safety is created by managing group member behaviours, confidentiality, and psychological depth. "Participants need some evidence that they will be safe to interact in the group without undue fear of being attacked, ridiculed, ignored, or abandoned" (Ringer, 1999, p. 7). In more recent work articulating a set of competencies for online facilitators, Thorpe (2016) describes two competencies that are relevant here. First, the online facilitator must hold and support the group in their culture by "creating space for everyone in the group and for all that is happening in the group, including enabling members to participate through different levels of access and through technological interruptions" (p. 84). Second, Thorpe (2016) identified the competency of *communicating with presence online* as "…working actively to mirror the group back to itself and improve the participant awareness of others…through deep listening and careful communication, assisting the group through their interventions to harness their collective intelligence and achieve their best performance" (pp. 85–96).

In a higher education context, creating a safe container in an online learning environment would encourage the risk taking required for students to learn effectively. However, the research and writing suggests that this is less about doing things, and is more about the kind of person that a facilitator is being for the group. This intangible aspect of group facilitation, may be frustrating and elusive for some teachers to grasp and practice, but that does not make it any less important to successful learning in groups. These ideas are also not new, and the concept of presence is steeped in ancient traditions (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004). Palloff and Pratt (2007) identified six essential elements to learning that may provide a good starting point to understanding what being present might look like and they were honesty, responsiveness, relevance, respect, openness, and empowerment. There are no easy shortcuts for online facilitators when it comes to using teacher presence to value students and their learning. The effective facilitation of online discussions takes time, effort, strategies, and commitment just like face-to-face group discussions. In the next section, we will summarise the literature and provide some practical suggestions on how facilitators can improve their facilitation of online groups.

Equipping academics and students to facilitate online groups

The notion that online instruction requires a different set of teaching skills is not new and the successful facilitation of online groups will prompt a need to refocus teaching efforts and develop new pedagogical approaches (Baran et al., 2013; Putman, Ford, & Tancock, 2012). The literature is clear that online facilitators need to be people-oriented with a desire to reach out to their students, show empathy and interest in others, and have the commitment and the skills to bridge communication gaps (Ko & Rossen, 2010). There appears to be agreement that, "All teachers and trainers in online or in blended situations need to understand that creating successful networking for learning is not merely about the choice of technology but also about critical human skills and understanding" (Jaques & Salmon, 2007, p. 277).

The professional development of online group facilitators "must focus on electronic pedagogy … rather than technology" and "the technology should only be used as a vehicle to convey the ability to create a collaborative, transformative process. It is the only means by which instructors and students can connect to form community" (Jaques & Salmon, 2007, p. 237). Based on our review of the literature, and our experience with online and face-to-face group facilitation in higher education, we offer the following practical suggestions for academics facilitating online groups:

- Rethink the role of the teacher and the student. This decentring of the teacher is a challenging process for online educators, and they should be "guided in finding ways to support learners' independence and autonomy in the online environment" (Baran et al., 2013, p. 36).
- Peer facilitation may be best used to encourage participation, and teacher facilitation may be best used to achieve specific learning or to reach a consensus of opinions (Hew, 2015).
- Provide clear, explicit purposes or objectives for all group facilitation (Hunter, 2012; Schwarz, 2017). This is consistent with Biggs and Tang's (2011) emphasis on achieving constructive alignment where the explicit purpose and/or objectives should guide the selection, foci, and implementation of learning activities and assessment tasks.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for all participants. A simple working agreement or contract identifying desirable or acceptable participant behaviours will assist groups to achieve their objectives (Schwarz, 2017).
- Equip online group facilitators with a toolkit of strategies to allow group members to communicate effectively and establish an effective social presence. It is important that facilitators to develop the pedagogical awareness (Löfström & Nevgi, 2008) required to choose optimal learning methods based on rational reasons informed by a knowledge of learning theories and personal values (Baran et al., 2013; Thomas, 2008b).
- Develop an understanding and awareness of teacher presence and the power of being present with a group. Pay "close attention to the complex constellation of feeling, thinking, action, intuition, and memories and fantasies that is you. It means addressing and dealing with your own vulnerability and failings" (Ringer, 2002, p. 19).

Conclusions and recommendations

The massification of higher education and persistent fiscal challenges have prompted universities across the world to look to online learning as a strategy to resolve teaching and learning challenges. This interest in technology-enhanced learning, and the emergence of MOOCs, flipped classrooms, and blended learning, is partly based on the capacity for fiscal savings through higher teacher-student ratios and more efficient use of teaching resources. However, large student numbers are not conducive to facilitator-led, socially constructivist, learning approaches. The corresponding reduction in educational interaction between teachers and students, and students and their peers threaten the

quality of teaching and learning (Kennedy, 2014). The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that online group work provides a potential solution to this problem. However, this contention assumes that university administrators dedicate the required resources, and university teachers can make the necessary commitment, to make sure online learning is successful. We have argued that with appropriate training and support for teachers and peer facilitators, online group work may be part of the pedagogical solution for encouraging deep approaches to learning in large-scale, online-learning environments.

More studies, with appropriate research designs, larger sample sizes, across multiple institutions are needed to investigate the efficacy of peer facilitation and other interpersonal dimensions of online discussions and knowledge construction processes. More research is needed to explore the pedagogical philosophies of effective online teachers and specifically how their philosophies guide their instructor presence as it would seem the concept of teacher presence in an online environment is ill-defined and not yet well understood. Research focusing on students' perceptions of teacher presence and social presence would assist teachers and course designers (Richardson et al., 2016).

Research suggests that online learners want "to know their instructor and feel that he or she was present ready to come to their aid anywhere in the course" (Elander, 2016, p. 58). Facilitating online groups effectively and using teacher presence to foster social presence places significant demands on teachers' time. Equipping academics and students with the skills to effectively learn online remains a big challenge. Salmon (2011) has noted eloquently that,

> …it has become fashionable to assert that teaching, not technology, is the "solution" to working online. I guess that's progress! However, it's too simplistic. To develop effective and efficient e-moderators, we need to create training that provides an online environment where the sense of emotional identity, the shifting of time, the experience of the context with all its foibles, can all be experienced. (p. 127)

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributors

Glyn Thomas is a Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Environmental Education in the School of Education at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Australia. His research and teaching focuses on facilitation, teaching and learning, and outdoor environmental education.
Stephen Thorpe is an academic, educator and group facilitator who specialises in group work in the online world. He is passionate about online group work, group facilitation and online collaborative technologies. He works at the Auckland University of Technology where he teaches computer-assisted group work, user-centered design, enterprise systems and computing technology in society.

ORCID
Glyn Thomas   http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9556-5255
Stephen Thorpehttp://orcid.org/0000-0002-6747-6105

References

Abawajy, J., & Kim, T. (2011). Engaging and effective asynchronous online discussion forums. In T. Kim (Ed.), *Software engineering, business continuity, and education. ASEA 2011. Communications in computer and information science* (Vol. 257, pp. 695–705). Berlin: Springer.

Allen, D., & Blythe, T. (2015). *Facilitating for learning: Tools for teacher groups of all kinds*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Baran, E., & Correia, A. P. (2009). Student-led facilitation strategies in online discussions. *Distance Education, 30*(3), 339–361.

Baran, E., Correia, A. P., & Thompson, A. D. (2013). Tracing successful online teaching in higher education: Voices of exemplary online teachers. *Teachers College Record, 115*(3), 1–41.

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). New York, NY:McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Chang, B., & Kang, H. (2016). Challenges facing group work online. *Distance Education, 37*(1), 73–88.

Crawford, C. M. (2016). Instructor immediacy and authenticity: Engaging in cognitive vulnerability within the online instructional environment. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating teacher immediacy in online learning environments* (pp. 15–36). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

D'Agustino, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Creating teacher immediacy in online learning environments*. Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Dreon, O. (2016). Building teaching presence in online classes. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating teacher immediacy in online learning environments* (pp. 1–14). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Elander, K. R. (2016). "I'm here for you": instructor presence online. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating teacher immediacy in online learning environments* (pp. 55–75). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Garner, R., & Rouse, E. (2016). Social presence – connecting pre-service teachers as learners using a blended learning model. *Student Success, 7*(1), 25–36.

Garrison, D. R. (2011). *E-learning in the 21st century: A framework for research and practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *Journal of Interactive Learning Online, 11*(1), 19–42.

Harasim, L. M. (2017). Learning theory and online technologies. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hew, K. F. (2015). Student perceptions of peer versus instructor facilitation of asynchronous online discussions: Further findings from three cases. *Instructional Science, 43*, 19–38.

Hunter, D. (2012). *The art of facilitation: The essentials for leading great meetings and creating group synergy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Wiley.

Jaggers, S. S., & Xu, D. (2016). How do online course design features influence student performance? *Computers & Education, 95*, 270–284.

Jaques, D., & Salmon, G. (2007). *Learning in groups: A handbook for face-to-face and online environments* (4th ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Jenkins, J. C., & Jenkins, M. R. (2006). *The 9 disciplines of a facilitator: Leading groups by transforming yourself*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2016). Higher education and the digital revolution: About MOOCs, SPOCs, social media, and the cookie monster. *Business Horizons, 59*(4), 441–450.

Kennedy, J. (2014). Characteristics of massive open online courses (MOOCs): A research review, 2009-2012. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning, 13*(1).

Ko, S. S., & Rossen, S. (2010). Teaching online a practical guide (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. Kreitner, R., & Kinicki, A. (2013). *Organizational behavior* (10th ed.). New York, NY:McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Löfström, E., & Nevgi, A. (2008). University teaching staff's pedagogical awareness displayed through ICT-facilitated teaching. *Interactive Learning Environments, 16*(2), 101–116.

Mazzolini, M., & Maddison, S. (2003). Sage, guide or ghost? The effect of instructor intervention on student participation in online discussion forums. *Computers & Education, 40*(3), 237–253.

Mykota, D., & Remoundos, D. (2017). Study protocol for scoping review on social presence. *International Journal of E- Learning and Distance Education, 32*(1), 1–10.

Olubukola Afolabi, R. (2016). Emphasizing instructor presence in digital learning environments. In S. D'Agustino (Ed.), *Creating teacher immediacy in online learning environments* (pp. 37–54). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Orcutt, J. M., & Dringus, L. P. (2017). Beyond being there: Practices that establish presence, engage students and influence intellectual curiosity in a structured online learning environment. *Online Learning, 21*(3), 15–35.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2007). *Building online learning communities: Effective strategies for the virtual classroom* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Palmer, N., & Schueths, A. M. (2013). Online teaching communities within sociology: A counter trend to the marketization of higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 18*(7), 809–820.

Park, J. H., Schallert, D. L., Sanders, A., J. Z., Williams, K. M., Seo, E., Yu, L.-T., … Knox, M. C. (2015). Does it matter if the teacher is there?: A teacher's contribution to emerging patterns of interactions in online classroom discussions. *Computers & Education, 82,* 315–328.

Parks-Stamm, E. J., Zafonte, M., & Palenque, S. M. (2016). The effects of instructor participation and class size on student participation in an online class discussion forum. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 48*(6), 1250–1259. doi:10. 1111/bjet.12512.

Phirangee, K., Demmans Epp, C., & Hewitt, J. (2016). Exploring the relationships between facilitation methods, students' sense of community, and their online behaviours. *Online Learning, 20*(2), 134–154.

Putman, S. M., Ford, K., & Tancock, S. (2012). Redefining online discussions: Using participant stances to promote collab- oration and cognitive engagement. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 24*(2), 151–167.

Reidsema, C., Kavanagh, L., Hadgcraft, R., & Smith, N. (Eds.). (2017). *The flipped classroom practice and practices in higher education*. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Richardson, J. C., Besser, E., Koehler, A., Lim, J., & Strait, M. (2016). Instructors' perceptions of instructor presence in online learning environments. *International Journal of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 17*(4), 82–103.

Richardson, J. C., Koehler, A., Besser, E., Caskurlu, S., Lim, S., & Mueller, C. (2015). Conceptualizing and investigating instructor presence in online learning environments. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 16*(3), 256–297.

Ringer, M. (1999). Two vital aspects in the facilitation of groups: Connections and containment. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education, 4*(1), 5–11.

Ringer, M. (2002). *Group action: The dynamics of groups in therapeutic, educational and corporate settings*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

R-M, Conrad., & Donaldson, J. A. (2011). *Engaging the online learner: Activities and resources for creative instruction* (pp. Jossey–Bass). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Salmon, G. (2011). *E-Moderating the key to online teaching and learning* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Schwarz, R. M. (2017). *The skilled facilitator: A comprehensive resource for consultants, facilitators, coaches, and trainers* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Senge, P., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2004). *Presence: Human purpose and the field of the purpose*. Cambridge, MA: The Society for Organizational Learning.

Szabo, Z. (2015). Better together: Teams and discourse in asynchronous online discussion forums. *Journal of Psychological and Educational Research, 23*(1), 73–88.

Teräs, H. (2016). Collaborative online professional development for teachers in higher education. *Professional Development in Education, 42*(2), 258–275.

Thomas, G. J. (2008a). Facilitate first thyself: The person-centered dimension of facilitator education. *Journal of Experiential Education, 31*(2), 168–188.

Thomas, G. J. (2008b). The theories and practices of facilitator educators: Conclusions from a naturalistic inquiry. *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal, 9*, 4–13.

Thorpe, S. J. (2009). Enhancing the effectiveness of online groups: An investigation of storytelling in the facilitation of online groups (Doctoral thesis). Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from http://aut. researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/778

Thorpe, S. J. (2016). Online facilitator competencies for group facilitators. *Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal, 13*, 77–90.

Tsai, C.-W. (2016). Exploring the effects of online team-based learning and co-regulated learning on students' development of computing skills. *Interactive Learning Environments, 24*(4), 665–680.

Weimer, M. (2013). *Learner-centered teaching: Five key changes to practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Woods, K., & Bliss, K. (2016). Facilitating successful online discussions. *Journal of Effective Teaching, 16*(2), 76–92.

Xu, D., & Jaggers, S. S. (2013). The impact of online learning on students' course outcomes: Evidence from a large com- munity and technical college system. *Economics of Education Review, 37*, 46–57.

Zhao, H., & Sullivan, K. P. H. (2017). Teaching presence in computer conferencing learning environments: Effects on interaction, cognition and learning uptake. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 48*(2), 538–551.