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Module 6: Educator's role and behaviour in online teaching environment some tips for success

T4T - Tools4Teaching in Digital Education Settings

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About the project

T4T - Tools4Teaching in Digital Education Settings project focuses on supporting adult educators and formal, non-formal and informal training providers to effectively shift towards digital education and to provide the same level of learners' interaction and 'human-like' experience, as in the physical environment. The overall project objective is to strengthen the capacity of adult educators and training professionals to build and sustain effective group dynamics in digital education settings, so as to better engage their online learners.
Development of Guidelines how to better set up effective group dynamics in an online learning environment will help adult educators and training professionals improve their competences about the specifics of building and sustaining effective online group dynamics and ensuring a high level of learners' experience in digital classrooms.
The 6 modules provide general methodological guidelines to adult educators how to be more effective in building and sustaining group dynamics in online learning environment:

- what digital tools and software can use
- what behaviour to adopt
- how to engage learners in small group online activities
- how to use artistic exercises to boost creativity, etc.

Module objectives

These days, due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, most training, courses, and lessons take place online. Some adult educators don't know how to properly engage students in the learning process, as the transition from physical to distance learning was very sudden and not everyone managed to adapt and acquire the necessary knowledge. This module will help educators to deepen their knowledge about their role and behaviour in the online teaching environment. Also, educators will get some tips that can help to improve their performance during online lessons, training, courses, etc.

The objectives of this module are:

- to provide educators with knowledge, understanding, and concepts related to the topic;
- to help educators understand their role and behaviour in online and blended teaching environments;
- to give educators useful tools and advice which help them to better understand the topic and adapt given tools in their own courses, training, etc.

Pre-requisites

- knowledge of how to use various digital tools and apps
- examine previous modules in order to better understand the topic
- motivation to learn new teaching methods and tools

Expected learning outcomes (skills and competencies)

After going through this module, adult educators are expected to improve their skills and competencies in the following directions:

- To know and understand the main concepts related to the topic of the module
- To know their role and behaviour in online and blended teaching environments

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- To be acquainted with useful tips that help them to teach in the online teaching environment
- To be equipped with online tools and activities which help to provide a successful online experience for learners.

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Topic 1: Educator's role and behaviour in online teaching environment

During a pandemic, most people encountered different challenges. Probably one of the biggest influences and changes experienced educators. From classrooms, and live activities their work had to be transferred to the online environment. According to the different surveys, the majority of educators faced various challenges while shifting to online teaching. For example, the lack of digital competencies, failure to keep the learner's attention, etc. Therefore, in order to solve these problems, educators had to change their role and behaviour while conducting lessons, training, courses, etc. So, what roles do educators have, and how they should behave while teaching in the online environment?

Figure 1. Roles of educators in the online teaching environment

First of all, educators need to be **proper guides**. For example, a tour guide needs to lead people through different places, similarly, online educators need to guide learners through various online learning experiences (Bull, 2013). After all, different learning methods and techniques are preferred by different online learners. As a result, online educators must adapt their teaching methods in order to provide proper education for learners (James, 2019). Online courses, lessons, sessions, training, etc., are often prepared before they start so educators can devote more time to guiding learners and less time to preparing material for their courses. In that way, educators are able to focus learners' attention on key concepts and ideas (Bull, 2013).

Furthermore, it is important that educators would be **good leaders**. As with all learning environments, learners often need some encouragement. The learning process itself is already a difficult thing, and the online environment makes it even more difficult, as learners often feel isolated, confused, and unmotivated to sit at the computer screen and listen to educators' monologues for hours. Therefore, educators have to encourage and motivate individual learners, as well as the whole group. They have to show their support and strive to turn negative situations into positive ones (Bull, 2013; James, 2019).

Without proper guides and good leaders, educators have to be **individual and group mirrors**. One of the most important things in teaching is feedback. When educators give feedback, then the learner knows what

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he/she needs to improve and what strengths he/she has. Also, it is good to inform learners if the lesson is going well and if they are achieving all of the lesson's goals (James, 2019).

Probably the most important role is that educators have to be **co-learners**. As we see, our world is changing very fast. New apps and digital tools are always changing and are creating new ones. So, educators need to develop their knowledge and digital skills all the time in order to perform appropriate online teaching.

If you want to know more about the educator's role and behaviour in the online environment you can watch a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6yjl67_71M) which represents the educator's role in the online teaching and learning environment.

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Topic 2: Educator's role and behaviour in blended teaching environment

According to Blaine Smith and Cynthia J. Brame in online courses, at least 80% of the content is delivered online while in blended teaching the content of the courses from 30% to 80% is delivered online with some face-to-face interaction. Therefore, the main difference between online teaching and blended teaching is that the latter includes online and in-person teaching while online teaching is the method that uses the internet via different online teaching platforms. As they are different ways of teaching, the role and behaviour of educators in these teaching environments might be different as well (Hasa, 2021).

TNTP reimagining teaching illustrates educators' role as follows:

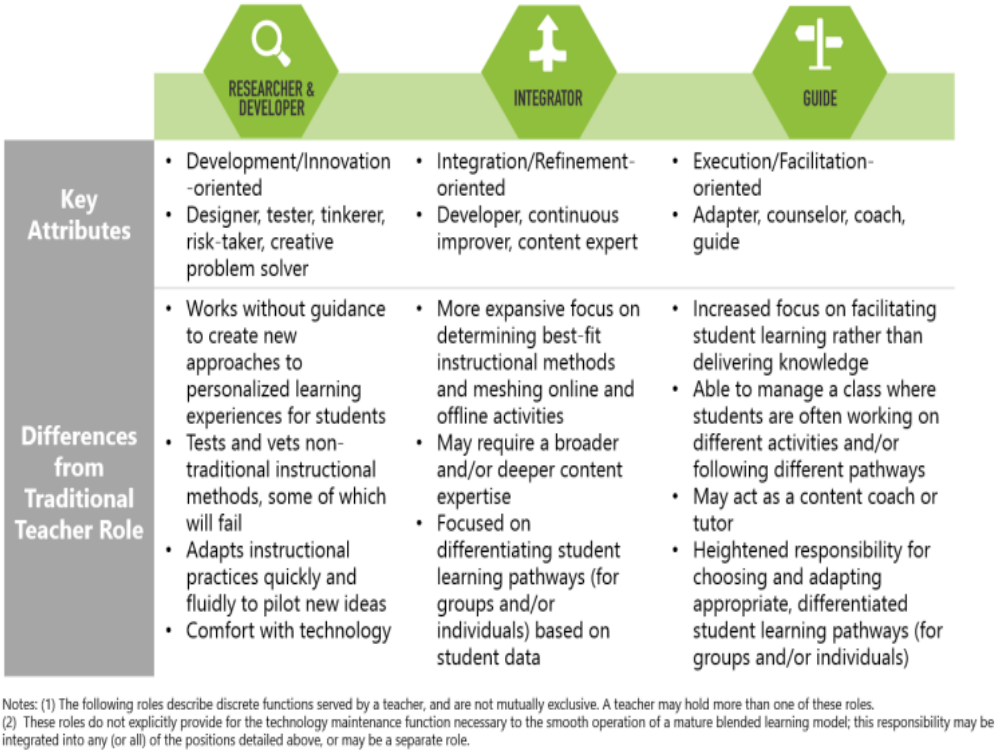

Figure 2. Educators' role in the blended teaching environment

As you can see in the blended teaching environment educators should be researchers and developers, integrators, guides (same as educators in the online teaching environment). As researchers and developers, educators should design various presentations, tasks – lesson material, and test new learning methods. Also, they should always think, take risks and solve problems in a creative way. As integrators educators should integrate things, and work as developers, continuous improvers, and content experts. Finally, as guides educators should be adapters, counselors, and coaches.

Furthermore, Geeta Rani et al. divides educators' role in a different way as shown in the chart below:

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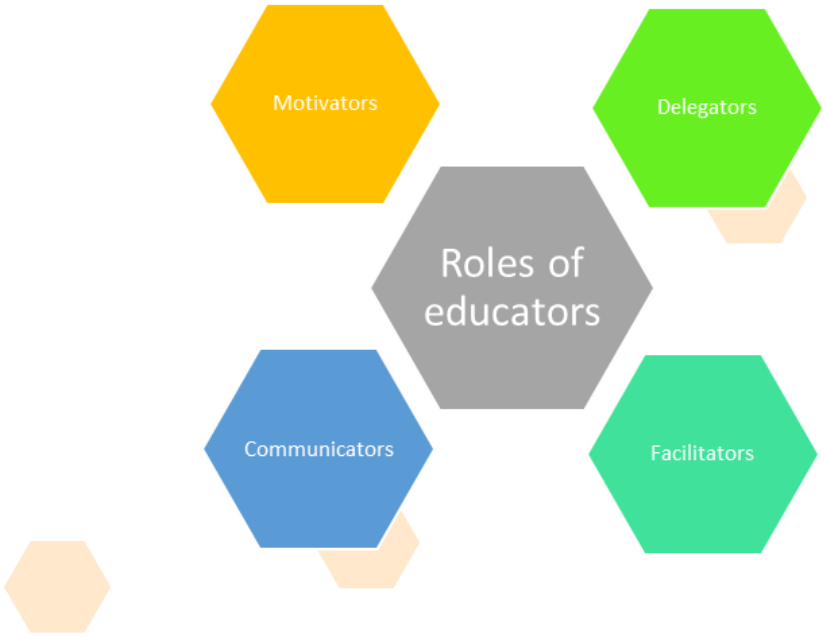

Figure 3. Roles of educators in the blended teaching environment

She states that in the blended teaching environment educators should be motivators, delegators, facilitators, and communicators.

Communicators. Communication is one of the most important things in teaching, especially in blended teaching where two different teaching environments (online and face-to-face) intertwine with each other. Educators have to ensure that learners correctly understand their expectations. In order to provide proper communication between learners and educators both have to remember the following terms: synchronous communication and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication means communication in real-time, doesn't matter if it is in person or virtual. Online this commonly occurs through web-conferencing tools. Asynchronous communication means communication that occurs at a time suitable for the user, also called "anytime learning". Online this is commonly occurring through discussion boards, email, and wikis (Australian Catholic University). Besides that, educators should remember that the learner has to feel valued and welcomed (Geeta Rani, et al., 2021).

Motivators. Motivation is very important in the learning process. Without motivation, the learner will not be able to complete various learning activities in a proper way. Therefore, one of the main educators' tasks is to motivate learners. There are some useful methods to boost learners' motivation. One of them is cultivating choice. It is important to give a choice to the learner while completing tasks, for example, you can write an essay or make a PowerPoint. Another way to boost motivation – make a competition. Competition is a powerful motivator for learners, and when handled correctly, it may boost motivation and engagement, especially when combined with collaborative working (Whitaker, 2021). Finally, it is important to prioritize celebration. Probably, most people like to be awarded and congratulated on making progress. However, some people don't like to be awarded publicly, so you can write an e-mail or say in-person that someone did a great job.

Facilitators. There are two types of facilitators: involved and silent facilitators. The involved facilitators often engage with learners in online discussions and work. In this way, educators are able to lead the discussion,

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manage it, ask follow-up questions, compliment learners' responses and clarify doubts (ASCD, 2012). "This role allows teachers to actively engage with students to guide the conversations to ensure they stay on track" (ASCD, 2014). However, facilitators can't be too dominating, they need to limit their online participation and let learners explore topics by themselves.

The silent facilitators "use online discussions and work to complement and extend in-class curriculum… [but] limits his or her involvement to posting questions for students to discuss and designing activities for students to complete" (Tucker, 2012). In that way, learners are able to lead the discussion by themselves and take charge of their discovery of knowledge (ASCD, 2014). But it is important to let them know that educators are monitoring online conversations and assignments.

Delegators. Usual learners have different knowledge and their working pace varies. Ones are able to finish tasks quickly and by themselves while others need more time and some help. Therefore, educators' task is to delegate persons who will help others. It encourages teamwork and improves communication skills.

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Topic 3: What educators can do in order to provide a successful online experience for learners?

"In all forms of distance teaching, the ability to humanize the relationship with distant learners is important" (Moore, 2011). However, nowadays, when educators have to navigate to a format in which tiny boxes show a face or picture, it is hard to ensure that the online learning experience would be the same as a live experience. So, what educators can do to ensure a successful experience for learners?

As was mentioned in the previous chapter it is important to get the educators' feedback, but the learners' feedback is important as well. Therefore, educators can use the animated response to ensure a more interactive online experience. For that purpose, Voki can be used. Voki is an educational tool for teachers and students that can be used to enhance instruction, engagement, and lesson comprehension. Voki can be used in class (for student work), as an animated presentation tool, for student assignments, and as a virtual supervised discussion forum (Voki Hangouts). The second useful tool is Powtoon. Powtoon is the visual communication platform that gives you the freedom to create professional and fully customized videos your audience will love. So, these two tools will help learners to give an animated response by creating voice-over characters and cartoons (Peterson-Ahmad and Keeley, 2021).

Furthermore, it is crucial to provide cooperative learning. Cooperative learning means that learners should be divided into several groups. Those groups have to distribute tasks to all of the group members. Everyone must contribute to the task in order to achieve the goal. "There are several strategies that can be used to ensure the work is collaborative which includes strategies such as think/pair/share, jigsaw, and flexible grouping" (Peterson-Ahmad and Keeley, 2021). Edublogs, Weebly for education, Zoom breakout rooms, or a shared Google document are examples of tools that can support these strategies.

Another useful tip for educators to ensure a successful experience is to be simple. Every educator has experienced the frustration of having to explain new instructions to the learners. In the online teaching environment educators have to do it more often because there are various tasks that should be completed by using digital tools and before each task educator has to explain not only the task but also give instructions on how to use a particular app or another online tool. It is important to provide these instructions as simply as possible so that every learner will be able to understand them. Also, educators may create a file where the learner will find required instructions during all the training, course, lesson, etc.

Finally, it is important to make the presentation interactive itself. In order to keep the reader's attention and make his/her presentation interactive educators can use tools such as PearDeck add-on for Google Slides and NearPod. Also, these tools are useful for making assessments and finding out if learners understood the material (Peterson-Ahmad and Keeley, 2021).

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Topic 4: What activities can educators use to provide a successful online experience for learners?

That's me!

During this activity, learners have to turn off their camera and microphone. Then, one person turns on the camera and microphone and says one statement about himself: "I have a brother!". A person, who also has a brother, turns on his camera and microphone and says: "That's me!". Then all learners turn off their cameras and microphones and the next person says the statement about himself. This activity is great for warm-up and to get to know each other.

Note:

- In order to avoid chaos, when a person wants to say a statement about himself, he/she "raises his/her hand" or the educator calls each person according to the list of participants.
- This activity works best using the "gallery view" or something similar so you can see all participants.

Write and Show

During this activity, learners have to have a sheet of paper and pen. Educators ask them to write down how they are feeling in one word. Also, educators can make this task more difficult and creative by asking learners to describe their feelings using the New York Times headline and, finally. create their own headline that represents their feelings and mood. These activities can be used at the beginning or at the end of the training, course, session, etc. If training, course, etc. lasts more than one day then educators can distribute these tasks over several days. This activity is perfect for getting learners' feedback.

Note:

- All learners should be able to see each other's screens for this activity. It works best in "gallery mode" or something similar.

Think/pair/share

Learners think about what they want to ask, maybe they have doubts about something or want to ask something in order to deepen their knowledge. The question is firstly discussed in pairs then in the whole class. This activity encourages critical thinking and problem-solving. Also, this activity is a perfect way for learners to collaborate.

Step by step

1. Learner writes the question on some online tool, for example, Lucidspark.com

2. Learners are formed into groups of 2-3 people.

3. Learners discuss the question and try to find the answer.

4. Some of the pairs are asked to share what they have discussed in small groups.

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Glossary

Online teaching environment – it is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process.

Blended teaching environment – is a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities, giving students more flexibility to customize their learning experiences.

Facilitator – someone who helps a person or organization do something more easily or find the answer to a problem, by discussing things and suggesting ways of doing things.

Humanize – to make something that is not human seem like a person, or to treat something that is not human as if it is a person.

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Tips for further reading (bibliography and links)

https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/27/learning/7-activities-to-build-community-and-positive-classroom-culture-during-online-learning.html
https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blended-and-online-learning/
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https://elearningindustry.com/7-tips-prepare-for-teaching-online
https://www.pearson.com/ped-blogs/blogs/2020/03/9-strategies-for-effective-online-teaching.html

Check also our T4T Library. Here are some useful resources:

https://ditchthattextbook.com/8-interactive-google-slides-activities-for-classroom-excitement/
https://www.edutopia.org/article/8-strategies-improve-participation-your-virtual-classroom
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZkEPiRcJXY
https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/collaboration-tools-for-online-learning

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