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Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by **Nick Noakes** - Tuesday, 27 February 2007, 01:24 PM

This space is for all of us to share and discuss our stories of how we got into online facilitation.

Did you learn by the seat of your pants? Did you take courses first or at some later point or points? What courses have you taken? What have been the key take-aways from your individual trajectories in becoming an online facilitator?

Over to you! 😊

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by **Barbara Dieu** - Tuesday, 27 February 2007, 06:06 PM

Hmmm...the last ten years....does my memory stretch that far? I must definitely drink some of **Willy Wonka's Wonkavite**

I definitely started by the seat of my pants, which is a recurring pattern in my life and have not taken any formal courses (I did not even know exactly what function or characteristics an online facilitator is supposed to have - just googled it).

Most of what I learnt was through being in contact with different people and observing how they reacted (I suppose this must also be connected to my job : juggling with the balance of power, reason and feelings of students, parents, board all the time ; and having attended and hosted social meetings at home)

When I went online, I just did whatever there was to do according to what I thought would work (tacit classroom management and hosting techniques , I suppose) and then observed a lot what people did and how they did it and drew my conclusions. I followed sessions at Tappedin and later volunteered to lead some and the same happened to other online sessions and workshops at YG, wikispaces and blogs.

However, I have not managed to repeat the same lines like some people do. I just cannot follow a recipe - whenever you eat curry at home - it will always taste different, depending on the ingredients I have at hand, the weather, the cutlery and dishware I serve it on, the wine and the mood you are in 😊

I facilitated the process of my learners and other colleagues starting online, experimenting with the different tools and environments and have recently been trying to make both reflect on the process and where all this can lead , even though I am not sure about it myself and have no answers - so what we try is to ask each other these questions and patch the ideas that come up, blend them with people's experience in certain domains and adapt them to our own contexts. A **quilt** of a myriad colours. Aloha!

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by **Nick Noakes** - Thursday, 1 March 2007, 03:10 AM

I think I might be an online learning junkie! ... My first course was on teaching online with Tina Joy Pitt in DU MOO and email (pretty much pre-web) ... which covered quite a bit to do with structured online facilitation. I've done so many courses online now I've lost track ... Nancy White's OnFac, Concord's MooM with Sarah Haavind, Gilly Salmon's e-Moderating, Communities of Practice workshop (most of these I think I share with Sylvia but we did them at different times). These were all quite spread out time wise for me and I was doing a lot of seat of my pants stuff in between too! And then there was the 2-year online (bearing 2 x 1-week n UK) research MEd in Networked Collaborative Learning, and thenetc etc ... well you get the picture, as I say, an online learning junkie!

With Nancy and Sarah's courses, they both walk the talk really well and I learned as much from the content and activities/processes, as I did observing and reflecting on what they did and the way they did it - language is so key to all of this, as is stance/perspective. Nancy goes meta frequently (and uses a different colour to help differentiate those comments too!) and this really helps ... this making the tacit explicit of what the facilitator is attending to and why, what assumptions and criteria they bring to bear in making judgments and decisions about ways to interpret and respond in narrow-bandwidth environments. Phew that was a bit of mouthful of a sentence ... sorry folks! 7pm ... time to get the hell outta the office!


I hope other people will start posting in here too ... thanks for getting the ball rolling Bee and Kelly. 😊

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Debating if this is a useful contribution

by **Nancy White** - Thursday, 1 March 2007, 04:32 PM

 [A_Short_History_of_Online_Facilitation.doc](#)

In the olden days of late 2004 I wrote an obscure piece on the history of online facilitation for an even obscurer publication. I offer it not as a concise and clear answer, but some interesting bits that sit along side our personal histories with online facilitation.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Kelly Christopherson](#) - Tuesday, 27 February 2007, 09:13 PM

I have only been doing the online facilitation for a little while. I started taking Harvard Univeristy Graduate School of Education classes two years ago. This past year I was asked to be an online facilitator and did a 4 week training course. I will be doing more online facilitation in the future but I know that any chance a person has at facilitation assists them in so many ways with what they do offline.

As for SL, my avatar is Kelv Chevelier. I try to visit a few times a week but we are in the middle of basketball playoffs, I coach, and staffing so I have little time for the next few weeks. I will add you to my friends and we can maybe have a chat some time.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Jan Lai](#) - Friday, 2 March 2007, 12:44 AM

Actually in the last ten years I've done a lot of facilitation but "live" since I work as a non formal trainer for young european volunteers and for EU youth leaders. The online part started only 2 years ago when I enrolled in a master on e-learning design and management. I dont have a lot of practice yet as I am still in a learning curve (the up-hill phase I guess).

So, let's say I'm a newbie...



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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Kaj Rietberg](#) - Friday, 2 March 2007, 01:41 AM

I started in 92 with a economical study. I wanted to do something with computers and economics. But that didn't work out. But I still loved the computer. I did something else as a study.

Since I started to learn the internet. I think that was in 96 or 97, I'm hooked on it. I love the information there is to find, all those words to read and to get to know more. I have used ICQ for a long time to chat with people from all over the world just great all those talks and inetresting people you can meet.

Now I'm a special education teacher for children with Autistic spectrum disorder. I believe that online education can help these children learn. I'm really a self learner (probably not so good English), I just try and see how it works. I spend a lot of time on the internet to learn about all the possibilities of learning.

I just did my first online workshop about [Quest Atlantis](#), a virtual education world. This online course was a great way of learning.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Bronwyn Stuckey](#) - Sunday, 4 March 2007, 05:22 PM

Hey Kaj,

Great to find you here. Yes we are just completing an online workshop for teachers disctibuted about the globe where we have used the 3d multi-user environment [Quest Atlantis](#) (built on Active Worlds 3D engine) and using [Skypecast](#) for our audio. I find facilitating in the 3D spcae with the voice was a great way to introduce a new and dynamic technology and address a myriad of questions people had along the way. The synchronous nature of the workshop was a challenge (time and new technology) but with synchronous tools growing more accessible and user-friendly we will see much more real time facilitation and support.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Mar Ruiz](#) - Friday, 2 March 2007, 01:59 AM

My first contact with this worls was at <http://www.barcelona2004.org>, this was a cultural event that took place in 2004 and this yera will be hel in Monterey, Mexico.

I was web editor firts, but a community was spontaneously build, we jsut openend a space for them and it worked. During that period I met Nancy White at <http://www.thewell.org> - I even met her during her visit to barcelona some yeras ago- and since then I have been involved in several building communities online projects. My last one at <http://intermonxfam.org>, a new space for community is being built for young people.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Sylvia Currie](#) - Friday, 2 March 2007, 07:40 AM

Nick calls himself an online learning junkie. I can relate! Yes, I also took Nancy White's Online Facilitation workshop, Concord.org's MooM (Moving out of the Middle) with Sarah Haavind, and CPSquare.org's Communities of Practice workshop. I'll also add iCohere.com's Online Community Workshop, although that was more about community design for higher ed than about online facilitation. There are some others but whew, 10 years is a long time!

Thinking back...way back (actually more than 10 years! ouch!) I was given my first taste of online facilitation in a course taught by Linda Harasim from SFU. She modeled all those good things like weaving, and put a flavour on different posts, like social, administrative, divergent, convergent, etc. Students were given the opportunity to facilitate. I'd say that experience was career changing for me!

I then sort of fell into a more formal online facilitator role back in the late 90's with the Global Educators' Network (GEN). GEN began as a gathering place for researchers in the TeleLearning Network of Centres of Excellence to share and get feedback on work in progress. It quickly evolved into an international community and we found ourselves immersed in new roles, like online facilitator, community coordinator, etc.

Through participation in those GEN discussions I began to notice how certain ways of phrasing questions influenced the quality and quantity of responses, how some facilitators managed to create a warm and friendly atmosphere and others felt more serious and academic, how revealing publicly that you haven't read what others have contributed can be a total show stopper! (etc etc) I also noticed how participants could influence the discussions -- sometimes taking on a facilitation role without realizing it. I became really interested in trying to figure out what works and what doesn't.

The more formal workshops were terrific -- they sort of frame up what you're working with in practice, and offer more opportunities to practice with some constructive feedback. Helping others through Knowplace.ca and my work at NVIT has also been a really good way to learn. No better way to learn something than to try to teach it! But also a great deal of my learning has been, and continues to be, from carefully watching what other people do. That's the glory of open, online discussions! These people are my mentors and they don't even realize it!

This backwards journey has brought forward a lot of memories! I may be inspired to start a list of memorable moments in online facilitation. If we all contributed, it could become quite the collection of vignettes!

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Bronwyn Stuckey](#) - Sunday, 4 March 2007, 05:15 PM

I agree totally Sylvia. So much of the finesse in facilitation is not learned from books, theory or even online discussions like this. It is in the actual to-and-fro of the job. I do have to say though that theories make so much more sense when you have been engaged in the practice. I remember reading Amy Jo Kim's Community Building (2000) only a year ago and nodding as I read parts of it.

I put myself out there volunteering to facilitate groups and do view these as continued learning experience. I worked in [Listening to the City](#) and [Fly into the Future](#) and [K-12 Online](#) as opportunities to explore facilitation and different community toolsets. I do have to say that I find some people like myself actually 'discover themselves' online. For some people these were not skills people knew they had nor had an opportunity to demonstrate before they went online.

I too took Nancy White's Facilitation course and The Foundations of Communities Practice which I now coach in. But the workshops most made sense because I had a real need in a community I was trying to facilitate (and because I had just had a monumental failure in a previous effort 😊).

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Silvana Carnicero](#) - Friday, 2 March 2007, 09:03 PM

I also started by the seats of my pants as Bee said. I had taken online course on how to integrate online project work to the EFL classroom and four years later I was offered the possibility of facilitating the course. Invitation that I enthusiastically accepted but for which I had no experience at all. I tried to do what was expected from me that was to moderate the discussions that were taking place in the forums in which participants had to post their assignments. For that, I used my facilitator's postings as a model since I hadn't had any previous training on online facilitation.

Later, I took some short online courses as a participant related to the ICT field and last year I was asked to design an online course on the use of international journalism in the classroom as a preparation for the participation in a specific project belonging to IEARN. At the moment, I am facilitating this course.

Last year I participated in different electronic groups and I also moderated an e-sig.

My skills as an online facilitator were mainly self-developed.

Hope to learn from you all.

Best wishes,

Silvana

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Kaj Rietberg](#) - Monday, 5 March 2007, 03:06 AM

Hello Silvana,

That online course of you about journalism for IEARN sounds interesting. Can you tell about it?

Best wishes,

Kaj

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Robin Yap](#) - Sunday, 4 March 2007, 06:38 PM

Last ten years (I'll be dating myself as I write this)

I've been a computer nerd in the 80s having learned Cobol (yes I just look young) and moved on to more (now) esoteric programming. As I enjoy face-to-face training, I took my MS in Computer Technology in Education meshing the love for anything computer related (ergo my fascination with science fiction too) and passion for education.

Being part of a global outsourcing training company I've been exposed to many training software products including Interwise, Breeze, Centra, Webex, GoToMeeting and such. I learn by doing and sometimes being thrust into online classes that I have to teach since I am the SME for the face-to-face version of the class.

I think having a leaning towards computer science and the continuous need to be in the leading edge of technology allowed for open mindedness, removal of fear of failure (as I've had my share of online facilitation mistakes - from as simple as sneezing and deafening my students to saying something inappropriate thinking that my mute button is on), and the understanding that when one is confident to say "I don't know everything about this technology but we'll learn it together" especially at beta or initial launch of these software products that students were much more forgiving.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Nick Noakes](#) - Monday, 5 March 2007, 02:36 AM

It's really interesting reading all of these. There is a very strong element of get stuck in and do it, learn some by the seat of your pants adapting what you can from onground facilitation experiences. Then coming to online courses and/or books with a little experience under your belt, so that what is said on these courses has a personal, experiential context to make it stick. The virtual head nodding of people when people read something (either in sync chat or async forum) has been almost palpable in responses in these situations.

It's only in the last 6 years that the theory behind this practice of online facilitation has started to really take off. Although I'm starting to feel a little bit (not unhappily) like the odd one out as I actually took a course before trying to teach and facilitate online, I was probably lucky that I just happened to chose a course that had a great facilitator and teacher who walked the talk!

Thank you all for your posts and I hope it will encourage others to post here and in the current landscape thread! 🙄 What about others experiences?

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Derek Chirnside](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 11:53 AM

Nick, this is an interesting activity, the looking back and "Where are we now?"

I am reminded of a small comment by Etienne Wenger at the end of a long day's workshop on Communities of practice. (Paraphrase) "Our understanding is just in it's infancy, like our thinking was in the 70's on groups, that has matured much more into our understanding of groups today". He went on to say something about our understanding (of CoP's) will grow and will deepen in the future.

I read last night Nancy's document referred to in this post:

From [Debating if this is a useful contribution](#) by choconancy on Thursday, 1 March 2007 4:32:00 p.m.:

In the olden days of late 2004 I wrote an obscure piece on the history of online facilitation for an even obscurer publication. I offer it not as a concise and clear answer, but some interesting bits that sit along side our personal histories with online facilitation.

This is quite a remarkable summary/overview, and has some good avenues to inquire down further. It starts with the sentence "Traditional face-to-face (F2F) group facilitation is a well evolved practice"

I wonder in a few years me what we will say about online facilitation?? I'd say we, the collective we have learned a huge amount this century. But it has opened up just as many new doors, especially with new technologies.

My personal history in the online facilitation world is not that long. e-mail Lists in the 1990's and Forums in the 2000's.

Since 2000, My main role was a course developer in a College of Education with over a thousand distance students and online was the natural way to go. We set our standard at 56K dialup, and the challenge was to learn to live in this new medium.

Consequently I have spent a lot of time alongside others who were teaching courses in maori, professional studies, special needs, music etc. At the heart of the institution there has always been the desire to live in learning communities of some sort, after all these are budding professionals we work with and most of the teachers saw the limitations of a lecture driven methodology (or lectures on DVD delivered to distance students) and many have sought to embrace a distributed/online community model. I have learned a lot through vicarious experience and mistakes. I've generally tried to do a little more than I should on the platform, understanding, energy and resources we have.

We have actually come a long way, with more to learn. It's been a lot of fun. I meet people still who I've interacted with online.

In this context I've run several workshops face-face and online on the topic of facilitation. I've also been part of several online workshops as well. [I'm actually now ready for another dose!!]

As I've described in my yesterday's post, I'm now involved with catalysing a potential teachers community out of a soon to end project.

Pretty well everything else has been dabbling. Clinical health educators, mothers online, short term task groups, planning groups, teachers groups, parents groups, early child care educators, and most recently looking at something for amateur playwrights. A bit like a butterfly trajectory.

It's been great to read the other stories here. We have a lot in common, and yet so different.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Maggie Verster](#) - Monday, 5 March 2007, 08:16 AM

Hi All,

I have always been passionate about getting teachers to use ICT for teaching and learning and it has been an uphill battle in my country (South Africa). I am currently doing my masters in computer based education at the University of Johannesburg on creating an online community of practice for maths literacy teachers. This brought me to contact Tony Carr from Cape Town who invite me to be a hostess at the Emerge 2006 online conference. I then did a 4 week course in preparation for the conference and probably did not get much sleep during the conference as I was sooo scared I will miss something...This was my first introduction to communicating online with a whole lot of people from all over- Great!! I became an "active lurker" in both the Yahoo Comprac group and the OF group, where I am learning sooo much. It still boggles my mind how willing everybody are to share their experiences and knowledge!

Ever since then I have had a lot of trouble choosing a platform for my community and ended up using Yahoo groups. The teachers, believe it or not, struggled to get over the technical barriers of registering for the group (we are way behind here) and I ended up doing a step by step instruction sheet with pictures to get them online and connected (<http://www.e-education.co.za/aaaaaa/ML/ML%20Resources/Yahoo%20registration%20info.pdf>) . I also had to do f2f workshops to show them how things work. My little community is growing and there are 80 members already. But I am still struggling to get them to Discuss resources. As this is a community for a brand new subject with lots of issues, we need to "talk" more. We do not have the culture of online communication yet. So it is a painful birth. I have worked my way though Ettiene's and Bronwyn's structures and hints and Nancy's down to earth advice, have got me through many a down moment. So it is great to see some of my heroes here and I know that I am going to find some new inspiration from some great lights...

Thanx for sharing

Maggie

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Therese Weel](#) - Monday, 5 March 2007, 07:35 PM

Hello Folks,

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and say hello.

My experience in anything online only goes back to 2003 when I created my first HTML site in front page for my digital pictures. Before that I had my head firmly sunk in the closed systems of the corporate world. I traveled around, analyzing business processes and building enterprise database systems designed to squelch creativity and innovation.

Became a netzien in 2004 and went off on a virtual adventure to follow my bliss. I was interested in how we could use connective technology to enhance our lives. There is a lot of nonsense on the 55 billion pages that comprise the internet, but if you look in the right places it affords us a wonderful opportunity to bring like-minded people together for valuable discussions.

I am a systems integrator who is constantly amazed at how many people consider me a geek. I think what I do is perfectly normal!

Through happy coincidences I have engaged with, Tia, Sylvia and Frances. I am delighted to see them on this forum and look forward to learning from the other experts here.

I have participated in several business forums over the years. Taught one on line course for Frances' knowschools earlier this year. Next month << knees knocking >> I will be co-hosting a SCoPE session with Tia on the value of serious games and virtual worlds.

I agree that the best way to learn online facilitation is to "just do it" learning from the experience and the excellent resources out there. Kudos to Nancy - who's resource page <http://www.fullcirc.com/resources.htm> contains a wealth of terrific information.

I am happy to be part of this experience.

Thanks for hosting us Nick

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Stephen Thorpe](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 02:22 AM

My first encounter with the online group dynamics was in 1999 when I was studying Intelligent Business Systems at the Auckland University of Technology (NZ). One of our class projects was to work online in a small team with three other students at the University of Uppsala in Sweden using a Lotus notes based system. We had fights and flaming and fun and drama - I was hooked!

The following semester one of my professors kept trying to get me to join his research lab doing systems usability and researching, developing and commercialising a multi-site large interactive digital whiteboard. I wasn't really that keen on turning my online fun into serious work, but after being conned into going to several meetings I figured they might as well start paying me! I also went on and managed projects for the lab developing online and cd-rom based tutorials for systems modeling.

I started part-time teaching in 2000 on user centered design at the Uni while I was studying and became more and more interested in the skills and practice of group facilitation. Particularly its potential with online systems and online learning. I was really grateful later that year to get the opportunity to present some of my research in the United Arab Emirates at the E-ducation Without Borders Conference - what a blast!

Shortly after I joined the team at Zenergy to learn more about group facilitation. I completed the Zenergy Diploma of Facilitation, joined the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and started attending and presenting at facilitator conferences. I became involved in the IAF Ethics and Values Think Tank - a group of about 80 facilitators around the world who joined together over two years to develop a Code of Ethics for Facilitators. I also became an Associate Editor of the IAF's Group Facilitation: A Research and Applications Journal.

After meeting Dr. Gil Brenson-Lazan when he visited for the Australasian Facilitators Network Conference in 2004, I became involved with Global Facilitators Service Corps (GFSC) and helped with early online tools research and testing for the global virtual organisation.

More recently I've been engaged in a PhD exploring the benefits of storytelling in the development of relationships in online groups. The 12 month study involved a co-operative inquiry with a group of 18 facilitators from 7 countries across 12 time zones. I'd love to share some of my key findings if it fits in with the programme and where we go as a group.

And most recently I lead the 12-week Zenergy Online Facilitation Skills programme. It's a programme that is based on using the Zenergy facilitation framework online.

Well that's most of it, I think. Thanks for the opportunity to walk down memory lane. Stephen

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Barbara Dieu](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 04:53 AM

the benefits of storytelling in the development of relationships in online groups. The 12 month study involved a co-operative inquiry with a group of 18 facilitators from 7 countries across 12 time zones. I'd love to share some of my key findings if it fits in with the programme and where we go as a group.

Please do, Stephen. I would be very interested in reading your reflections and findings.

Off topic: thanks for keeping me company on [Venice Island](#) and for the lovely ride on the gondola along the many canals of the City of Water last Friday - pity I did not think of taking a pic - I went back there on Sunday and did not find the gondola anymore - but a gentle lady gave me a beautiful blue dress for the [Renaissance](#) ball which was about to start on the Piazza. I slid, floated and spiraled on the herringbone pavement. Also sat down on one of the piazza benches to eat a gelatto, enjoy the orchestra playing, the other couples dancing and stared at the star speckled sky above the palace roofs and city lights.

BTW, Nick - you could open a thread where we could post our stories, impressions and encounters in SL. Goes along with the story-telling and memories bit, I suppose.

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Nick Noakes](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 07:41 AM

Bee

I think anyone here can open a new thread. I'll open one now for storytelling for Stephen to post there. But if you like a separate one for SL, please go ahead and set it up 😊

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [Stephen Thorpe](#) - Thursday, 8 March 2007, 06:51 PM

Thanks for the invite to Venice Island it was fun cruising the City of Water in the gondola. The ball on the Piazza sounds like it was a lot of fun. I hope we do another trip into SL sometime soon.

I see Nick has created a new thread for storeytelling so I will start generating something there.

Stephen

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!
by [carla arena](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 05:25 AM

Dear Stephen,

What impressive online facilitation opportunities you've had! I'd love to hear more about your storytelling research and the results of it.

Carla Arena

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [Derek Chirnside](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 10:50 AM

Stephen, this looks very interesting. If ever you are in Christchurch, let me know. Like Barbera, I was interested in your side comment about story telling.

-Derek

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Re: Online Facilitation - the last ten years!

by [carla arena](#) - Wednesday, 7 March 2007, 05:45 AM

Dear all,

I've been taking lots of online courses for the past years, mainly about how to integrate technology in the classroom. As an EFL teacher I've always been interested in trying out different tech-approaches that would enhance students' motivation to learn English. Some years ago, maybe 1999, I started using e-groups with my classes to keep in touch outside the classroom, give students extra help and info. Since then, I've been using tech-tools to supplement my classes and I'd say that this is a kind of informal online facilitation. Is it?!

The turning point for my online teaching approach was really in 2005, after the TESOL Convention. I learned about the TESOL Practices and Principles of Online Teaching Certificate Program and took it for a year. Then, Becoming a Webhead 06 was another development for my online practices with my students.

Last year, I took the Electronic Village Facilitation course to moderate an online session. Then, what a blast! We've just finished our 6-week "[Blogging for Beginners](#)" online session with 180 educators from all over the world with totally different cultural backgrounds and professional experiences. It was an amazing experience and I want to keep going and learning more about this brave new world of online facilitation. Now, I've started an online course at the University of Florida about Design and Delivery of online courses. Really exciting!

As many others, I've been doing many things online by the seat of my pants. However, being part of communities of practice helps us learn from other experiences and test things with our colleagues. Besides, as Bee pointed out, observation on what the others are doing is key to pursue successful experiences in the online environment.

I still have a long way to go...But I dream to have the chance to implement e-learning at the school I work for in Brasilia for some English courses we have there.

Carla

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