Preface

The focus of this book is the teaching practices required of blended learning approaches and designs in higher education. Our previous book, Blended Learning in Higher Education (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), in which we defined *blended learning* as “the organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complementary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies” (p. 148) guides us in this goal. Feedback from the publication of this first book indicated that the unique feature of this work was the provision of a coherent framework in which to explore the transformative concept of blended learning. Invariably, as we made presentations and conducted workshops, the consistent message we received was about how valuable the rationale is to understanding the purpose and practical challenges of adopting blended learning approaches in higher education. In *Teaching in Blended Learning Environments: Creating and Sustaining Communities of Inquiry*, we build upon the framework and concepts of our previous work.
The context of this book is the growing demand for improved teaching in higher education. Traditionally, faculty members served as content experts, selecting disciplinary content to be transmitted to students largely through lectures. Unfortunately, most faculty members do so with limited knowledge of pedagogy and appreciation of the value and growing importance of engagement in a community of inquiry. This book provides a coherent and comprehensive practical view of teaching in higher education that provides a map of the future in terms of integrating face-to-face and online learning.

Our focus here is on teaching as it relates to the design, facilitation, direction, and assessment of blended learning in contemporary higher education. The transformative innovation of virtual communication and online learning communities creates new ways for teachers and students to engage, interact, and contribute to learning. This new learning environment, when combined with face-to-face interactions, will necessitate significant role adjustments and the need to understand the concept of teaching presence for deep and meaningful learning outcomes. This book defines teaching presence as the effort and activity around the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes in learning communities for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning.

Introducing a phenomenon as complex as teaching presence in a blended learning context is a daunting task. Beyond discussing teaching with technology, writing this book was a process of explicating, examining, and describing a very different approach to higher education — an approach that represents the era of blended learning. We see that “neither the purpose, the methods, nor the population for whom education is intended today, bear any resemblance to those on which formal education is historically based” (Pond, 2002, n.p.). These changes include a new way of conceiving of, and offering, teaching and learning. The need for, and purpose of, this book lies in the fact that the context, the technology, and the students that are part of contemporary higher education are different, and
those differences must be accommodated in the teaching practices of our institutions (Dziuban et al., 2010).

To make these changes relevant and real, the book focuses on the practice of teaching in blended learning environments. In addition to addressing new approaches to teaching and learning in higher education, two central ideas come together. First, information and communications technology provide the opportunity to create communities of learners that support engagement and collaboration. The online Community of Inquiry theoretical framework introduced by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) guides this idea. The reason their framework is valuable for this task is the active presence of a teacher at its core, working toward active cognitive and social presence of all the participants. Distinguished from the lecturer transmitting accepted knowledge in traditional face-to-face teaching (“sage on the stage”), or the role of instructor in traditional distance education (“guide on the side”), the teacher in a blended environment is collaboratively present in designing, facilitating, and directing the educational experience.

The second idea that illuminates teaching presence in blended learning environments is defining principles of practice. We define seven principles that reflect the realities of new and emerging information and communications technologies. Moreover, it is important to recognize that “just blending face-to-face learning with information technologies cannot provide effective teaching and efficient solutions for learning” (Hadjerrouit, 2008, p. 29). The need to go beyond capricious blending of face-to-face and online activities is revealed in the importance of these principles to allow us to capitalize on the potential of information and communication technologies. These principles provide the organizational structure to this book.
It takes more than adjusted face-to-face principles of teaching (see Chickering & Gamson, 1987) to harness all the opportunities for teaching and learning available through technology. Principles of practice intended to develop teaching presence in blended learning communities must account for new, emerging possibilities and roles. This book offers new principles of teaching presence for blended learning designs in higher education. The seven principles emerge out of the requirements of a collaborative community of inquiry, where learning is situated in purposeful inquiry and where students collaboratively assume shared responsibility and control to design, facilitate, and direct inquiry. The seven principles, and the concepts that provide their foundation, are explored across the next seven chapters of this book.

In the introductory chapter we describe blending learning, define the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theoretical framework that shapes the structure of this book, and outline the seven principles of blended learning that provide the inspiration for the practical guidelines and suggestions that constitute the primary contribution of this book. Successful blended learning is dependent upon the creation of a collaborative community of inquiry and an understanding of the principles of teaching presence that guides, engages, and successfully achieves a worthwhile educational experience.

Chapter 2 describes the first phase of teaching presence: the design and organization of a collaborative community of inquiry. It focuses on the coherent integration of curriculum, climate, active tasks and assignments, timelines, and assessment rubrics. This chapter provides a description of successful case studies and examples that maximize the critical discourse and reflective potential of blended learning methods and techniques.

Chapter 3 explores the social and cognitive principles of facilitation. Facilitation goes to the core of the dynamics of a community of inquiry. Collaborative communities emerge, and are sustained,
through shared purpose, joint activity, and interaction. These commonalities must be identified, illuminated, and fostered through the teacher’s leadership in order to facilitate these aspects of community. Social presence emerges and cognitive presence evolves through facilitation. Facilitating social interaction fosters social presence, which is central to setting the stage for continued collaborative activity. However, pushing beyond social interaction to critical discourse moves cognitive presence to deep and meaningful learning. Strategies for the facilitation of social and cognitive presence are described in terms of practical examples.

Chapter 4 speaks to the use of direct instruction. This involves helping students to manage collaborative relationships in order to assume increasing responsibility for their learning and ensuring that students move toward resolution in their course-based discussions and assignments. Direct instruction is about academic and pedagogic leadership; it is educational leadership that provides disciplinary focus and structure and scaffolding but also offers students the choice and opportunity to assume increasing responsibility for their learning. This instruction is more than a “guide on the side,” but less than a “sage on the stage.” It is an approach where learning is socially shared. This is the path to a meaningful, systematic, and worthwhile educational experience. Students remain engaged and focused while achieving desired learning outcomes. This chapter provides practical guidelines and strategies for directing social and cognitive presence in a blended learning environment.

Chapter 5 addresses the final principle regarding assessment. Educational researchers (Thistlethwaite, 2006; Hedberg & Corrent-Agostinho, 1999) state that assessment drives learning in higher education. The design of assessment activity and feedback influence the type of learning that takes place (Entwistle, 2000). The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the types of self-reflection, peer feedback, and teacher-directed assessment techniques that can be used to support a blended community of inquiry approach to learning in higher education.
Chapter 6 provides a discussion of digital technologies and instructional strategies that can be used to design collaborative communities of inquiry. This chapter reiterates the interdependent elements of social, cognitive, and teaching presence and provides corresponding social media application examples and associated collaborative learning activities. Educational strategies for using these tools to support a collaborative community of inquiry, in a blended learning environment, are illustrated and discussed.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with a summary of key ideas and strategies for teaching in a blended teaching format.

Overall, the book is a coherent view of the principles for the integration of face-to-face and online learning made explicit. Second, the book is grounded in the actual practice of blended learning.

CONCLUSION

The primary audience for this book is college faculty and graduate students interested in quality teaching in blended learning environments. The secondary audience is education technology professionals, instructional designers, teaching and learning developers, and instructional aides – all those involved in the design and development of the media and materials for blended learning. Other audiences include higher education administrators, education researchers, and government officials interested in quality education issues. While focused primarily on blended learning in higher education, the principles can be easily adjusted for application in the K–12 environment and the workplace.