

# **Distance Learning: Promoting Language- Intensive Online Interaction**

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# Advance Organizer

- 1) Learning Environments in General**
  - what are we trying to accomplish?
- 2) WebCT – Theory/Claims**
  - what is special about online work?
- 3) WebCT – Two Practical Examples**
  - OPs and RPs: structure, instructions, **examples**
- 4) Integrated Instructional Context**
  - integrated instructions/evaluation/other tasks
- 5) Post Organizer: Implications**

# 1) Learning Environments in General

## My experience:

- INTC 1F90: Foundations of Intercultural Studies
  - Humanities 'Context' Course
  - c 200 students; blended format
    - F/F lectures; online seminars
- INTC 1P80: Introduction to Intercultural Studies
  - c 40 students
  - entirely online 12-wk course

# Profile of **My** Learners

- majority: year-1 students, mostly L1 English
- substantial minority of L2 English speakers
- diverse academic language-skill levels
  - improved academic language = transferrable skill for **all**
- “Each course offered as a Humanities context elective must include a significant **essay** component and an integral **seminar** component (or lab, in the case of the language courses).” (FHB)

# Instructional Goals in General

- improved academic language skills = one desired outcome... but **how to get there?**
  - taking account of diverse
    - first languages
    - (cultural) expectations re. learning process
    - language-skill levels
    - year levels... maturity/academic experience
    - learning styles
    - academic subject-area interests/expertise

# General Principles

- “animated exchanges are the life-blood of learning” (Carey, 1999, p. 373)
- basically, Carey says (adult) learners need
  - autonomy
    - some degree of control over **shape** of learning process
  - individualization
    - some recognition of personal **preferences**
  - self-pacing
    - some allowance for different **skills/schedules**

# But How...?

- We want to promote joining the **academic culture** of learning
  - Hall (1959, p. 186): “Culture is communication and communication is culture.”
    - communication permits / enacts / celebrates membership in the culture
  - language of academic culture: CALP (Cummins, 2003)
    - cognitive academic language proficiency
    - CALP takes time to develop; benefits from an inviting and academic-language rich environment
    - **in part** = Carey’s autonomy, individualization, self-pacing

# Challenge of Inter-Group Communication

- “heterophilous communication” (Rogers, 2003, p. 306)
  - more difficult than homophilous
  - **BUT** more fruitful in terms of new information
  - **major barrier** to effective cooperation, achievement... **many** stunning examples
- meeting this challenge requires
  - tolerance of ambiguity
  - mindfulness/persistence ... motivation
  - openness to personal change (**learning**)



# Structural Barrier to Communication

- Brazil and Sinclair (1982): 'IRF' pattern
  - initiation, response, follow-up structure
  - 33% learner, 67% teacher

Move	Impact	Learner	Teacher
Initiation	Set topic; designate turn		✓
Response	Demonstrate skill	✓	
Follow-up	Evaluate; elaborate; designate next turn		✓

# Adjusting the Structure

- maintain teacher **management**... reduce teacher **control**
  - problematize the rigid 'IRF' pattern
  - reduce “differential participation rights” (Clifton, 2006, p. 142)
  - so, increase **learner** opportunities to
    - self-select turn, topic
    - elaborate on other's or own turns
    - initiate (invite or provide) instruction
  - **teacher** creates/facilitates environment... **AND** can still intervene as per tradition

## 2) WebCT: Theory and Claims

- WebCT features common to most LMSs - potential includes:
  - post materials, instructions
  - report scores
  - send teacher/learner and learner/learner emails
  - engage in online discussions
    - asynchronous communication
    - edit, even remove own posts
    - access other online resources
    - lead discussion
    - communicate in own time

# Claims for WebCT Discussions

- Carey's (1999) claims:
    - autonomy
    - individualization
    - self-pacing
  - **generally possible with any LMS, if not just “traditional courses loaded into an online shell” (Carey, 1999, p. 375)**
  - time issue: **asynchronous communication**
    - “permits communication requirements to be met in slow motion” (Carey, 2001, p. 136)
      - fewer errors
      - time to bring in external resources
      - better comprehension (can consult written record)
      - more willingness to participate (language; opinions)
      - more equal involvement by all learners
      - overcome **possible barrier** of EMI when learning content
- Aim to “equal or exceed” F/F seminar discussions (1999, p. 375)**

# Related WebCT Potential:

## a) Accountable Grading

- Carey (1999) – F/F seminar grading can be “too subjective and prone to non-accountability” (p. 378)
    - “record of student participation” is available to consult:
      - teacher – when scoring
      - learner – when reflecting on origin of grades
      - learner – when monitoring own work
        - in a given seminar discussion
        - from discussion to discussion
- can promote useful **backwash**
- • promote accountability by **teacher/learner** alike

## b) Washback

- Cheng & Curtis (2004): impact of testing entails interactions among
  - teaching methods, instructions
  - test format, schedule
  - learning strategies (e.g. **seeking help**; cf. Spilitopoulos & Carey, 2005, re. WebCT)
- possible to have an integrated package
  - a) instructions for online discussions
  - b) grading scheme closely reflects instructions
  - c) related instructions/criteria for other assignments, too

# But How...?

- collected claims/advice so far:
  - promote **interactive discussions** via
    - autonomy
    - individualization →
    - self-pacing
  - and **manage the process** via
    - accountable grading
    - integrated package for effect washback

Through asynchronous communication, allowing ample & flexible **time**

**Practical how-to examples needed!**

# 3) WebCT: Two Practical Examples

per p. 2, 'Online Presentations vs Reflective Posts: What's the Difference?'

Each of OP, RP suits different learning/ thinking style

## 1) Online Presentation

- source-based; textual evidence; formally structured
- cf. **academic essay**

## 2) Reflective Post

- opinion/experience-based; less formal
- cf. **personal essay**



# Online Presentation in More Detail

## pp. 3-4, 'Evaluation of Online Presentations'

- “strongly recommended ... one or more short quotes from the reading(s) and/or textbook... designed to direct attention to specific issues in them” ... “anchor your questions and activities to that material”
- formal structure:
  - Focal question → Elicited Conclusion
  - very **linear** structure

# Reflective Post in More Detail

## p. 8-9, 'Evaluation of Reflective Posts'

- “...your own opinion ... with specific and convincing details”... “thinking in the context of information” ... ending “draws together the various issues raised by participants... refers back to specific points”
- informal, emergent structure
  - wide-ranging discussion → pull-together ending provided by presenter
  - more **organic** structure

# Integrated Overall Framework

- highly explicit instructions for online assignments (e.g. 1-week planners)
- ice-breaking/mentoring in first 4 weeks
- grading sheets directly reflecting instructions
- consistent low-context communication, CALP emphasis throughout course
  - online and paper-essay work alike

**- will return to this framework issue later in the presentation**

# Flow of Discussion

Day	OP	RP
1	Announce <b>thesis</b> , predict 1-wk structure	Announce exploratory <b>theme</b> , predict 1-wk structure
2	First stage of <b>thesis- driven</b> discussion	First stage of <b>exploratory</b> discussion
3		
4		
5	Second stage of discussion	Second stage of discussion
6		
7	Elicited conclusion	Presenter's summary

# Autonomy

## 1) asynchronous **participation** guidelines (see pp. 10-11)

- min 3x/week over OP and RP together
- connections among posts, outside
- credit for additional frequency
- spacing over week

**Clear responsibilities...  
but freedom in  
how to meet  
them.**

## 2) **I**nitiation – **R**esponse – **F**ollow-up

- learners taking possession of **I** and **F** as well as **R**  
... this is expanded in following slides

# Initial Mentoring, Stress-Reduction

- first month (4 wk, or so) led by instructor
  - overcome **general** 'culture shock' of new technical environment
    - plus **individual** password etc glitches
  - learn netiquette
  - experience basic strategies for good discussions, modeled by instructor
    - prediction/schedule-outlining
    - invitational questions
    - open-ended responses
    - **substantial** contributions
    - **constructive** inter-post linkages, recognition of collaboration

# Guidance re. **Initiation** Function

## 1) instructions for **presenters**

- initiate discussion at beginning (cf. 1-wk planner), plus “you can and should re-enter the discussion occasionally ... to enrich the conversation without dominating...” (p. 3) to initiate movement forward

## 2) instructions for **participants**

- helpfully offer synopsis, explanation, definition, example etc to initiate topic/invite responses (p. 10)
- generally: focus on initiations that, in either case, offer **inviting: structured** but **open-ended** guidance for ongoing discussion
  - **both** presenter/participant roles have access to this function

# Examples\*

- initiation by **presenter**

*To begin the discussion for this week, I'll ask you to answer a question: What are the advantages/disadvantages of a society in which all people speak the same language? Please give examples or experiences.*

- initiation by **participant**

*You say, when everybody speaks the same language, they also use the same forms of nonverbal communication. Actually, do all English speakers use the same nonverbal communication?*



# Guidance re. **Follow-up** Function

- advice for **presenters**
  - “challenge a consensus if you feel that an alternative view should also be considered” (p. 3)
- advice for **participants**
  - make a comment that “that clarifies a disagreement or a confusion in the discussion” (p. 10)
- generally: focus on **message-focused** follow-ups in either case: **make explicit connections**
  - **both** presenter/participant roles have access to this function

# Examples

- follow-up by **presenter**

*That was a very good example, Marie, because it related closely to the reading.*

- follow-up by **participant**

*I agree with the previous comment emphasizing that, since Canada is a multicultural nation, we must raise our children to accept those who are 'different' from them.*

# Guidance re. **Response** Function

- advice for **presenters**
  - not only “encourage, praise, question” but may also give **own suggested response** to “briefly explain” how to participate (p. 5)
- advice for **participants**
  - avoid “unexplained repetitions”, “unelaborated contributions” etc (p. 10)
- generally: focus on **interactive** responses in either case: **‘talk’ to a participant**
  - **both** presenter/participant roles have access to this function

# Examples

- response by **participant**

*I definitely favour a bilingual community because two cultures can interact to produce a fusion instead of two separate cultures.*

- response to participant question by **presenter**

*Do we have a right to feel frustrated by difficulties with cross-language communication? ➔ There are always ways to work around language barriers...*

# When Things Go Wrong...

- **follow-up** strategies by which presenter can manage the interaction
  - netiquette issues
  - substance: relevance, elaboration
  - **NOTE**: discrete *one-to-one* email intervention is uniquely available **during** online activity period (week)
    - big **advantage** over F/F
- **instructor** can intervene publicly/privately, too... but may not need to
  - flexible: can also consult quietly with presenter

# Examples

- management interventions by **leader**

*The discussion so far is good, but could we hear from others?*

*I know there's an essay due this week; still, please find time to contribute.*

*Political correctness might stop us from commenting on other cultures, but in this seminar, please do feel comfortable to make constructive comments.*

- or by **participant**

*This week's presenter seems to be absent; so, I'm going to jump in and start the discussion...*

# Time: The 1-Week Planners

- support to invite good time-management
  - 1-week planners advise **presenters**
    - advice on start-up, plus 3-step process over 7 days to develop
      - a thesis towards an elicited conclusion: Online Presentation
      - a viewpoint/theme towards a summary/overview
      - OP or RP planners, pp. 11-13, 13-15
  - resulting **activity-structures** advise **participants**
    - “Over the next couple of days” ... “On Friday, Saturday and Sunday” ... “Okay, now it’s time to...” (pp. 11-12)

# Time: Elaboration of Ideas

- giving examples, reasons, connections, alternatives

“I think that a society in which everybody speaks the same language has both pro’s and con’s.” → 14 lines (3 paragraphs) of elaboration

“I completely agree with George here.” → 16 lines (4 paragraphs) of elaboration



# Time: Use of Complex Structures

- CALP... typical language strategies for academic communication
  - **sentence** structure (e.g. **hedge**)

“While I do not condone this, I do not believe we can realistically say that we would never do it.”
  - **discourse** structure (e.g. staging)

“There are many reasons ... First of all, ... Also, ... In conclusion,...” (11 lines)

# Time: Negotiation of Viewpoints

- Spilitopoulos & Carey (2005, p. 90): “a learner can ... experience an evolving **sense of self**...”

“Personally, I think that...”

“My ideal society would be...”

“I believe that...”

Fitting in  
OR  
standing  
out

“I completely agree with all that has been said.”

“Although I do believe that..., ...”

## 4) Integrated Instructional Context

- taking full advantage of the **record of interactions**
  - a) accountable grading
  - b) washback
- low-context, explicitly elaborated CALP-type **communication skills** across entire course
- recurring themes
  - c) predictive structure
  - d) substance (evidence)
  - e) constructiveness/coherence
  - f) nature of a conclusion
- plus
  - g) flexible, optional starter-prompts for topics

# Elements in the Package

- online activities
  - most support materials copied in your hand-out, including grading sheets
- written assignments
  - personal essay; critical discussion of one article; research essay – similar grading sheets
- on-line Style Guide
  - writing/research advice, using same metalanguage
    - [www.brocku.ca/intl/HTML\\_Files/Style\\_Guide.htm](http://www.brocku.ca/intl/HTML_Files/Style_Guide.htm)

# a) Accountable Grading

- accountability on two levels
  - 1) Carey's point: refer to the **record of interactions for**
    - objective scoring
    - constructive feedback
  - 2) additional issue: give **very exact** advice to mentor learners
    - grade according to it
    - explain according to it
    - inform students **explicitly** of what the criteria are
      - **cognitive fix** as first step in learning

## b) Washback

- Berry (2005), p. 17: *language to describe language* need not be highly technical to have a positive impact on “noticing”
  - being **aware of** and **learning from** advice/experience
  - grading sheet **language** refers specifically to sections of advice on leading OPs or RPs
    - **same metalanguage** used for each
  - record of actual OP or RP is there for reference: **metalanguage + exemplars**
    - mentioned in written feedback
    - common ground in grade-discussion with TA
    - available for reference when trying again

## c) Predictive Structure

- intellectual purpose/goal... thesis or theme **clearly announced** in advance
  - **online** discussion instructions/grading
    - e.g. “Reflective viewpoint regarding theme announced explicitly on day one...” (PR Grading Sheet, p. 9)
  - **essays** in same course
    - “Explicit statement of thesis” ... “states viewpoint and predicts main steps of following argument” (each essay feedback sheet; Style Guide)

## d) Substance (Evidence)

- quotations, specific reference to source (paraphrase)
  - **online** seminar instructions/grading
    - “focus on specific events, objects, characters or even words in the assigned reading...” (OP Grading Sheet, p. 4)
  - **essays** in same course
    - “relevant and convincing supporting details with effective explanations” (each essay feedback sheet; Style Guide)



## e) Constructiveness/Coherence

- relevance, continuity of argument, markers
  - **online** discussion instructions/grading
    - “... make [your OP] easy to grade by using readily-identifiable section titles, such as...” (Evaluation of OPs, p. 5; similar re. RPs, p. 8)
  - **essays** in same course
    - “Appropriate logical-division argument flowing logically from the thesis statement; effectively marked by subtitles ... marker words... semantic resources” (each essay feedback sheet; Style Guide)

## f) Nature of a Conclusion

- distinction between **synopsis/summary** and **conclusion**
  - **online** seminar instructions/grading
    - distinction between OP and RP ending (p. 2); “informed answer to the focal question” (OP, p. 5), vs presenter-generated “concluding generalizations” re. main points raised (RP, p. 8)
  - **essays** in same course
    - “summary looking back at earlier argument, plus conclusion looking out to a broader understanding of the issues” (each essay feedback sheet; Style Guide)

## g) Flexible Starter-Prompts

- CALP-style thinking about academic topics is **difficult**, even with ample **time**...so, **non-constrictive** starter-prompts help a lot
  - e.g.: “General Suggestions” – “In fact, you are **entirely free** to approach the online activity and presentation materials in any manner that promotes ... **substance** and **constructiveness** ... However, it may be helpful to scan this list of **optional** suggestions...” (pp. 15 ff)
  - plus **discussion** with teacher/TA, of course

## 5) Post Organizer

- key points ('**summary**') re. **interactivity**
  - teachers **desire** interactivity as a way to
    - **extend** the language-intensive environment
    - **focus** language-activity on negotiation of content
    - **promote** development of CALP
  - we can **achieve** interactivity through
    - **autonomy**
    - **individualization** →
    - **self-pacing**

Each fostered through breaking down old teacher-dominated I-R-F pattern... which examples show CAN be accomplished

# Post-Organizer

- implications ('**conclusion**') re. **implemen-  
tation**
    - breaking down I-R-F pattern requires re-thinking traditional teacher role (→ facilitator)
    - CALP is complex: a big, integrated package is needed **for rich experience**
      - online activities
      - essay activities
      - Style Guide
- 
- With internally  
consistent  
metalanguage**
- big, integrated package will take time/effort

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