A PARTICIPATORY PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING: IDEATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Dr. Cecilia GORIA
ORCID: 0000-0002-4530-4038
School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, UNITED KINGDOM

Angelos KONSTANTINIDIS
ORCID: 0000-0002-4342-4650
Center for Information Technology
University of Groningen
Groningen, NETHERLANDS

ABSTRACT

In spite of its increasing popularity, distance education faces challenges – levels of digital literacy, access to technology, workload and time management, students' feelings of isolation and disconnection – that can have a significant impact on the experience of the learners. In addressing these issues, we propose a pedagogical model for distance learning which promotes the synergy of eight ingredients – Community, Openness, Multimodality, Participation, Personalisation, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement, with their initial letters generating the acronym COMP-PLETE – for the shaping of a highly participatory online learning experience and the creation of an active and cohesive community characterised by a strong sense of commitment towards the learning of the individuals and that of the group. This paper presents the theoretical rationale for and implementation of COMP-PLETE. It also provides recommendations for researchers and practitioners interested in cultivating an online learning community which responds well to the aforementioned challenges posed by distance education.

Keywords: Pedagogical model, distance education, higher education, online learning, online community.

INTRODUCTION

When in early 2020 COVID-19 lockdown measures were announced to the world, Education, as many other areas of life, was not spared by the necessity to transitioning to the online environment. Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al., 2020) – the quick impromptu response to the lockdown – became the new norm in many parts of the globe to ensure continuation of learning at all educational levels. In this context, pedagogical considerations were ousted by technical and technological emergency solutions, corroborating the claim that ERT is not comparable to planned and purposely designed remote learning (Hodges et al., 2020), i.e. distance learning in the true sense.

With this in mind, it must be recognized that the ground onto which ERT solutions rapidly grew had been ready for a while. Before the 2020 global disruption, online and distance learning had increasingly become a popular learning paradigm, in Higher Education, challenging educators to confront existing assumptions of teaching and find new ways to engage students in the learning process. Indeed, online educational programmes have mushroomed over the last two decades - approximately 80% of higher education institutions in Europe and the USA offer online learning courses (Bichsel, 2013; Gaebel et al., 2014). In a rapidly increasing digital and interconnected world the turn from traditional to online forms of education is far from surprising. First, online learning gives access to education to people living in remote and/or rural areas (Bichsel, 2013). Second, online learning boasts more flexibility compared to learning within the four-

walled classroom, offering greater control over when and where to study and therefore accommodating the needs of professionals (Horspool & Yang, 2010), people who are place-bound (Schwartzman, 2007), and anyone wishing to undertake a study programme regardless of whether their preferred choice is offered by a nearby or far-away institution.

Nevertheless, online learning faces some challenges, which, ironically, stem from the same reasons that make it an attractive option. Studying from a distance often creates feelings of disconnection and isolation leading to lower engagement with learning and lower student retention. In addition, it has been reported that students perceive that, compared to face-to-face courses, online learning offers lower levels of interaction amongst teachers and peers (An & Frick, 2006; LaPointe & Reisetter, 2008). Furthermore, as distance learning courses are a popular solution for professional development, the tension between the students' personal and professional commitments and course requirements may lead to significant procrastination and drop out. Finally, a tension has been identified between institutional regulations affecting private courses and the benefits of open learning supported by social technologies.

The model for distance learning presented here, called COMP-PLETE, an acronym formed with the initial letters of the components of the model (see below), is an attempt to address these challenges by taking the learners' experience not as the outcome, but as the starting point for the overall pedagogical design and the driver of teaching and learning practices.

In the continuing COVID-19 scenario, the move from ERT to a pedagogically though-through and researched model for distance learning is essential to ensure that the turbulence provoked by the pandemic was not in vain. Instead, it is important to build on its unintended legacy to shape the new distance education norm during and beyond COVID-19.

The Context

The tangible context within which COMP-PLETE was developed is the Master of Arts in Digital Technologies for Language Teaching (MA in DTLT) offered by the University of Nottingham since 2013. The MA in DTLT is a part-time professional development programme offered to language teachers around the world, wishing to improve their understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of Educational Technology, with a specific focus on Language Learning and Teaching. It boasts a varied students' body in terms of professional context, geographical location, academic profile, ambitions and expectations.

There is one annual in-take and the teaching follows the university calendar, framing a cohort-based model which contributes to achieving pedagogical goals around the shaping of a community of learners that progress together through the different phases of the programme (see section 2.1).

The MA in DTLT was designed with two sets of course design in mind, namely the cognitive approach and the experiential approach (Toohey, 1999). The former is influenced by social constructivism and highlights the significance of knowledge construction in a shared environment, through social interaction. The role of the teacher is to elicit and facilitate this process and the role of the learner is to collaborate and take ownership of his/her learning. The latter, is based on the belief that effective learning is personally relevant and is dependent upon the students' experience. The role of the teacher is to provide guidance and the role of the learners is to bring their life experiences into their educational path and the community.

The result is a participatory pedagogy that relies on a community for participation to take place, making Community and Participation central features of COMP-PLETE (see sections 2.1 and 2.4 respectively).

Purpose and Architecture of this Work

The purpose of this paper is to introduce COMP-PLETE as a theoretical framework for designing learning in the online environment. In the light of the educational changes caused by COVID-19, a consequential goal of this discussion is to support the transition from ERT to purposely designed distance learning, to recognize the important of seizing the moment and build on the positive legacy on the pandemic.

Section 2 presents the features COMP-PLETE and their relations with the relevant literature. The empirical contribution is provided by the implementation of the framework in section 3. Section 4 concludes the paper by briefly outlining the paths for future research.

COMP-PLETE

COMP-PLETE is the conceptualization of a model for distance learning by which eight ingredients (Community, Openness, Multimodality, Participation, Personalization, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement) have been identified as fundamental to provide distance learners with a learning experience that is motivational and empowering. The focus is on the design of a programme structure and content that nurture a learning community and allow flexibility for the learners' voice to be heard and acted upon. The rationale behind COMP-PLETE is the attempt to address and resolve the issues common to distance learning mentioned earlier by capitalizing on participatory pedagogies in motivating students and strengthening their commitment to their learning. In the next eight sections, the components of COMP-PLETE are explained.

Community

When considering the community of practice, there are two theoretical cornerstones relevant to this study, both concerned with online community development and with the process of learning in online communities. The first, the Community of Inquiry framework (CoI) (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999), provides order and guidance into the foundational concepts of online learning communities, the second, the Community Indicators Framework (CIF) (Galley et al., 2014) maps transactions and patterns of activity that emerge in online communities.

The CoI model is built on the premise that higher-order learning is best supported in a community of learners engaged in critical reflection and discourse, it is entrenched in collaborative constructivism and conceptually grounded in research on deep and meaningful approaches to learning. The CoI identifies three core interrelated, interdependent, and overlapping elements required to create and sustain an online learning community: *teaching*, *social*, and *cognitive presence*.

Cognitive presence is broadly defined as the extent to which the participants are in a position to construct meaning through communication in an online community. It is grounded in critical thinking and is seen as developing through the learners' process of practical inquiry and investigation. *Teaching presence*, refers to: (a) instructional design and organization of learning; (b) facilitation of discourse, and (c) direct instruction (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). *Social presence* is a mediating variable between the other two elements; it is a responsibility of *teaching presence* and a prerequisite for *cognitive presence* (Garrison et al., 2010). It is manifested through the ability of participants to: (a) project their individual personalities into the community, (b) identify with the community, (c) communicate into the community, and (d) develop interpersonal relationships (Garrison et al., 2010).

More recently, Armellini and De Stefani (2016, p. 1212) proposed a revised structure of CoI in which *social presence* becomes "bigger and more pervasive" affecting directly *cognitive* and *teaching presence*. This view is in line with the feature Community of COMP-PLETE and is reflected in the encircling and encompassing role of Personal Learning Environments and Networks (see Fig. 1) as vehicle to expand *social presence* beyond the confines of the original CoI model.

Alongside the CoI model, Galley et al.'s CIF (2014) played a significant role in the conceptualization of our learning community. The CIF identifies four fundamental aspects of the online learning experience – *cohesion, identity, creative capability,* and *participation*.

Cohesion relates to community members' perception of the ties between each other and is demonstrated by language use, willingness to listen and learn, responsiveness and turn-taking, adoption of leadership roles. *Identity* is related to the perceptions that community members nurture about the community itself and their place within it. It is manifested by establishing the limits, boundaries, purpose, and expectations of the group, by referring to shared experiences or knowledge, by using language which refers to the group as a group, and by using a shared vocabulary. *Creative capability* refers to the community's ability to create shared artifacts, knowledge, and understanding. A creative community demonstrates discussion skills, accommodates differences in experience, encourages multiple points of view to be expressed, and identifies links between member's knowledge and experience. Finally, *participation* refers to the ways in which individuals engage in community activities, e.g. patterns of rapid and energized engagement and longevity, the members' ability to move between social and productive activities within the community, to develop a social structure and adopt social and facilitative roles.

It is proposed here that the two frameworks outlined above complement each other. In fact, CoI focuses on the foundation components of online communities and CIF addresses online community patterns of activities. However, it is also acknowledged, that while CoI supports communities in closed educational experiences, CIF supports the development of online dynamics based on principles of open education. This provides a valid ground for combining the two models in the MA in DTLT, as, though implemented in a closed online context, it employs open pedagogies, building on the learners' wider social web connections.

In reconciling CoI and CIF, our framework (Fig. 1) places *identity* inside the sphere of *social presence* as it narrowly relates to the social dynamics of the community. *Cohesion* is placed in *teaching presence* as it rests in the hands of the teacher, or of students when acting as teachers by leading learning activities (Garrison et al., 1999), to establish and maintain these ties. *Creative capability* is in *cognitive presence*, since it is related to the motivation and ability of the community to engage in productive activities. *Participation* is placed at the centre of the diagram (Fig. 1) to emphasise the participatory nature of the educational experience.
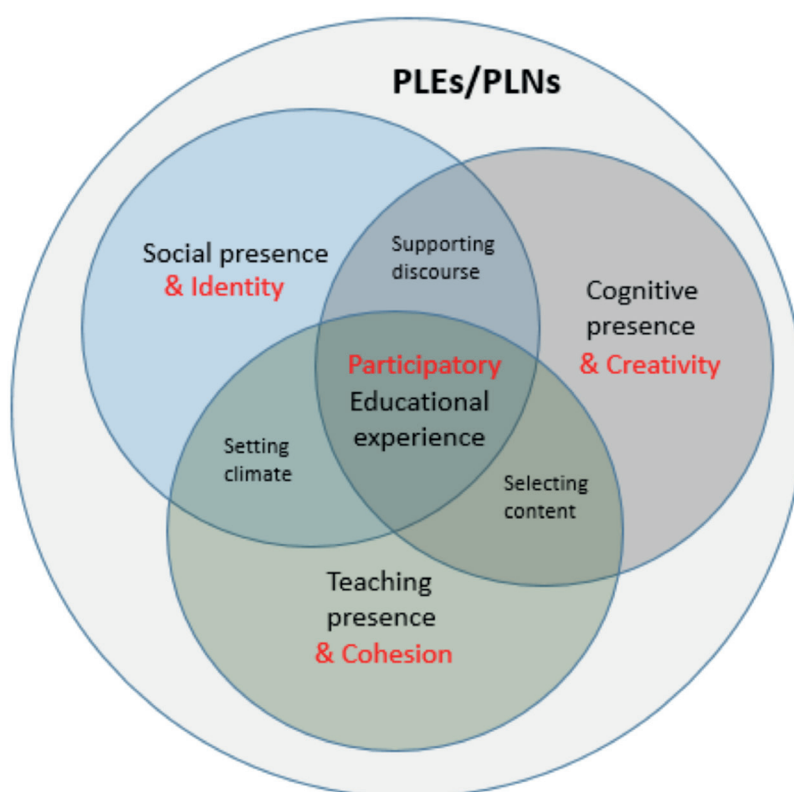

Figure 1. "Learning in online communities" framework adapted from the CoI and the CIF (Konstantinidis & Goria, 2016).

Lastly, a distinctive feature of our model is the integration of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) and Networks (PLNs). As discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.5, these function as the programme's gateway to Openness (Goria & Konstantinidis, 2017), the second component of COMP-PLETE, which is addressed in the next section.

Openness

Openness is an umbrella term (Weller, 2012) to refer to: open admissions, i.e. no required prerequisites; open or free access to education; open content as in Open Educational Resources (OERs) (Paskevicius et al., 2018); open curricula coupled with the notion of community-as-curriculum (Cormier, 2008); open connections (Cormier & Siemens, 2010); open accreditation, i.e. academic credits obtained from taking OERs courses; open, as in transparent, teaching and dialogue; open scholarship; open source (Weller, 2012).

Most relevant to the present work is the pedagogical interpretation of Openness provided by Dalsgaard and Thestrup (2015), who view Openness as articulated over three pedagogical dimensions, namely *transparency*, *communication* and *engagement*.

Transparency refers to the practice of opening up activities to students across cohorts or institutions, in order for learners to reflect on their own work by gaining insight into their peers' activities. In COMP-PLETE *transparency* is applied to all activities, including assessed work – pedagogical aims and objectives are made explicit and shared with the students, and students are encouraged to share the preparation phases of their assignments as well as the final products.

The second pedagogical dimension of Openness is *communication*, intended as communication with affinity groups (Gee, 2012), i.e. a surrounding society of "non-students" who share a field of interest (Dalsgaard & Thestrup, 2015, p. 85). In COMP-PLETE this is achieved through the use of social media interwoven with the notion and practice around PLEs/PLNs (see below and section 2.5).

Engagement refers to activities by which students and tutors become partners in problem solving practices with other partners, for instance other institutions. In COMP-PLETE, this dimension surfaces with Experience (section 2.7) by which the students are guided, in all learning activities, to address themes that are specific to their own professional contexts, outside of the programme's boundaries.

Furthermore, COMP-PLETE's Openness is fostered through practice around the notion of PLEs/PLNs (section 2.5), i.e. people, communities, organizations, digital tools and any other tool, artifact, or object with which the learners interact to generate knowledge (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Goria et al., 2019).

Strongly supported by social media, in the MA in DTLT, PLEs/PLNs ensure that *transparency, communication* and *engagement* take a globally open social dimension and support continuous exchanges of information across the boundaries of the programme, providing an open ground for knowledge building and shared experiences. Different facets of Openness are implemented via PLEs/PLNs: they encourage the creation of new connections inside and outside the programme's learning community (open connections - *communication*); they empower our learners to bring into the programme their experiences from their own diverse teaching contexts, contributing to and enriching the content and structure of the learning experience of the whole community (open teaching and open curricula - *engagement*); they also encourage the use, creation and dissemination of open resources (open content) and, facilitated by social media, have proven to be conducive of non-hierarchical tutor-student dialogue (open dialogue - *transparency*).

The next section explores Multimodality and its role as the third component of COM-PLETE.

Multimodality

Multimodality is the practice of using different representations of content knowledge, typically *verbal* (printed, spoken words) and *non-verbal* (illustrations, photos, videos, and animation) (Moreno & Mayer, 2007). It is an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account semiotic resources other than language (Jewitt, 2013) for the construction of meaning; it focuses on the role of modes such as words, sound, images, animation, colors as well as gestures, space, facial expressions in social interactions and peoples' meaning making process.

Multimodality also entails establishing interactivity (Guichon & McLornan, 2008); interactive multimodal learning environments are those in which, during the learning, the learner is able to interact with the content that is presented, e.g. play/pause/forward while watching a narrated animation; click on hyperlinks to get additional information (Moreno & Mayer, 2007).

In COMP-PLETE Multimodality is promoted as a pedagogical tool to foster the construction of knowledge (Moreno & Mayer, 2007), to encourage personal meaning making (Kress, 2012), to enhance motivation and engagement, to assist comprehension and retention (Sankey et al., 2010), and, coupled with interactivity, to make instructional design conducive to deep learning (Moreno & Mayer 2007). Furthermore, building on the evidence that multimodal learning is beneficial for second language acquisition (Gilakjani et al., 2011; Guichon & McLornan, 2008; Price, 2013), Multimodality is promoted in the MA in DTLT to ensure that our students will adopt multimodal pedagogies in their own language teaching contexts, benefiting their own learners' learning.

In COMP-PLETE Multimodality is nurtured in a variety of ways; not only are the students provided with multimodal study content, they are also required to create and share multimodal learning artifacts and are exposed to multimodal learning experiences, for instance, through the use of 3D virtual world environments (Konstantinidis, 2017).

Participation

It was mentioned earlier that in the model presented here the feature Participation is central to the learning experience, in agreement with the overarching pedagogical approach introduced in section 2.1. A participatory pedagogy is an approach to learning which puts the learners at the centre of the experience enabling them to contribute to the creation of content and the shaping of the structure of their learning paths and experiences (Andersen & Ponti, 2014).

In COMP-PLETE, the shift from consumer to prosumer of knowledge does not happen in isolation; the learners become co-producers as members of the learning community (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007, 2008). Thus, at the heart of social constructivism and connectivism for learning, Participation is heavily reliant of the use of participatory technologies (Siemens, 2008) in support of collaboration, shared construction of knowledge, making connections. Accordingly, in COMP-PLETE Participation is supported by the use of social media as a requisite for the practical implementation of our PLE/PLN-based approach (see section 2.5).

Personalisation

In COMP-PLETE, Personalisation surfaces in conjuctions with other features of the model, i.e. Participation and Experience, as well as a feature in its own right through PLEs/PLNs. More precisely, Personalisation is a built-in element of the student-centred nature of Participation with its emphasis on students' individual choices and ownership of learning. Similarly, it is a desired result of Experience given the significance that is placed on the personal experiences of our learners and their impact on the learning of the community as a whole (see section 2.7).

In addition, Personalisation takes the form of personalised learning spaces and networks, i.e. PLEs/PLNs, which, in discussing Openness (see section 2.2), were introduced as playing a central role in ensuring that the wider social web community becomes the ground for *communication*, *engagement* and *transparency*.

Typically built on resources selected by the users and located outside institutional domains (Johnson, 2016), PLEs aggregate the tools, the communities and the services that learners use to determine their learning goals and direct their learning to achieve these goals (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). PLNs are the network of people and resources that support ongoing learning (Trust et al., 2016). Thus, the distinction between PLEs and PLNs rests on the emphasis that is put on the spaces (PLEs) within which learning takes place, and the human factor (PLNs) inside that spaces, in the sense that the former provide the structure for the human connections to take shape (Goria et al., 2019).

The notion of and practice around PLEs/PLNs tally fully with the pedagogical principles underpinning COMP-PLETE. Consistent with Community, Openness, Participation, PLEs/PLNs foster the construction of knowledge (Downes, 2007) through social connections (Laakkonen, 2011), support autonomous and self-regulated learning, empower students to own their learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012), promote student-centred learning (Kravcik & Klamma, 2012) and bring together formal and informal learning, learning from the home, and learning from the profession (Attwell, 2007).

Learning

As claimed earlier, COMP-PLETE focuses on the nature and quality of the experience in the digital learning context, while keeping firm sight of the cognitive process of learning. Thus, the model is strengthened by the way it interfaces with the typology of ways of learning advocated by the well-established Conversational Framework (Laurillard, 2012).

The Conversational Framework pivots around the idea that in formal learning teacher-student dialogue fuels the cyclic modulation and generation of concepts, practice and actions. Included in the framework is the claim that learning happens through six types of learning activities. Namely (adapted from Laurillard, 2012, p. 96 and Laurillard, 2016):

Acquisition: learners read book and online, listen to lectures/podcasts, watch demonstration master classes/animation/videos.

Inquiry: learners formulate questions and actively look for answers, by consulting teachers, libraries, study guides, online advice services, by selecting tools to evaluate information and ideas, by using data collection services.

Production: learners produce essays/reports/animations/digital stories/e-portfolios for the teacher to evaluate or for public display of their learning.

Collaboration: learners work together and produce a shared output, through negotiation of ideas and practice, by challenging each other ideas and agreeing on the output.

Discussion: learners exchange ideas and challenge each other arguments and develop concepts through responding to each other while articulating an argument.

Practice: learners take action in response to tasks set by the teacher and responding to feedback, they are involved in project-based learning.

With this in mind, COMP-PLETE provides the principled structure for the six ways of learning to happen. In particular, the principles around Community, Openness and Participation are consistent with the dialogic nature of Laurillard's proposal.

Framed by COMP-PLETE, the MA in DTLT provides different locations for learning to take place; learning is distributed not only geographically but also across different channels. The channel for formal learning is the institutionally controlled Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which provides the students with reading materials, search guidance, teacher-directed shared tasks, structured forum discussions, fostering Acquisition, Inquiry, Practice and Production, Discussion respectively. Another channel is provided by the synchronous online tutorials which support mainly Discussion, but also Production and Collaboration depending on the tasks brought into the online meetings. Chat-like exchanges provide the channel for informal learning which happens through Discussion and Collaboration, and, as seen earlier, engagement with PLEs/PLNs widens the scope of Inquiry beyond the confines of the programme.

A more detailed mapping of the most prominent activities featuring in the programme, the way they serve COMP-PLETE and the six ways of learning is illustrated in section 3.

Experience

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) maintains that learning is generated through the transformation of experiences. Knowledge is not the outcome of the process of learning, but the process itself. For learning to happen, learners engage in a transformative cycle that includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (McCarthy, 2016).

In COMP-PLETE, Experience is multifaceted. First, in alignment with Kolb's theory, it refers to the experiential approach that underpins the task-based and reflective design of the learning activities. This is Experience as 'learning by doing' – consistent with learning by Production and Practice seen in the previous section. The students are actively engaged in concrete experiences through which they are encouraged to bridge the gap between theory and practice and link what they study with their professional contexts.

The second facet of Experience is reflected in the emphasis put on the individual experiences of the students, on the significance of bringing them into the community and use them as the foundation to create new shared experiences (Girvan et al., 2016), accentuating the relation between Experience and the student-centred nature of Participation and Personalisation. Experience as 'shared experience building' makes learning personally relevant and frames the learners' contributions to the content and structure of their learning (see examples in section 3.1).

The third facet of Experience is reflected in our 'participation as learners' approach (Girvan et al., 2016) by which teachers undertaking a professional development programme are given the opportunity to learn how to learn and experience as learners the impact of their learning.

Technological-Enhancement

The last feature of COMP-PLETE to be outlined is Technological-Enhancement. The principles buttressing this feature are borrowed from the SAMR framework by Puentedura (2006) who identifies Substitution, Augmentation, Modification and Redefinition, as the four levels of integration of technology in educational activities. In Substitution technology acts as the direct substitute for more conventionally designed tasks with no functional change; in Augmentation technology adds functional improvement; in Modification it provides opportunities for redesigning tasks; and in Redefinition, technology transforms educational tasks in ways previously inconceivable.

Characterized by an overarching critical stance in addressing the integration of technology in teaching, Technological-Enhancement aims at Redefinition and explores new ways of teaching and learning that would not be possible without technology. As a start, Redefinition is paramount, dictated by the fully online learning nature of the context within which COMP-PLETE was developed. Furthermore, Technological-Enhancement as Redefinition surfaces in Community, Participation and Personalisation, given the central role of social media in shaping connections and communication across the globe – the extent to which these features are implemented in COMP-PLETE is not achievable without technology. Furthermore, Technological-Enhancement emerges as a by-product of Multimodality as technology widens the opportunity for multimodal representations of content knowledge.

The remaining sections of this paper provide the empirical support for COMP-PLETE by illustrating examples of activities integral to the design of the MA in DTLT.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

Highlighting the empirical implications of COMP-PLETE, this section presents examples of the different methods employed to implement the framework, including the design of the assessment procedure which given its crucial role is presented separately in section 3.2.

It is worth clarifying that the features of COMP-PLETE are intertwined and therefore it is not possible to provide discrete examples for each feature of the model. This is particularly true for Technological-Enhancement, Learning, and Multimodality which pervade all activities. While Technological-Enhancement and Learning will feature separately in Table 1, Multimodality should be seen as an overarching attribute of the programme's approach to teaching and learning by which students are presented with multimodal materials and are tasked with generating and sharing multimodal content of their own, e.g. images, animation, spoken and written language, graphics as well as sensory experiences, such as the use of 3D avatars.

COMP-PLETE in Practice

As mentioned in section 1.1 our postgraduate programme is structured around the academic calendar. Thus, during the teaching weeks each student cohort progress together, providing the structural frame for the development of a sense of belonging; students are encouraged to establish their Social Presence as individuals while also developing their *identity* as participating members of the Community. Community and Participation are the focal features that ground the programme's participatory pedagogical approach.

From the start of the course, emphasis is put on building students' sense of group identity; they are addressed as a group to cultivate a culture of shared responsibilities. Everyone's contribution is promoted as essential for a fruitful common and individual learning experience, contributing to the realisation of Community and Participation as well as Personalisation and Experience.

Group tasks are assigned for the building of common learning objectives, cultivating Community as group *identity*, *cohesion*, and *Social Presence*. As an example, the students on the course Integrating Technology in

Course Design and Assessment create a collaborative poster on a specific topic and engage in a collaborative presentation of their outcome. As the students are located around the world, communication takes place online, generally outside the control of the teacher; the students self-organise, work together towards a common goal by building on their own individual experiences, implementing several features of COMP-PLETE. Namely, Community: in particular *Social Presence/identity* and *Cognitive Presence/creativity*; Participation: as the students act as co-producers; Multimodality: as the students engage with verbal (text or recordings) and non-verbal (images and graphics) modes; Openness: as *communication* and *engagement*; Experience: as 'learning by doing'.

Formal and informal communication platforms are established to support group exchanges. Besides the more formal Moodle Forum functionality, Microsoft Teams (MS-Teams) is employed as the collaborative space with social network, chat-like features to frame the development of CoI's *presences* featured in our Community model (Fig. 1) (Goria & Hanford, 2019). It is worth noticing that MS-Teams allows the students to create channels of communication outside the control of the tutor, a functionality that has been welcomed as a way to reinforce the student-student sense of community.

Asynchronous teaching is heavily complemented by synchronous meetings in which the students are encouraged to use the web camera as an effective way to add bodily presence to the distance learning experience, with a remarkable impact on CoI's online *presences* and ultimately on the implementation of Community and Participation of COMP-PLETE.

CoI's *teaching presence* may include student-tutor role shifting. In COMP-PLETE this is nurtured by promoting peer-feedback as a way to increase students' sense of interdependence and subsequently the cohesion of the community. An example is provided by an activity in the course Telecollaboration for Language Learning in which the students engage in group tasks and provide peer-feedback, including grades, across the groups. In addition to Community and Participation, other features of COMP-PLETE are put into practice through this task, in particular, Openness as *engagement* and *transparency*.

Opportunities for our students to project themselves socially and emotionally as 'real' people and develop their sense of community identity are maximized in the MA in DTLT by celebrating social events, e.g. birthdays, Christmas, weddings, graduation, to mention a few, with the use of selected online tools. Although these events have no explicitly stated learning aims, they offer ample opportunities to expand students' PLEs, to acquire hands-on experience with digital tools and virtual worlds for learning, and to access and create multimodal artifacts – Experience as 'learning by doing'.

Open events with more explicit learning objectives are organized as publicly advertised and attended Twitter chats and Dissertation Talks. The Twitter chats provide first-hand experience of how social media can be used for teaching, further contributing to Experience as 'learning by doing'. They also foster Openness, as students across all cohorts, graduates, tutors, and people outside the course interact and discuss educational topics in the open. Furthermore, they generate role shifting of *teaching presence* of Community as it is observed that, in these chats, the participants are willing to learn from each other and engage in a peer tutoring process without being explicitly instructed to do so. Similarly, the openly attended Dissertation Talks enable Openness and student-held *teaching presence* as in these talks, graduates present a synopsis of their thesis, describe their experience, providing support to peers working on their dissertation.

Openness as *transparency* is further nurtured by the teacher-led practice of uploading selected students' works (with their consent) on openly accessible websites (see http://telecollaboration20.pbworks.com/; Konstantinidis, 2020), contributing also to the 'go public' phase of our PLE/PLN approach.

In fact, in this and the previous examples, the role of PLEs/PLNs as vehicles for information exchanges and knowledge building in the open surfaces explicitly. Learners enter the programme with their own individual PLEs/PLNs built from previous experiences and continue developing their spaces, tools and connections throughout the duration of their studies. They reflect regularly on their PLEs/PLNs and graphically represent their spaces positioning themselves inside them as users as well as contributors, bringing Personalisation of learning to the fore.

In practical terms, students' PLEs/PLNs are developed in phases (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). In phase one, the students use the tools of their PLEs to develop self-regulated learning and enhance personal productivity. In phase two, they make their PLEs/PLNs social by adding connections and engaging in collaborative activities. In the third phase, they reflect on the previous phases and customise their spaces to serve their

own personal learning goals. In the fourth phase (Goria, 2018), the students 'go public' and engage in activities which include links and connections beyond the confines of the programme. The ongoing ties created between the personal and the social spheres of this approach not only is coherent with the goal of implementing all three dimensions of Openness, it also ensures that Personalisation, Participation and Experience are put into practice.

As claimed in section 2.7, Experience as 'learning by doing' merges in COMP-PLETE as a by-product of the applied nature of the programme. Throughout the MA in DTLT, students apply the theoretical paradigms considered in their studies to their own teaching. In addition, they reflect on their practice and report back to the group, generating personally relevant learning – another example of Personalisation – and shared experiences at the same time, implementing Experience as 'shared experience building'. Note that this practice also strengthens Participation – by building knowledge around their individual experiences, our students are empowered to co-create unique learning paths.

As for Experience as 'participation as learners', it was said in section 2.7 that our students are engaged in activities that provide them with the opportunity to experience learning from the perspective of their learners. Although this aspect applies to most activities in our programme, a remarkable example is provided by the course Game-Based Learning which, designed to include game-like features, engages students in playing a game and offer them the necessary first-hand experience to develop the ability to critically evaluate gamification and the use of games for language education.

Based on the empirical implications of COMP-PLETE presented in the previous paragraphs, Table 1 offers a summary of practical recommendations. In the first column a typology of activities that support COMP-PLETE is offered; the second column provides broad suggestions as to the technologies to be used for each activity; the third column maps each activity with the most prominent features of COMP-PLETE, while Learning is treated separately in the fourth column to highlight that Learning pervades all activities and to indicate more explicitly the types of learning that are supported by each activity.

Table 1. Practical recommendation for implementing COMP-PLETE

Typology of activities	Technological-Enhancement	Prominent features of COMP-PLETE in addition to Technological-Enhancement (left) and Learning (right)	Learning
Shared tasks	Online boards, online mindmaps	**Community**: social presence/identity; cognitive presence/creativity **Participation** **Multimodality**	Production Collaboration
Readings, Set Tasks, Controlled forum discussions	VLE (e.g. Moodle)	**Community**: teaching presence/instructional design **Participation**	Acquisition Discussion
Webinars	Video conference platforms	**Community**: social presence/identity; teaching presence/cohesion **Participation** **Experience**	Discussion Enquiry Practice
Informal chats	IM platforms (e.g. MS-Teams)	**Community**: social presence/identity; teaching presence/cohesion; cognitive presence/creativity **Openness** **Participation** **Personalisation** **Experience**	Discussion Collaboration
Social events/parties	Online boards, 3D virtual worlds	**Community**: social presence/identity **Multimodality**	Discussion

Formal open chats	Social media (e.g. Twitter)	**Community**: social presence/identity **Openness** **Participation** **Personalisation** **Experience**	Discussion Enquiry
Dissertation Talks	Online presentations via video conferencing platforms	**Community**: social presence/identity; teaching presence/cohesion; cognitive presence/creativity **Openness** **Participation** **Experience**	Acquisition Discussion
Group work (posters; videos; presentations)	Virtual video conference rooms, chat platforms	**Community**: social presence/identity; cognitive presence/creativity **Participation** **Multimodality** **Experience**	Production Collaboration
Peer feedback	VLE	**Community**: teaching presence/cohesion; cognitive presence/creativity **Experience**	Production Collaboration
Gamified activities	VLE	**Community**: teaching presence/cohesion; social presence/identity; cognitive presence/creativity **Participation** **Experience**	Acquisition Practice

Assessment

Acknowledging that assessment directs students' efforts and significantly impacts their learning, assessment in COMP-PLETE not only endeavours to put the features of the framework into practice, it is also firmly grounded on the principles and strategies of assessment for learning. Three main theoretical approaches frame the practice.

The first one is *constructive alignment* (Biggs, 2003) which starts by setting learning outcomes that include content and students' level of understanding. Activities are then set to empower learners to achieve those outcomes and assessment is designed to ensure and evaluate attainment of those outcomes. As an example, one of the learning outcomes of the course Research Methods for Language Professionals is to acquire the ability to design research instruments. Thus, early in the course the students are engaged in a formative task by which they develop and run mock questionnaires and interviews with their peers or members of their own professional community. After receiving feedforward from tutor and peers, the outcomes of the practice are later included in the individual three-part summative assessment procedure for the course. This example also illustrates how Openness as *transparency*, Personalisation, Participation and Experience as 'learning by doing' are put into practice, in addition to Learning by Collaboration and Discussion.

The second approach is *learning oriented assessment* (Carless, 2007) by which assessment tasks are seen as learning tasks; they are constructively aligned with learning content and objectives, are relevant to the real world and spread throughout the course, e.g. the semester-long assessed portfolio – Learning by Production – that the students compile throughout the duration of the course Technology-Enhanced Creative Writing in a Foreign Language. Furthermore, according to *learning oriented assessment*, the students are involved in the assessment procedure by engaging in drafting assessment criteria. As an example, the students taking Introduction to Digital Technologies for Language Teaching nominate assessment criteria toward which they wish to be assessed, fostering COMP-PLETE's Personalisation and Participation.

In addition, in *learning oriented assessment* students are involved in self and peer evaluation. To exemplify, one of the assignments in the course Telecollaboration for Language Learning requires that the students collaborate to add content to Wikipedia and that they self-assess their work (Konstantinidis, 2020). Through their engagement with this assignment, students build stronger bonds with their peers, enhancing different aspects of COMP-PLETE's Community, while the globally open trait of the final outcome in Wikipedia fulfills aspects of Openness.

Finally, in *learning oriented assessment* feedback takes the shape of feedforward, i.e. relevant for future work. An example is again provided by Introduction to Digital Technologies for Language Teaching for which the students keep a blog reflecting their development as learners during the course. Halfway through the duration of the course, the blogs are opened to the tutor and optionally to peers and the public for receiving feedforward to be implemented in the final submission. For the final submission, the students select which posts they wish to be assessed – an example of Personalisation – and are encouraged to explore different modes of representation of content (i.e. text, audio, video, animation), benefiting from Multimodality and Technological-Enhancement.

The third approach to assessment is *sustainable assessment* by which tasks are designed to encompass "the knowledge, skills and predispositions required to underpin lifelong learning activities" (Boud, 2000, p. 151). The outcomes of *sustainable assessment* extend beyond the goals of the course, e.g. in the course Integrating Technologies to Course Design and Assessment, the students are asked to design and write the rational for a digital course to be delivered in their institution, fostering COMP-PLETE's Technological-Enhancement, Personalisation and Experience, together with Learning by Production and Practice.

Clearly, assessment in the MA in DTLT is conceived at programme level, witnessed by the tight connection between course specific assessment activities and the overarching COMP-PLETE approach. Table 2 below lists several types of assignments and states their relation to the model's features.

Table 2. Examples of assessment activities in COMP-PLETE

Module	Assignment description	Most prominent features of COMP-PLETE
Introduction to Digital Technology for Language Teaching	Students keep a reflective blog. At the end of the module they select the posts they wish to submit as assessment	Multimodality, Personalisation, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
	Students propose a topic and mode of delivery for the final assignment, and nominate two assessment criteria	Openness, Multimodality, Participation, Personalisation, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
Integrating Technology in Course Design and Assessment	Students design and develop an online course of their choice – emphasis is put on the relevance of creating a digital artefact that is personally relevant	Multimodality, Personalisation, Participation, Learning by Production, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
	Students write a rationale for their course design	Learning by Acquisition, by Inquiry and by Production
Telecollaboration for Language Learning	Students collaborate to add content in Wikipedia and self-assess their work	Community, Openness, Participation, Learning by Production and Collaboration, Experience
	Students select a case-study to review in collaboration with their peers	Community, Personalisation, Learning by Inquiry and by Discussion, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
	Students can propose a topic for their last assignment	Multimodality, Participation, Personalisation, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement

Game-Based Learning	Students maintain a reflective journal on their experience as gamers	Personalisation, Learning by Production and Practice, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
	Students design a game-enhanced scenario and they can build on this scenario for future work	Multimodality, Personalisation, Learning, Experience, Technological-Enhancement
Technology-Enhanced Creative Writing in a Foreign Language	A creative writing portfolio and related reflective short essay	Personalisation, Learning by Production, Technological-Enhancement
	Students select the topic and mode of delivery for the final assignment in which they demonstrate the ability to apply theories to their teaching	Personalisation, Multimodality, Learning by Inquiry and by Production
Second Language Acquisition	Students write a review of a text book of their choice	Personalisation, Learning by Inquiry and by Production, Experience
	Students create and present a (blended) classroom learning event	Personalisation, Learning by Practice and by Production, Participation, Experience, Technological-Enhancement

CONCLUSION

Prior to COVID-19, distance learning had gained popularity as a modality for academic studies that allows for the degree of flexibility particularly welcomed by people at difference stages in their professional development. However, distance learning is also notoriously affected by a high drop-out rate related to the students' feeling of isolation and disconnection, by the challenges that distance learners face when managing the academic demands, while still attending those imposed by their professional and personal lives, and more recently, by the need to redefined institution-based courses to satisfy the appetite for the socially interactive open pedagogies that have emerged in the last two decades.

With the rise of COVID-19 what was earlier a popular educational choice became a necessity. COVID-19 forced face-to-face teaching around the globe to move to the online environment, changing drastically the shape of education. Pedagogically weak ERT, during which technical and technological considerations were prioritized over pedagogy, became the fasted and safest solution to allow teaching and learning to continue (Hodges et al 2020). However, as the effect of COVID-19 lingered beyond expectations, it seems reasonable to aspire to replace ERT's pedagogical weaknesses with planned and purposely designed online teaching and learning. COMP-PLETE fits this purpose.

COMP-PLETE, which was developed to respond to the challenges of distance education, focuses on the nature and quality of the students' experience in the online environment. Surfacing as the outcome of several years of pedagogical ideation and experimentation within the postgraduate professional development MA in DTLT, it offers the guidelines for creating distance learning courses that generate a sense of community belonging to fight isolation. It also promotes a participatory learning experience that empowers the students to build personally relevant learning trajectories to strengthen their commitment to their studies. Finally, it embraces multimodal open teaching, stretching the realm of learning beyond the boundaries of the institution, to foster the construction of knowledge through social interaction and networked relations.

This paper has introduced the features of COMP-PLETE, it has endorsed COMP-PLETE theoretically by solidly embedding each of its traits in the relevant literature and has corroborated the model empirically by providing several examples of its implementation.

Our conversation around COMP-PLETE aims to be part of a wider study which in addition to the theoretical conceptualisation and the practical implementation of the framework, also addresses the response of the students to the pedagogical approach that it generates. Although the framework has been tested empirically, future research will endeavor to gather intelligence on students' perception and to deepen further our understanding of the impact of COMP-PLETE on learning. Future work on COMP-PLETE will also

aim to provide step-by-step support for distance learning designers and instructors interested in achieving pedagogical goals that straddle between closed institutional requirements and the dynamics of open social engagement, that address feeling of isolation and endangered commitment to studying that are commonly attested in distance learning.

Ultimately, in these turbulent times of COVID-19, COMP-PLETE provides the framework to shape the future of teaching practices that moves forward from ERT to endorse effective and pedagogically sound online education.

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of AUTHORS

Dr. Cecilia GORIA is Associate Professor in the School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies. She is Digital Learning Director for the Faculty of Arts and Director of the Language Centre, Univeristy of Nottingham. She has years of experience in digital teaching and learning especially in the areas of distance and online education. She also has extensive experience in professional development through teacher training and support programmes for academic staff. Her research interests are in the areas of design, principles and practice of open learning, active learning, participatory pedagogies in online, blended teaching and learning, and in authentic assessment with a focus on language learning. Recently, she has engaged in championing, supporting and researching on hybrid synchronous teaching, as a powerful solution to widen participation in education.

Cecilia GORIA
School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies, Faculty of Arts
Address: University of Nottingham, NG7 2RD, Nottingham, United Kingdom
Phone: +44 (0)115 8468076
E-mail: cecilia.goria@nottingham.ac.uk

Angelos KONSTANTINIDIS is educational advisor and trainer at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. He is a MirandaNet fellow and regular reviewer in academic journals and conferences. During his teaching career he was actively involved in numerous international school projects that foster the integration of digital technologies in learning activities. His research and educational interests lie in the areas of online course design, effective feedback practices, alternative assessment, teacher training, and virtual exchange. Angelos has published more than 40 articles in academic journals, conferences, and books. More info about Angelos' work, projects, research, and interests can be found on his blog: http://angelos.ict4all.gr/

Angelos KONSTANTINIDIS
Educational Support and Innovation, Center for Information Technology
Address: Nettelbosje 1, 9747 AJ Groningen, Netherlands
Phone: +31 631983141
E-mail: a.konstantinidis@rug.nl

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