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# Researching participatory literacy and positioning in online learning communities

## Book Chapter

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# RESEARCHING PARTICIPATORY LITERACY AND POSITIONING IN ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

As discussed in earlier chapters, the potential of Web 2.0 tools and social networking environments for enhanced peer interaction is being recognised across the education sector. Many institutions are moving their blended and online learning provision from a ‘computer-as-tutor’ approach towards models which foster knowledge co-construction and sharing in socially networked learning communities. Yet, many education professionals find that they do not have the skills required to help their students to fully benefit from this paradigm shift.

The TESOL-Electronic Village Online (EVO) 2012 module *Tutoring with Web 2.0 tools – Designing for Social Presence*<sup>1</sup> provides the backdrop for this contribution. The module was designed to develop effective learner-centred online moderation skills, with a focus on the role of Social Presence (SP). Although hosted by the EVO, the programme was open to practitioners from all subject areas, and participants represented a multifaceted community in terms of educational, social and cultural backgrounds, online learning and teaching skills, and ICT literacy.

Drawing on examples from the participants' learning journey we hypothesise that a group's capacity to send and read SP cues is a precondition for successful knowledge creation and sharing in online learning communities. Our findings provide new insights into the notion of online participation and challenge aspects of Garrison et al.'s (2000) Community of Inquiry (CoI) model. In accordance with Morgan (2011) we highlight the need for a different way of conceptualising what happens in networked learning contexts taking into account aspects such as learner identity, creative agency and participatory literacy.

## **1. ABOUT THIS CHAPTER**

In January/February 2012, two of the authors of this article ran a 5-week online training module entitled *Tutoring with Web 2.0 tools – Designing for Social Presence*. The aim of the module was to prepare tutors and teachers of English as an additional language and other subject areas for teaching in an online only context. This was the third iteration of a training event originally designed and delivered at the British Open University for tutors of English for Academic Purposes course.

The first iteration of the training module provided the basis for a detailed analysis and evaluation of the developing dynamics among the teacher trainees and later on, between the trainees and their students (Hauck & Warnecke 2012). This study focused on Kehrwald's (2008) definition of SP, that is the ability of the individual to demonstrate his/her availability for and willingness to participate in interaction. The primary aim of

the study was to explore 'how SP is developed, under what conditions and through what media, and which [SP] indicators are more prominent in a socially present online community' ((Lomicka and Lord 2012: 213). We carried out a content analysis of the trainees' asynchronous interactions through the lens of the CoI framework (Garrison et al. 2000), and more specifically applied Swan's (2002) adaptation of the original coding template for SP (see Table 2).

Garrison et al. (2000) see SP as distinct from Cognitive and Teaching Presence. However, our study concluded that there was a case for a fundamental re-consideration of this three dimensional approach. In line with Morgan's (2011) critique of the CoI, we argued that it 'does not consider the complexities of the community's global and local contexts, the potential multi-linguistic demands of the teaching and learning contexts, and how power, agency, and identities are negotiated in these multicultural contexts' (2011: 2).

In this chapter we will provide a more detailed introduction to the notion of SP and its inter-relationship with online participatory literacy. We will give a brief overview of the EVO training programme and participants before presenting our methodological approach to data gathering and evaluation, namely discourse-centred ethnography. Section 5 is dedicated to a summary of our main findings and the presentation of a new framework, the Community Indicators Framework (CIF), which we argue is particularly well suited to capture the development of productive online learning communities as

reflected in the participants' constant efforts to position and re-position themselves during the learning process. Towards the end of this chapter we outline some recommendations for further reading.

## **2. SOCIAL PRESENCE, COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATORY LITERACY**

SP and its role in mediated interactions including computer-mediated-communication (CMC) has been a research topic since the early 1970s. Initially, the SP concept emerged from the attempt to distinguish between mediated interactions (e.g. telephone) and non-mediated (face-to-face) interactions. SP was defined by Short *et al.* (1976: 65) as 'the degree of salience of the other person in a mediated interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal interaction'. SP was seen as a characteristic of the affordances of the media, where the 'capacity to transmit information about facial expression, direction of looking, posture, dress and non-verbal vocal cues, all contribute to the SP of a communications medium' (Short *et al.* 1976: 65). Subsequently, SP was used to theorise communications media and became closely related to media richness theory (Daft & Lengel 1986). From this perspective, text based CMC was conceived of as a 'lean' medium in comparison to face-to-face interaction (Spears, Lea & Postmes 2001: 605). However, the human capacity to adapt to lean media and to develop strategies to compensate for reduced cues was foregrounded by later theories of communications media (Walther 1992, 1994). Gunawardena (1995) for example, argued that although text-based CMC offered only low social contextual cues, participants' perception of the medium was primarily based on their sense of community, and

consequently interactions among participants using ‘lean’ mediums could be social, active and interactive. As a result SP began to be increasingly understood in terms of the quality of the communication among participants, rather than the technology used (for a more detailed overview see Satar 2010).

Bacon (1995) argues that ‘sustained interaction between participants’ is central to successful online learning. She observes that ‘dialogue helps learners connect with their reality, thus promoting learning [...] the reader and the writer become each other’s audience; their relationship is based on sharing the power, rather than one person controlling the other’ (Bacon 1995: 195). This observation points to the notion that Kehrwald’s definition of SP as the *availability for participation* and *willingness to participate* should be understood as two interdependent factors. Dudeney et al. (2013) take this notion further and suggest that participation ‘is not optional: those who lack appropriate literacies barely exist in digital culture and are doomed to hover on the fringes of digital societies and digital economies’. Participatory literacy can be seen as belonging to a set of key skills – personal, network, participatory, cultural and intercultural literacy – that have a focus on the ability to connect, which Dudeney et al. have identified as crucial for full participation in a digitally networked world. Thus the ability to participate effectively, and through this demonstrate SP, can be seen as a pre-condition for learning in CMC contexts and also a fundamental e-literacy skill, as opposed to merely a facilitator for Cognitive Presence as suggested in the CoI framework.

Most published research deals with the SP construct from the researchers' or teacher-as-researcher's perspective. However, Kehrwald's (2008, 2010) case study belongs to a small number of investigations that approach SP from the learner's perspective. His case study explores four online postgraduate education courses from the learners' viewpoint using dialogic interviews and focus groups. He concludes that SP is a subjective quality which translates into 'subjective projections of self [...] into technology mediated environments, subjective assessments of others' presence and assessments of the subject's relations with others' (Kehrwald 2010: 41). He sees SP as something that emerges organically, and attaches great importance to the learners' ability to send and read SP cues and the way in which these skills are learnt collaboratively: 'through seeing and experiencing how others project themselves into the environment, how others interact with one another and how others react to their personal efforts to cultivate a Social Presence' (Kehrwald 2010: 47).

### **3. THE TRAINING MODULE: TUTORING WITH WEB 2.0 TOOLS – DESIGNING FOR SOCIAL PRESENCE**

This module was presented during January/February 2012 as part of the annual training events organised by the EVO community which is part of TESOL. Table 1 provides an overview.

<b>Aims</b>	Engagement with a series of activities designed to highlight the relevance of SP in online learning and teaching contexts and to foster
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	participants' development and use of participatory literacy skills.
<b>Duration</b>	5 weeks
<b>Approach to task design</b>	The programme was inspired by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Hoven's (2006) 'experiential modelling approach' where the tools and processes the tutors are expected to use in their teaching are experienced beforehand from a learner's point of view;</li> <li>b. Allwright's (2003) and Allwright and Hanks' (2009) understanding of 'exploratory practice' or inclusive practitioner research which foregrounds the learners' (tutors as learners) perspective.</li> </ul>
<b>Participants</b>	57 teachers and tutors of English and other subjects from around the world representing a mixed cohort of learners in terms of academic histories, linguistic backgrounds, and range of e-literacy skills. For some the programme was their first experience with learning and teaching in an online only context.
<b>Venue</b>	A dedicated Moodle site ( <a href="http://moodle.click-lounge.eu/login/index.php">http://moodle.click-lounge.eu/login/index.php</a> ) which is open to the public and can be accessed as soon as interested parties have set up their account.

**Table 1:** Training programme overview

A relatively wide range of topics was covered from the exploration of the host site's functionalities and the sharing of icebreaker ideas early on in the programme, to an exploration of the challenges associated with motivation and participation half way through (see Figures 1 and 2) and finishing with strategies for assessing forum contributions in online modules in week 5. Below, we share a task example from week



3 which uses Salmon's animal descriptors for learner behaviours online (2002: 171) as a framework for discussion.

**Week 3 Task 1 - Patterns of participation: forum**

Dear all,

This week we will consider two key issues with regard to the tutor role in asynchronous communication: motivation and participation. We want to find out to what extent our work can tip the balance either in favour or against participation and whether what [participant] calls 'let students get on with it' is something we need to take on board and to communicate to our learners.

Now:

- Think about your own patterns of participation (either as a moderator or as a student). How often, when, why, how intensively do you participate?
- Then have a look at the attached document, which is a collation of common patterns of online participation as categorised by Salmon (2002: 171).
- Which one applies to you? Is there anything you have learned that you want to practise in order to help your group become / be / stay (inter)active?

The module was structured to provide opportunities for 'experiential modelling', immersing participants 'in the use of the technologies, while at the same time providing them with the freedom and framework within which to experience the practical

application of the theory in their own learning’ (Hoven 2007: n.p.). The module was also influenced by Allwright and Hanks’ (2009) understanding of ‘exploratory practice’. Exploratory research originated in the 1990s in an attempt to bridge the teacher-researcher gap. Allwright (2003) focuses on the social nature of teaching and the need for all participants to be aware of the processes involved. Similarly Allwright and Hanks draw our attention to the fact that language learning, teaching and research are social processes and call for learners to be seen, and see themselves, as ‘key practitioners’ alongside teachers; “practitioner colleagues” with the teacher playing a collegial role in helping learners develop as researchers of their own practices and as practitioners of learning’ (2009: 146).

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

In our first study (Hauck and Warnecke 2012), we followed the approach taken by Arnold and Ducate (2006) and other SP researchers by carrying out a content analysis of the trainees' asynchronous interactions in the forum through the lens of the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000), using Swan's (2002) adaptation of the original coding template for SP indicators (see Table 2). In common with most investigations of SP, the study took the perspective of the researcher or teacher-as-researcher. However, it was different in so far as we were also able to consider the learner’s perspective, namely tutors as learners on a training programme.

<b>Affective</b>	<b>Interactive</b>	<b>Cohesive</b>
Paralanguage	Greetings and salutations	Acknowledgement

Emotion	Vocatives	Agreement/disagreement
Value	Group reference	Approval
Humour	Social sharing	Invitation
Self-disclosure	Course reflection	Personal advice

**Table 2:** Swan's (2002) adaptation of the Social Presence template developed by Rourke et al. (1999)

In general, this categorisation of forum contributions according to Swan's SP indicators was found to be unhelpful as most postings were found to contain a densely woven and rich mix of indicators. In addition that the mere occurrence of SP indicators did not, in itself, appear to convey the 'SP message' expressed in the participants' contributions. The study had hoped to explore how the participants developed an awareness of the interactions they were involved in, and thus an awareness of their own and others' SP and its impact on the interaction. However, we felt that the analysis based on indicators moved us away from an understanding of the 'storyline' through the postings in terms of emerging SP among participants.

In particular, we found that the CoI framework, and the indicators template were not able to do justice to the constant shifting of roles, identities and patterns of participation that are characteristic of CMC-based interactions. Swan's indicators template has also met criticism in the literature, and some (e.g. Kim 2007) have rejected it outright arguing that it is not an accurate representation of SP. Since Rourke *et al.*'s (1999) original template was developed several attempts have been made to distinguish new and different aspects of SP. These attempts acknowledge the influence of variables such

as the affordances of the media, group dynamics and number of participants (Lomicka and Lord, 2007), peer status and discourse markers (Satar 2007), and task type (Batstone et al. 2007). After some consideration, we decided to look at the contributions to the training forum from a broader perspective in line with Kehrwald's approach.

Our data collection and analysis methodology could be broadly described as discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2008: 1), that is 'a combination of systematic observation of online activities and interviews with online actors'. It encompasses and extends Herring's Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis framework (Herring 2004), using ethnographic insights 'as a backdrop to the selection, analysis, and interpretation of log data'. There are broadly three dimensions to this kind of research: Data analysis; Observation; Interviews and surveys.

## **5. INITIAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section we will present participant interactions as rich narratives which include contextual and other supplementary information such as illustrations as appropriate. We hope that we have captured the complex nature of online interaction from an authentic learner perspective. The names of the participants are pseudonyms.

### **5.1 Shifting roles and identities and varying patterns of participation**

Shea et al.'s revised CoI model (Shea & Bidjerano 2010, Shea et al. 2012) introduces the notion of Learner Presence as a distinct element, and suggests that nearly all components and relationships interact with and influence each other. Our investigation takes this notion further with a shift in focus onto the relevance of participation in successful online learner communities as a first step towards the required interaction. To illustrate our observations, we have selected data from five of our participants who are representative of the diversity of the group that worked together online.

The chosen extracts relate to tasks 1 and 2 in week 3. Both tasks focus on the theme of 'Participation' and triggered a high volume of reflective comments. They highlight the broad range of factors that are perceived to influence participation. Importantly, many participants' statements confirm Shea et al.'s claim that '[l]earners and instructors do not perform identical roles and thus must engage in different behaviours to succeed' (2012: 93). The following forum contributions are representative to that effect:

My situation changes depending on whether I'm a moderator or a participant. [...] Related with my other studies, I think I'm mostly a wolf or a squirrel for the forums that I'm a participant of; I don't have much time to contribute especially at the beginning and end of the semesters, but I think I'm mostly an elephant for the forums that I moderate.

*(Huseyin - Sunday, 15 January 2012, 08:34 AM)*

As a student, I have found that the role played by online tutors can make a huge difference in the learning that occurs in discussion forums. [...] However, in other contexts I've also observed that the type of tutor behaviour (more than the frequency) makes a huge difference.

*(Lara - Monday, 16 January 2012, 08:27 AM)*

[...] when I have had time I have been visiting every day, so perhaps I have elephant tendencies. Although with time constraints [...] I am more mousey! I have been dipping in and out and enjoying reading all the posts and discussions at my leisure without forcing myself to respond.. I will aim to become more dolphin like as the course progresses! When I moderate a course I block off time daily and keep on top of it and am most definitely an elephant. It's interesting to think about different types of participation and how we can all display several of the characteristics and still enjoy a good learning experience.

*(Anne - Tuesday, 17 January 2012, 06:39 AM)*

The task initiated a lively exchange about motivational factors underlying participation in online groups along with reflections about the changing nature of participation according to assigned roles, personal circumstances and/or institutional settings:

I think, many times as a student, I have behaved as an elephant. I think it is because I am a responsible student who likes to do her homework! I've noticed I just do what the instructors ask me to do, no more, no less, so perhaps I have the tendency of a squirrel and a mouse, too.

(Maria - Thursday, 19 January 2012, 7:18 PM)

The most important factor affecting my contribution [...] online [...] is the size of the group. The smaller the group the more I contribute, perhaps because I remember who the participants are and what they said before in their comments. I could say that in a smaller group I am a dolphin. However, things are different if the group is bigger [...] I think I turn into a mouse or an elephant because I try to read my peers' comments and then try to remember what they said before [...]. It makes me really confused and I don't participate as fully as I could.

(Anabel - Tuesday, 17 January 2012, 03:10 AM)

Participants were then asked to use the web 2.0 interactive poster website 'Glogster' to produce visual representations of their actual online participation, and that to which they aspired:

#### **Week 3 Task 2 - My animal Glogster**

Following on from task 1 we now ask you to look at your online participation patterns from a more playful and creative angle.

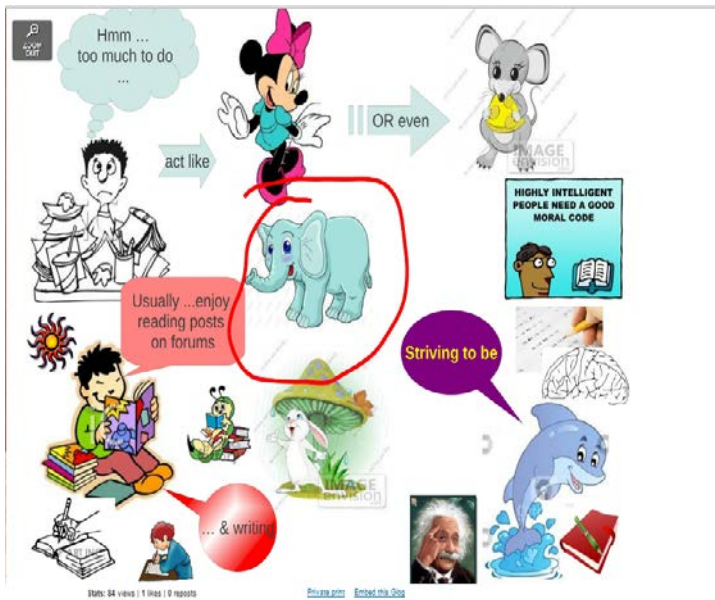
- Please make a note of the animals from [Salmon's \(2002\) list](#) you could identify with.
- Brainstorm ideas and associations with these animals, i.e. music, images, poems etc.
- Then go to [www.glogster.com](http://www.glogster.com) and create a poster that represents the associations you have with the 'your' animals. What does your 'online creature' look like?

- Please have a look at [this one](#) we produced as a suggestion ... we are sure you will be more creative than we were, but it is a start. 😊

Please note: Feel free to use any other Web 2.0 tool that you consider appropriate for this task.

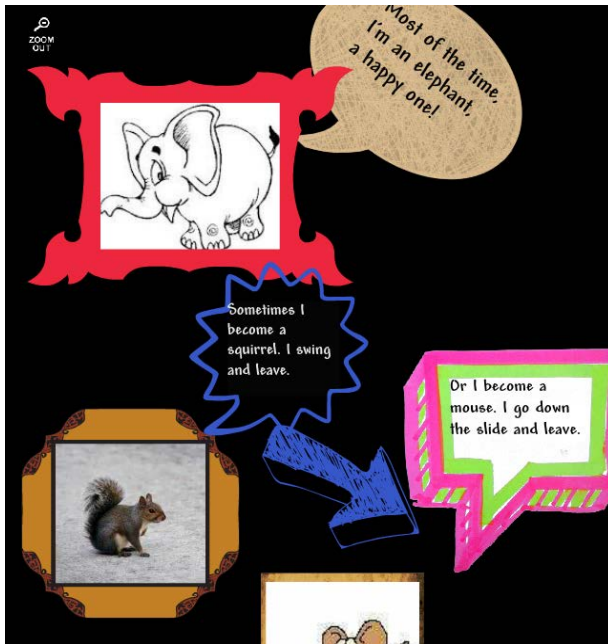
- Please post the link to your Glogster (or any other media you created) in the [appropriate thread in the week 2 forum](#). (click *reply* at the very bottom of all contributions only!)

Enjoy!



**Figure 1:** Glogster poster 1, Malgorzata - Tuesday, 17 January 2012, 06:44 PM





**Figure 2:** Glogster poster 2, Maria - Monday, 23 January 2012, 12:58 AM

Both these examples emphasise not only the participants' realisations of their changing participation patterns and shifting roles, they also are poignant visible representations of identity formation and the co-existence of a number of online identities. The frequent use of arrows highlights the process nature of what happens in online communities.

A further aspect this chapter seeks to emphasise is the need to distinguish between participatory literacy as a prerequisite for SP and SP itself, and we suggest that what we can actually train for in teacher education is participatory literacy as defined by Pegrum (2009), that is 'digital communicative literacy, which provides a foundation for online interactions, [...] and which facilitates the collaborative processes at the core of participatory literacy'. The following extracts bring this into focus:

This is a very interesting task as we are required to observe ourselves in this session and of course also observe you, the moderators, and how we interact with you and each other.

*(Tomek - Monday, 16 January 2012, 03:26 PM)*

I suppose a bit of lurking is healthy, as long as teacher / participant are happy with it. [...] I am very glad of the opportunity to do this course and get the student-side experience as it's a very different view and funny how easy it is for me to assume student characteristics!

*(Anna- Friday, 20 January 2012, 08:43 AM)*

The next quote demonstrates how participants feel, and the approaches they might adopt, if they have not fully developed their participatory literacy. It shows how this limitation might lead to a breakdown of communication, or even stop participation entirely.

First emotion: I feel unable to cope with all these interesting and intelligent posts. Regarding the content as well as regarding the amount of posts. [...] Given a certain number of participants it is difficult for me to follow each and every entry [...] I realise that I tend to concentrate on the replies of the tutors, trying to extract, whether the referred post is worth reading. Doesn't give much clues on the content either. As I don't read the posts in detail or don't have time to think them over (seeing that there are plenty more waiting), I don't react to the posts often, which leads to the fact that the online coaches are the only ones to react to

the posts. Is that what I call collaborative learning? Reminds me more of old fashioned teaching: pupils fulfilling the chores and the teacher giving their 'placet'. Now the reaction is that I don't write a post at all, or maybe a funny one or a very critical one, just to avoid repeating thoughts that have been posted already. Isn't that a pity?

*(Claudia - Monday, 23 January 2012, 03:45 AM)*

Participatory literacy may be achieved by systematically raising awareness for SP cues such as the cohesive SP indicator 'invitation' in 'Isn't that a pity?' Such an approach corroborates Kehrwald's (2010: 47) conceptualisation of SP as the ability to send and read SP cues, and his assertion that these skills are best acquired collaboratively 'through seeing and experiencing how others project themselves into the environment, how others interact with one another and how others react to their personal efforts to cultivate a Social Presence'.

## **5.2 Hierarchy versus process**

We argue that the key to developing a skill such as participatory literacy is continuous meaningful reflection on the learning/interaction process, and consideration of this process as an 'organic' one. The task performances above move the participants well beyond the self as a 'static entity' in online interactions. The examples reflect the ongoing process of identity formation depending on ever changing contextual circumstances on the one hand, and insights gained from newly acquired or pre-existing

theoretical knowledge on the other. The following statement underlines a participant's acknowledgement of these processes.

[One aspect that is crucial in online courses] is the opportunity to develop personally or professionally. I would suggest focusing on social aspects to keep motivation up.

*(Tomek - Thursday, 26 January 2012, 11:10 AM)*

In the same vein, the hierarchical division of the elements of the CoI model is challenged by participants' experiences:

In an online course I think student-student interaction is key [...] I think peer exchanges really enrich online courses and really help to engage, motivate and inspire learners and help them to think outside the box and [...] this rich student-student interaction can promote analysis and syntheses in response to others views, opinions and knowledge. Besides that the connections formed through these interactions provide support in many ways not just academically and make the online learning environment a fun place to be.

*(Anne - Friday, 20 January 2012, 09:27 AM)*

What these participant contributions highlight, in terms of those involved taking on different responsibilities and functions, is corroborated by Comas-Quinn, de los Arcos and Mardomingo:

We argue that our attempt to promote interaction through our VLE model has resulted in a contested space where traditional hierarchies and relationships between tutors and learners are in a state of flux and where new hierarchies and relationships are constantly being forged. [...] tutors are no longer the only ‘experts’ that learners have access to, whilst learners can more easily adopt the roles of content-creators and peer-supporters

(2012: 129).

### **5.3 The impact of experiential modelling and exploratory practice**

The extracts quoted above also hint at the added value of experiential modelling and exploratory practice in terms of cultivating a SP. Such modelling can be carried out by moderator/teachers and participants alike.

Observing you and [other trainer] I see you letting us get on with the tasks and observing while we get on with it, yet responding when there are questions and clarification is needed. This is energy-saving for the moderators and allows the participants time to engage with the tasks and each other. This has been a learning experience for me.

*(Tomek - Thursday, 2 February 2012, 09:45 PM)*

Every post commented on gave a sense of inclusion in the group and left more food for thought. I thought that you both did a very good job of making the group knit together and your comments were valuable. The measure of how

successful this is will be seen in the f2f component of my blended course. The bonding of the group will also be a success.

*(Caroline - Tuesday, 7 February 2012, 10:18 PM)*

The remarks suggest a direct link between experiential modelling and SP. The ways in which others position and re-position themselves in an online learning community offer a model which one can adopt and follow. To this effect the moderator-colleagues who ran the training intentionally positioned themselves in a variety of ways, which – in turn – gave them the opportunity to shift roles, if not identity. As a result the shifting between the perspectives of the teacher, the learner and the researcher became the centre of attention and could be discussed by the group.

#### **5.4 Defining participation/positioning**

The discussion about the division of labour, roles and participation patterns in online learning and teaching has shown that participation is more often than not measured and defined by a visible ‘presence’. Yet, as the quotes below illustrate, there are problems attached to such a conceptualisation.

It’s interesting to think about different types of participation and how we can all display several of the characteristics and still enjoy a good learning experience.

*(Anne - Tuesday, 17 January 2012, 06:39 AM)*

Otherwise, I am very active reader and writer on forums. I like to give some additional help to fellow learners, as well as new ideas to teachers. Usually, I look for some new ideas, resources, links about the current topic in others' posts. In regular circumstances, I visit forums every day and if I find something to add, I do it. My posts vary from short to middle long. Comparing to the given table, my type would be an Elephant, sometimes a Rabbit, but nowadays I tends to act like a Mouse. . Anyway, striving to be a Dolphin.

*(Malgorzata - Tuesday, 17 January 2012, 06:41 PM)*

I am amused at how I slot back into the role of student and become a little more hesitant than I would as in my role as a teacher!

*(Anne - Thursday, 26 January 2012, 06:12 AM)*

This study maintains that participation as a concept is too limiting a description of what happens in online communities and ought to be replaced by Davies and Harre's (1990) notion of 'positioning' as an attempt at describing how we relate ourselves to our contexts and environments; the notion of positioning is closely linked to identity formation. Linehan and McCarthy establish that positioning as a process of negotiation 'is a useful way to characterise the shifting responsibilities and interactive involvements of members in a community' (2000: 441). What are being negotiated are all participants' (learners and teachers') expectations, conceptualisations of their own as well as others' identity and realisations of changes to these. The following extract supports Morgan's view that the 'dynamics of positioning and identity are already at play at the entry stages of an online teaching context' (2011: 4).

I also feel that I post more reluctantly when I am a participant of a course, especially at the beginning until I 'get to know' the tutors and the other participants. Being a moderator/teacher of a course gives me more confidence. Funny, isn't it?

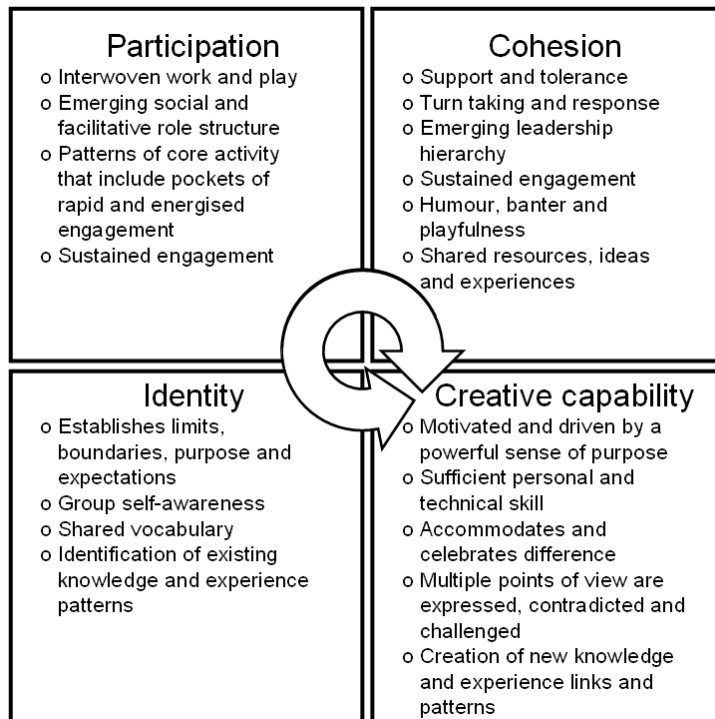
*(Anabel - Thursday, 26 January 2012, 07:56 PM)*

### **5.5. Supporting and guiding online learning communities**

As discussed above, several attempts have been made to distinguish new and different aspects of SP which acknowledge the influence of a number of variables. Yet we do not feel that these attempts have successfully represented the fluid nature of these online learning spaces, and the dynamic identities of participants - tutors and learners alike. Galley et al.'s (2011, 2012) Community Indicators Framework (CIF), emerged out of a series of attempts to more systematically position transactions and emerging patterns of activity on a social networking site for educators called 'Cloudworks' in order to provide guidance for communities using the site. The framework attempts to account for aspects such as identity, creative agency and participatory literacy. In our view it provides a more effective way of representing the development of the democratic, learner-centred, and identity building processes online which the new electronic media facilitate (Warschauer 1999), and provides a useful framework for supporting and guiding online learning communities.



Galley et al. (2012) gathered empirical evidence from the site, and related it to the literature from a range of disciplines concerned with professional and learning communities. They included literature relating to distance learning communities - including Garrison et al. (2000) - and studies into CMC, self-organising communities on the web, and wider research about the nature of learning organisations and continuous professional development. The framework is built around four key aspects of community experience: *identity* – how individuals perceive the community and their place within it, *participation* – the ways in which individuals engage in activity; *cohesion* – the ties between individuals and the community as a whole; and *creative capability*– the ability and willingness of the community to create shared artefacts, and shared knowledge and understanding. Each of these aspects is seen as being dependent on the others, in that the absence of one is likely to significantly impact on the presence of the others.



**Figure 3:** Community Indicators Framework by Galley *et al.* (2011)

It is noteworthy that the category of identity has found its way into the understanding of online communities, and the distinction between learner and teacher role is entirely absent. Here work and play, private and professional, academic and informal spheres interweave. In contrast to the CoI framework, all elements are equally weighted and their impact on each other and on the nature of activity is seen to be fluid, depending on context and participants. Galley *et al.* (2011, 2012) take account of social hierarchies that emerge in communities online and see these as important in structuring interactions. However, these are seen as being capable of evolving, and often of a temporary nature.

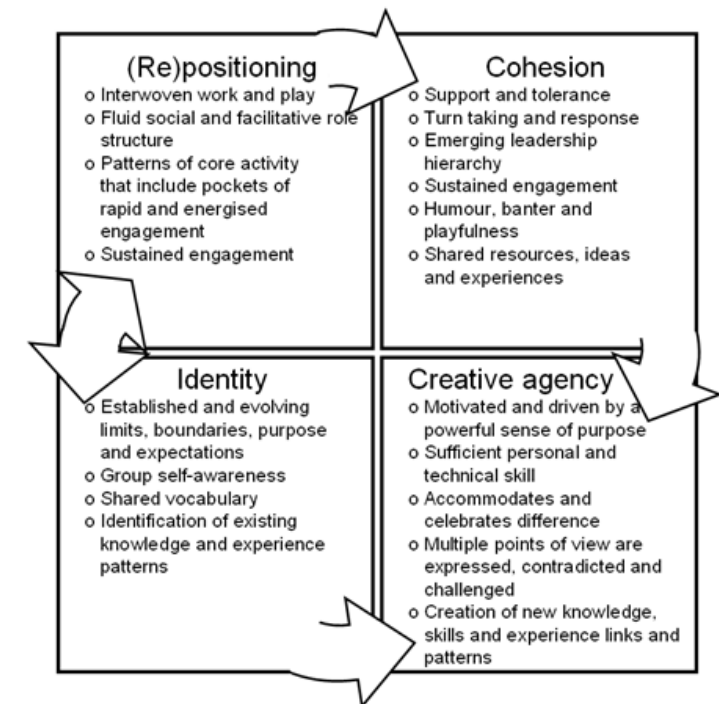
In this chapter, we suggest further development of the CIF framework through a re-conceptualisation of participants' tasks and other performances as 'role' outlined in the

‘emerging social and facilitative role structure’ element in the participation category. We propose an understanding of participatory behaviours as ‘positioning’ in line with by Morgan (2011). This then moves us beyond Kehrwald’s (2008) notion of ‘projecting oneself’, towards a notion of shifting patterns in the way we relate to others online, responsive to learning context. To that effect we draw on Davies and Harre’s (1990) concept of ‘positioning’ as a way to describe how humans relate to their contexts and ‘a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role’ (van Langenhove & Harre 1999: 14). Morgan, who explored this understanding in view of the teaching presence construct in CoIs, writes:

In Linehan and McCarthy’s (2000) view positioning “is a useful way to characterise the shifting responsibilities and interactive involvements of members in a community” when looking at particular practices (p. 441). This notion seems particularly relevant to online teaching, where instructors arrive in the teaching context with at least some professional identity that has been constructed through experiences in other practices. At the same time, the members of the community (in this case the students) have some notion of the practice of learning and the positioning of themselves in relation to an instructor in that practice. Therefore, dynamics of positioning and identity are already at play at the entry stages of an online teaching context. [...] If we truly want to understand effective teaching presence, it is perhaps timely to focus on conditions and affordances that the context provides, and pay greater attention to the role of positioning.

(2011: 4)

Based on our findings from the TESOL module, we also maintain that the category of ‘Creative capability’ should be replaced by ‘Creative agency’ to highlight that creative skills and actions can be developed and turn into agency rather than defining these as a more static qualities. In Galley et al.’s 2011 model the arrows serve to represent movement through the categories towards creative productivity, however we suggest that these arrows describe the participatory process from which SP develops and manifests itself. We argue for a re-consideration of the SP construct in the light of this framework as an overarching concept and as both the means *and* the end of communication and interaction in online communities, and the result of participatory literacy as understood by Pegrum (2009).



**Figure 4:** Revised CIF

The question arises how can the insights gained from this study contribute ‘to equip educators with a state-of-the-art underpinning theoretical framework so that they are better placed to guide teaching and learning efforts, to convert hunches and intuition into demonstrable student gains’ (Pegg et al. 2007 quoted in Pegrum 2009)? Morgan (2011) suggests ‘that a shift to understanding Teaching Presence within a socio-cultural perspective has important implications for teaching and design’. The same, we propose, holds true for SP. We believe that Galley et al.’s (2011) CIF is useful as a framework for supporting and guiding developing communities, as it expresses the tensions and challenges which can emerge as these evolve. A critical approach to these tensions and challenges may help to manage and limit risk to the community as people debate, discuss and work to create new knowledge together openly and online. On the basis of

our study we would argue that tasks designed to spark collaborative reflection on issues related to participation, motivation and SP, seem particularly well suited to foster SP itself and should therefore be more systematically trialled and integrated into CMC-based teacher education, and learner preparation for online interaction. We can claim with some certainty that it was the participants' interpretation of tasks designed to trigger exchanges on motivation and participation that led to reflection, discussion, and learning about the relevance of SP in online communities and – at the same time – helped SP emerge among the trainees. By witnessing how others ‘project themselves into the environment, how others interact with one another and how others react to their personal efforts to cultivate a Social Presence’ (Kehrwald 2010: 47) participants acquired the skill to send, receive and interpret SP cues. They found out about the way roles and identities can shift through interaction, and were able to engage in the process of positioning and re-positioning themselves which – in turn – allowed them to revisit and re-conceptualize their position in the online interactions and to accept, and even strategically use, the transient nature of their role to improve the creative agency of the learning community.

## **6. FURTHER READING**

**6.1 Thomas, M., Reinders, H. & Warschauer, M. (eds.) (2013). *Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning*. London: Bloomsbury**

Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) explains key terms and concepts, synthesizes the research literature and explores the implications of new and emerging technologies.

The three sections focus on: ‘The CALL context’, ‘CALL learning environments’ and ‘CALL in language education’. The link between the sections is the change that has been brought to language learning and teaching by digital technologies.

The volume includes chapters on design, teacher education, evaluation, teaching online and testing, as well as current trends like the immense increase in the use of social media. A glossary of terms to support those new to CALL as well as to allow those already engaged in the field to deepen their existing knowledge is also provided. (Text abridged from <http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/contemporary-computer-assisted-language-learning-9781441193629/> )

**6.2 Allwright, D. & Hanks, J. (2009). The developing language learner: An introduction to exploratory practice. Palgrave Macmillan.**

This publication promotes Exploratory Practice (EP) as a viable means of investigating and improving a deeper understanding of processes and interactions in the second language classroom, here understood as the context in which learning and teaching takes place also beyond the confines of brick and mortar institutions.

EP is based on learners as ‘developing practitioners’, on involving learners and teachers in all aspects of the language learning process, which encapsulates the authors’ motto of moving from global thinking to local practice – applying theoretical concepts wisely in specific teaching and learning contexts.

The authors illustrate how EP can support practitioners in overcoming traditional notions of good reflective practice as identifying ‘problems’. Instead they suggest that such ‘problems’ ought to be considered as ‘puzzles’ that spark enquiry. Yet, the volume

also draws attention to possible ethical and epistemological challenges of such investigations. The project examples present invaluable insights into good EP practice, particularly the participant narratives and rich descriptions of activities showcase meaningful collaboration with learners in order to enhance the quality of ‘life’ in the on- as well as offline classroom.

**6.3 Higgins, C. (ed.) (2011). *Identity Formation in Globalizing Contexts: Language Learning in the New Millennium*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.**

Through qualitative methodologies including narrative analysis, case studies, and ethnographic research, this volume investigates the multitude of ways that globalization in the new millennium influences language learning, transnational living, and the construction of dynamic identities. From a theoretical standpoint, the book explores how global flows of people, ideas and technology, as well as interconnected global ‘scapes’ continually construct new identity choices for language learners. It highlights how these identity options impact on language learning, language teaching and language use.

This volume focuses on three key aspects of globalization: the blurring of ethno-national boundaries due to immigration and travelling, the rise of intercultural awareness and ‘third spaces’ (Bhabha, H. K., 2004) through language learning and border crossing, and identity formation influenced by media and cyberspace.

The volume highlights how in the new millennium we are “require[d] to take a deeper look at how identity is formed in relation to mobility and the transgression of modernist



boundaries” (p. 2). However, it also illustrates in much interesting detail and case studies how these new identities do not necessarily erase or remove former traditional ones but create more fluid ‘hybrid identities’.

Abridged from <http://linguistlist.org/pubs/reviews/get-review.cfm?SubID=4550581>, review by Damian J. Rivers, *The Linguist List*, International Linguistics Community Online.

### 6.3 Interesting links

- NMC Project, Horizon Reports, for example for HE to highlight trends that influence the learning and teaching in the future: <http://www.nmc.org/horizon-project>
- Mike Sharples, Patrick McAndrew, Martin Weller, Rebecca Ferguson, Elizabeth FitzGerald, Tony Hirst, Mark Gaved (2013). *Innovating Pedagogy 2013*. Exploring new forms of teaching, learning and assessment, to guide educators and policy makers. Report published by The Open University, <http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating/> , specifically chapter on Crowd Learning ([http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating/?page\\_id=40](http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating/?page_id=40))
- <http://crowd-learning.org/>: This website is an open initiative to explore the emerging concept of crowdlearning and how it can complement, add value and affect traditional learning structures and practices.
- Educause: EDUCAUSE® is a non-profit association and the foremost community of IT leaders and professionals committed to advancing higher education. This project connects people seeking and providing information on

all aspects of working in and with computer assisted learning.

<http://www.educause.edu/>

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