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## Blended Learning [HPEC Fast Facts]

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# HPEC Fast Facts

As a member of the RCSI community, it's likely that you have participated in a blended learning course, either as a teacher or a learner.

It's clear that technological advances are impacting on all aspects of health professions' education, and have the power to transform the modern classroom.

In this month's edition of Fast Facts, we look at practical ways to plan and improve blended learning experiences.

Jenny Moffett

Editor, HPEC Fast Facts

## Fast Facts: Blended learning

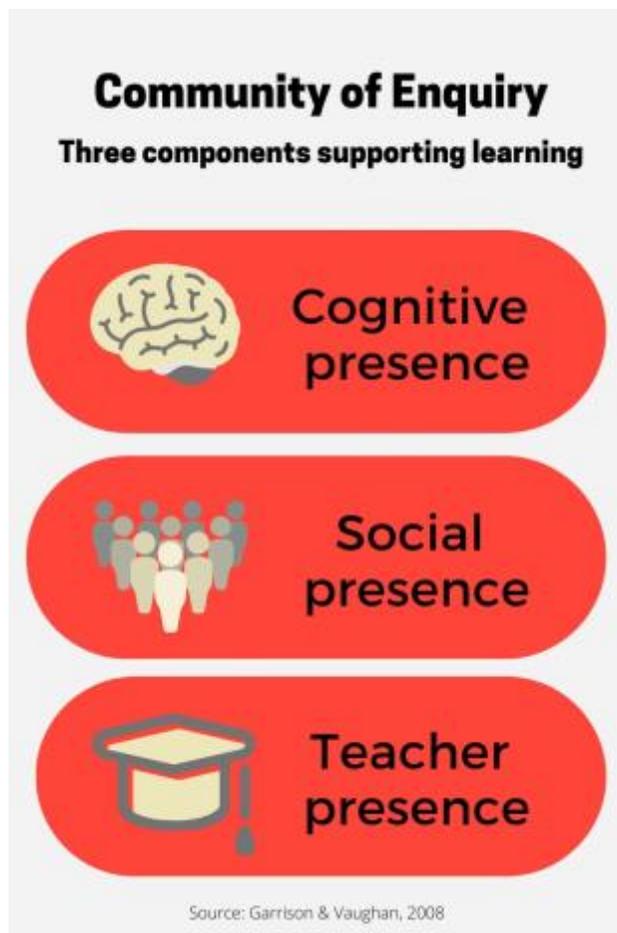
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“Technology will not  
replace great teachers,  
but technology in the  
hands of great teachers  
can be transformational.”

— George Couros

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- *Blended learning approaches have been rapidly adopted worldwide*
  - *A community of inquiry framework can be applied effectively to blended learning*
  - *Educators can consider how cognitive, social and teaching presence support learning*
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In the last two decades, e-learning and web-based technologies have revolutionised health professions' education. Rapidly expanding access to the internet and to mobile devices, means that today's students have much greater choice in how, when and where they learn.

These developments have created opportunities to expand the learning environment beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. A specific example is the emergence of blended learning i.e., the "thoughtful fusion" of online and face-to-face learning experiences ([Garrison & Vaughan, 2008](#)).

Although research into blended learning is at an early stage, there is evidence that such approaches can increase learning effectiveness and learner satisfaction ([Porter et al., 2014](#)); they also perform well in a variety of health professions' settings ([Pereira et al. 2007](#); [van Duijn et al., 2014](#); [McCutcheon et al., 2014](#)).

Educators can employ a wide diversity of blended learning approaches. At the most basic level, virtual learning environments and online activities can be used to help learners overcome barriers of time and location. More complex or "transforming blends" also exist, which allow "for a radical transformation of the pedagogy, [enabling] intellectual activity that was not practically possible without the technology" ([Graham, 2005](#)).

Such approaches include the flipped classroom, where technologies such as videos are used to deliver self-paced content outside of classroom time. Face-to-face classroom time is thus freed up for

collaborative or discursive tasks that promote higher order skills e.g., problem solving and critical thinking.

In designing blended learning experiences, a useful pedagogical framework that educators can draw on is that of “community of inquiry” ([Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000](#)). Originally developed to support distance learners, this framework emphasises the nurturing of “a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding” ([Anon., 2013](#)). Educators can facilitate effective learning through attending to cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence.

If you run, or plan to run, a blended learning experience, here are some considerations from a community of inquiry perspective ([Garrison, 2009](#); [Tu & McIsaac, 2010](#); [Vaughan et al., 2013](#)):

### **Cognitive presence:**

- In a nutshell: The recommended blended learning environment is one which helps learners to actively engage with content – to explore ideas, integrate new knowledge and achieve deeper understanding.
- Ask yourself: “How can I encourage my learners to share ideas and reflect on new learning?”
- Suggested tips and technologies: Discussion forums, problem- or case-based learning using web conferencing software, brainstorming using interactive whiteboards, concept maps e.g. [MindMeister](#), online case studies and quizzes.

### **Social presence:**

- In a nutshell: Learners should be supported to connect and communicate openly with each other.
- Ask yourself: “How can I build trust with my learners, and encourage them to interact helpfully with each other?”
- Suggested tips and technologies: Student introductions and bios, online forums and wikis, negotiated group rules, effective training on how to interact using software, collaborative tools, e.g. [padlet](#), [Google docs](#).

### **Teaching presence:**

- In a nutshell: Educators have a fundamental role in organising the learning experience and keeping learners accountable and on-task.
- Ask yourself: “How can I structure the experience so that learning outcomes are clear and achievable?”
- Suggested tips and technologies: Course handbooks and clear curriculum documents, setting clear expectations, regular feedback and direct instruction where needed, shaping constructive exchange for learners.

## Useful resources

### Selected articles

- [Anon. \(2015\). Being There: Instructor Presence in Online Courses](#)
- [Cleveland-Innes, M., & Wilton, D. \(2018\). Guide to Blended Learning](#)
- [Cook, D. A., Levinson, A. J., Garside, S., Dupras, D. M., Erwin, P. J., & Montori, V. M. \(2010\). Instructional design variations in internet-based learning for health professions education: a systematic review and meta-analysis. \*Academic medicine\*, 85\(5\), 909-922.](#)
- [Philipsen, B., Tondeur, J., Roblin, N. P., Vanslambrouck, S., & Zhu, C. \(2019\). Improving teacher professional development for online and blended learning: A systematic meta-aggregative review. \*Educational Technology Research and Development\*, 1-30.](#)
- [Sofer, T., & Cohen, A. \(2019\). Students' engagement characteristics predict success and completion of online courses. \*Journal of Computer Assisted Learning\*, 35\(3\), 378-389.](#)

### Podcasts

[Blended Learning](#)

[The Community of Inquiry Model](#)

## Upcoming events



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### *Small group teaching skills for researchers*

*HPEC presents a two-part online continuing professional development event for RCSI staff in developing small group teaching skills.*

*Using an interactive learning approach, participants will build their skills in setting up, facilitating and trouble-shooting small group sessions for effective student learning.*

*Although the sessions are designed for individuals with a research background, they are open to anyone who would like to further their small group teaching practice.*

- [Session 1](#) will take place on Thursday, November 28 (10-11am Irish time)
- [Session 2](#) will take place on Thursday, December 5 (10-11 am Irish time)

*For more details, or to ask a question, please email [hpec@rcsi.ie](mailto:hpec@rcsi.ie)*

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