

Teacher presence: Developing self in online, blended and distance learning settings through a professional development programme

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Teacher presence is a critical element in the design of effective learning environments. Although the role of the teacher is acknowledged as critical in all teaching, the term teacher presence appears relatively infrequently in literature about face-to-face teaching and learning. This may be a matter of difference in terminology or it may indicate different conceptualisations of skills such as design, facilitation and direction within the educational setting. The move to digitally-enhanced learning has highlighted the ways in which teachers conceptualise their teaching presence. Research suggests that when teaching is in blended or online mode, teachers are aware of the need to make explicit to the students features of planning and teaching which are more implicit in face to face classroom teaching. This explicitness is also present in the social and effective elements of presentation of self. A professional development programme designed to prompt teachers to question their assumptions about presence of self in both face-to-face and distance teaching settings will be described. The programme is framed around a set of guiding principles and practices for distance education, forming the basis of the programme's activity, skill development and reflection on teacher presence. Experiences of running this programme over a number of years in one institution will be discussed, in particular in relation to how the programme can inform professional development of all teachers, not just those charges with teaching in online, blended and distance modes.