Redefining Student Learning Identities: Insights into the Transformation of Identities through a Blended Learning Approach

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Abstract

This paper presents a focused examination of a practitioner research case study, honing in on twelve college students in a class of thirty-seven, enrolled in a chemistry course within a blended learning framework. Over the course of two years, the research aimed to delve deeply into the impact of networked learning experiences on the learning identities of these students. Through meticulous exploration using in-depth interviews, significant positive transformations in the learning identities of these twelve students were unearthed. The research question guiding this work was to understand how the blended learning approach, which included an online networked learning component supplementing face-to-face learning, brought about a change in student learning. The study investigated the impact of online participation on the learning identities of the students and how, in turn, the class was generally affected by the transformation of student identities. By examining the interplay between online and face-to-face learning modalities, this research sheds light on the complex dynamics shaping the learning experiences and identities of college students in blended learning environments. Distinctly, the investigation identified two main components of the student learning identity. These are the academic and positional sub-identities. The academic identity transformation was particularly noteworthy, revealing an emergent sense of control, agency, empowerment, and competence as a result of the students embracing online collaborative learning. Simultaneously, the research brought to light changes in the positional identity, encompassing persona-related, acted, and relational identities. The interplay of these identities within the class fostered a profound sense of belonging, of being valued, and connectedness among the students, extending its influence into the face-to-face learning contexts.

The findings emphasize that networked learning collaborative skills not only enhance traditional educational practices but also play a key role in effecting positive changes in students' learning identities. The integration of online collaborative learning within traditional educational settings emerged as a catalyst for fundamental transformations in how students perceive and engage with their learning processes. The research contributes to knowledge on the impact of digital pedagogies on learning identities and suggests that educators can use online collaborative learning experiences to cultivate a more profound impact on students' learning identities and engagement, thereby enriching both theory and practice in education. It offers valuable insights on fostering dynamic and empowered learning environments to educators.

Keywords

E-learning, academic identity; positional identity, blended learning, resilience

Introduction

This paper emerges from a doctoral research project that examined the blended learning experiences of 37 chemistry students at a pre-university college. Blended learning is an approach which amalgamates the strengths of both online and face-to-face learning (Dziuban et al, 2004). In this integrative model, online learning methods not only complement but also potentially enrich face-to-face teaching, fostering a unified classroom community and learning experience. This work delves into this significant shift in educational practice, with a specific focus on how the blended approach, particularly its online networking elements, initiates profound changes in the learning identities of students. The broader study explored the experiences of thirty-seven students following an online collaborative program in a blended learning context, and the impact of these online experiences on the learning identities of the students (Rolé,

2014). This paper focuses on the latter part and the research question guiding this investigation is - What was the impact of online participation on the learning identity of the learners in the online and the face-to-face class and how was the whole class in general affected by the transformation of student identities?

The larger study revealed several insights into the dynamics of online collaboration and its impact on student learning. The following findings from the larger study provide a brief context for this paper. Six main online behaviour patterns with particular student archetypes were identified (Rolé, 2021). These were innovators, early adopters, late adopters, discontinued users, sporadic users and disengaged students. Data analysis revealed that 60% of the class (n=22) formed an active online learning community composed of the innovator (n=1), early adopters (n=9) and late adopters (n=12). For easier reference, students with a particular online behaviour pattern were likened to a term selected from music dynamics. Analysis also showed that successful online collaborative learners met the following three challenges: (i) the acceptance of online learning as a learning method, (ii) the competence to use VLE tools and (iii) contribution to online collaborative activities. The factors which influenced the students' online behaviours were found to be situational, infrastructural and persona-related (Rolé, 2021). Situational factors such as time-management, online learning/VLE issues, experiential and out-of-class opportunities were due to the personal choices and unless the students themselves were prepared to change their lifestyle, they could not be able to meet the challenges. The infrastructural factors were due to institutional, outside college and home issues. The persona-related factors included epistemological beliefs, personal states such as shyness, computer use skills and the online learning dispositions of resourcefulness, resilience, reciprocity and responsibility, which were eventually developed by the active learning groups.

This paper focusses on the in-depth interviews conducted with the late adopters labelled as Crescendo students in the last phase of the research period.

Literature review

This literature review explores the relationship between learning, identity construction, and the specific impact of networked learning environments.

The transformative nature of learning, as conceptualized by Wenger (1998) and Levyck (2008), shapes individuals' identities and influences who they become. Wenger's (1998) perspective positions learning as a continuous journey of becoming a certain person, emphasizing its potential to bring about a profound change in identity. In addition, Vygotsky's assertion, as cited in Levyck (2008), underscores that true learning involves a transformative shift in both knowledge and personal identity. Sfard and Prusak (2005) contribute to this discourse by portraying learning as a dynamic process that narrows the gap between one's actual identity and one's designated identity.

Studies on learning identities reveal diverse aspects. Solomon's (2007) investigation into first-year university mathematics students reveals that some adopt an identity of non-participation and exclusion. Laird (2005) identifies key aspects of a learning identity, including academic self-confidence, critical thinking disposition, and social agency. Stets and Harrod (2004) explore the verification of different identities, emphasizing competence, agency, and power as crucial components of academic identity.

Holland et al. (1998) contribute the perspective that identities develop within social practices, visualized through the concept of figured worlds. Boaler and Greeno (2000) extend this idea, using figured worlds to compare mathematics classrooms and emphasizing the influence of teaching delivery methods on identity formation. Deaken, Crick and Wilson (2005) assert that a learner's development is deeply influenced by the social environment and the nature of educational relationships. This process contributes to the construction of positional and relational identities, aligning with the perspectives of Holland et al (1998). Chickering and Reisser's (1993) model introduces seven vectors that intricately define the complexity and dynamic nature of learning identities. These vectors, which include competence, emotions, autonomy, interdependence, interpersonal relationships, a strong sense of self, purpose, and integrity, collectively highlight the multifaceted aspects of identity development during the learning process.

In the context of networked community learning, Kreuger's (2008) insight suggests that online collaborative learning fosters a sense of community, influencing the development of cohesive group identities among students. Moreover, the observations of Andrew and Arnold (2011) suggest that positive experiences in e-environments foster critical friendships and can have profound impacts on motivation, learning, and student identities. These positive experiences may extend beyond the e-environment, making future selves and membership in imagined communities seem more achievable. Their insights indicate that teaching and learning in e-environments can privilege the development of

individuals' voices and contribute to learning community building. This process is facilitated by tutor feedback, e-moderation interventions, and, significantly, insights and critiques from peers. Andrew and Arnold's observations shed light on the potential of positive experiences in e-environments to shape identities and foster a sense of community beyond the digital realm. They articulate the intricate interplay between learning and identity construction, particularly within networked learning environments, where the ongoing negotiation of identities occurs under the influence of social contexts. Delahunty et al (2014), also highlight the pivotal role of interaction in identity construction and community building. They assert that the ongoing development of new identities, referred to as "identity trajectories," is shaped by socially negotiated relationships within networked environments.

The above studies emphasise the transformative nature of learning experiences and the role of social contexts in the construction of learning identities. Networked learning environments act as a specific social process which contributes to the positive shaping of learning identities.

Methodology

As a practitioner, I designed, implemented and conducted a blended learning course in chemistry. The course was designed on the supplemental model where online work complemented the face-to-face learning in class. Most online work was based on a socio-constructive approach to learning and included the use of wikis, discussion fora, glossary and lab simulation tasks. Face-to-face learning involved lectures and discussions in the classroom.

As a researcher, I designed and implemented a multi-method interpretivistic research inquiry to explore the students' response to the innovative learning strategy. The main study was carried out during 34 weeks of the academic year, and this was preceded by a four-month exploratory study in the previous year, with a different cohort of college students. The research methods for the broad study included observations, unsolicited student meetings, Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) tracking system, students' reflective journal, online informal discussions, 3 questionnaires, 2 focus groups and thirty interviews, twelve of which were conducted in greater depth.

This paper centres on the twelve in-depth interviews which were conducted with a criterion-selected (Miles and Huberman, 1994) group of twelve late adopters, referred to as the Crescendo students. The rationale for selecting this group of students, initially resistant to online learning but eventually embracing it, was to gain insights into the phenomenon under examination: the intricate changes in learning identity as students engaged (or refrained from engaging) with the online course. By focusing on this cohort, the aim was to understand the nuances of their transition and adaptation within the online learning environment. Through interviews, comprehensive insights were sought into the shifts in learning identities experienced by these students.

Each in-depth interview lasted around 75 minutes and these interviews were held in the last three weeks of the research period. The students explained the meanings of their experiences in detail and responded well to the use of artifacts (interview plus concept), e.g., incorporating extracts from postings or face-to-face discussions in the interviews. (Sharpe et al, 2005). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was coded and analysed using NVIVO. It was categorized and reduced several times. The main themes emerged were related to two identified components of learning identity.

Findings and Discussion

The rigorous analysis of interview data facilitated the discernment of two primary constituents of learning identities. These components, namely the academic and positional learning identities, exhibited a continuous transformation from previous identities within a traditional didactic student environment to the emerging online participatory student context.

The following short vignettes of two selected Crescendo students introduce the findings and exemplify the general shift in learning identities of the twelve Crescendo students. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the discussion)

Vignettes - Doreen and Paula

Doreen was initially hesitant to engage with the VLE due to personal apprehensions about online learning and a belief that learning chemistry required face-to-face instruction. Despite this, her resilience and determination led her to

embrace online collaborative tools, which improved her preparedness and engagement in the classroom, and she grew to appreciate the community aspect of the VLE.

Paula faced significant setbacks due to health issues and being absent in the first six weeks of the blended course, which contributed to her doubts about her ability to catch up and skepticism towards the use of technology in learning. Her initial resistance was grounded in a preference for teacher-led instruction and a sense of inadequacy compared to her peers. With a sense of almost giving up and a feeling of having little to lose, Paula found herself at crossroads and resolved to explore the realm of networked learning.

As seen from above, both students exhibited a resistance shaped by their situational and epistemological beliefs, positioning them as late adopters of innovation (Rogers, 2003). Over the course of their blended learning journey, both students evolved from a stance of reluctance to one of active engagement, reflecting a substantial transformation in their learning identity.

The transformation of the Academic Identity

From the data treatment, it became evident that in accordance with the findings of Stets and Harrod (2004), the new academic identity entailed an augmented sense of competence, agency, and power within the scholarly realm. The following are a few quotes from the students' voices which show the learners' perception of their capabilities, the ability to take purposeful action, and a heightened sense of influence and authority within the academic context.

Competence

> All of a sudden instead of having just a book and notes, I can see how someone else is solving a problem. I say to myself: 'she is doing it this way'. This is better having a book and notes, because in Moodle I am with something living. I can work like them, (Marianne, Crescendo).

> 'In Moodle, I inquire and become determined to work through what I do not know with other students in the forum. I felt I was capable of working through the home-works', (Doreen, Crescendo).

The competence gained in the subject matter and learning skills such as online collaborative and self-directed learning constituted a change in the academic identity and this also affected the student's learning identity in the face-to-face environment. The gain in competence brought about an increase in self-confidence. The students became motivated to collaborate and this led to the building of an enthusiastic learning community in both the online and face-to-face learning environments.

Agency

> Moodle showed me that I have to be the one who has to show interest to learn. You cannot find everything in the textbook. You cannot rely on the book only. I am now aware that learning is not just reading the book, (Doreen, Crescendo).

> I feel greatly responsible for the others to learn. If it is just me, I may postpone doing the work, but in our group I do it. I know the others depend on me. I'd be very concerned. You do the work willingly for yourself and for the team, (Paula, Crescendo).

> It all started when I asked a question; Sylvia responded to my question and then I posted an answer to her question. From then on I was reading all threads and discussing with others, (Lois, Crescendo).

In this study, agency was shown when the students made conscious choices (Kasworm, 2009) regarding their learning and in effect, were able to take control of their learning. The students became able to choose how to learn, what to learn and when to learn. As the Crescendo students developed agency, they were able to change their ways of study and to make choices about their learning.

Power

> We meet during a free lesson and we do our work using books and the Internet or ask each other through msn or at the College. Then each one posts the work in the wiki and we check each others' work and add in comments. Then we decide on some sections and reach an agreement on what to choose as the best answer,' (Jodie, Crescendo).

> I used to give up easily. I do no longer feel down because I do not know how to work out the problems. I convinced myself to ask once and had a reply from the others. Now, even when I do not know how to solve a problem, I try to do it, and if I do not manage, I discuss it in Moodle,'(Paula, Crescendo).

> Even the questions in the exam past papers which we were discussing in Moodle helped a lot - I was understanding them better. I felt confident to tackle more questions in past papers,' (Kate, Crescendo).

Students were empowered to research, engage with content and tackle more work, discuss, enquire and share knowledge, assess their learning and teach and support each other. Engaging actively in problem-solving and collaboration, they utilized e-tools effectively and honed self-directed learning skills, a stark contrast to their previous didactic learning experiences. As seen from the above quotes, the antecedent academic identity underwent a transformation, aligning itself with the development and cultivation of dispositions characterized by resourcefulness, reciprocity, and responsibility. The new academic identity fostered competence, agency, and empowerment as students collaborated in the online environment.

The transformation of the Positional Identity

Kasworm (2005) delved into the concept of positional identities and characterized them as multilayered constructs. Through an analysis of in-depth interview data in this study, three distinct layers emerged: persona-related, acted roles, and relational aspects. The findings revealed that the positional identity is a complex interplay of various dimensions, encompassing students' learning beliefs, their roles within the learning community, and their self-perception in relation to peers.

The persona related identity comprises internal characteristics related to learning, such as new beliefs in how to learn and willingness and ability to research and discuss. The enacted roles are new roles taken up by the learners such as seeking help and mediating knowledge. The relational layer reflects self-comparison with peers and perceptions of how others perceive the individual within the learning community. These layers interact, together with developments in online learning dispositions of resourcefulness, reciprocity, responsibility and resilience, fostering active participation and, ultimately, facilitating the learning process.

Data showed that the persona-related positional identity of the Crescendo students at the beginning of the blended course was one constructed by teacher-centred beliefs, individualistic and ritualistic learning, shyness, a lack of self-confidence in technology use and passive learning.

> Studying from the notes or textbook is a lonesome experience. But in Moodle, I was able to see the work of other students, to see what they think and this was encouraging. They give you the push to research and do the work. You do it for yourself and to share with them', (Marianne, Crescendo)

However, as the Crescendo students overcame their problems with online participation, they gradually changed their epistemological beliefs to take on a new persona positional learning identity favouring learner-centred, collaborative and networked learning. A new persona positional identity was developed when learners participated in the online course.

The second layer of the positional identity reveals how students understood and acted out their roles. The change from passive learners in the face-to-face class to self-directed and collaborative learners in the online medium resulted in an overall transformation in the acted positional identity. These new roles, initiated in the online medium, were manifested as roles of help-seekers and knowledge-mediators. The interviews revealed that the acted positional

identity of five Crescendo students prior to their participation in the VLE was that of passive and shy students. For example, the following student with a developed disposition of reciprocity, interacted with other students.

> Because of Moodle I made a huge step; In class, I talk to everyone who is in Moodle. Without Moodle chemistry would have been more difficult. Now, it is like you are talking to someone else you are not alone at home. You are sharing with others and revising with them; then you talk to them again in class, and work with them, (Marcus, Crescendo).

Another student expressed her former acted positional identity of a non-interactive and shy online learner in the following manner:

> I printed out email copies of discussions and then read them on the bus. I did not discuss in Moodle because I did not feel at ease. I was scared I would say things which were obviously stupid. In many cases the questions which other students asked, were also my difficulties. I would not know how to answer, and even if I do, I am afraid that the others will not understand me, (Janina, Crescendo).

This acted positional identity changed when the student realised that the VLE was a safe medium where she could express herself.

> Now that I got to know Anthony and Kate through the online team work, it feels different. I am posting in the forum. These students are 'all right' (good natured). They do not look down on me and say that I do not know any chemistry, (Janina, Crescendo).

The changes in the acted positional identity entailed shifts from passive-learners in the class or non-collaborators in the VLE, to active learners with roles of help-seekers or knowledge-mediators in the VLE. Circumstances such as: 'could not wait for others to ask', 'a desperate need for support', and 'getting to know that knowledgeable students are kind', triggered a change which together with the underpinning learning dispositions of resilience, reciprocity and responsibility led to a new acted positional identity of asking, discussing and collaborating in the VLE.
The third layer in the positional identity refers to the relational identity which relates to how students, aware of their acted positional identities and those of their classmates, visualise themselves in relation to their classmates. (Kasworm, 2005; Solomon, 2007). In the individual interviews, some students remarked that in the online medium, they could watch other students learn.

> When we started the topics with lots of maths, you had told us that there is great help in Moodle. I became determined to use it because just by listening in class, I was not learning as much as the others, who were doing Moodle, (Paula, Crescendo).

Paula compared herself to other students and believed that other students never seemed to get discouraged. However, the awareness of her changing positional acted identity in relation to others kept Paula motivated and working hard. She was also willing to imitate other students whom she perceived as more knowledgeable and hard working in the VLE. Paula also appreciated that her ideas were being valued by her peers in her small group. This was a positive move for a student who, in the first term, needed encouragement from her friends. She moved from dependence through autonomy towards interdependence (Chickering and Reisser's, 1993), where she developed both emotional and instrumental independence.

> If I have a problem, I look up what the others did in Moodle, and if I do not find it, I start a discussion; I often end up helping others in other fora. As Kate and Anthony had said, when you try to solve problems for others, you realise what you know or do not know, (Paula, Crescendo).

She also became aware of possessing a new positional relational identity in both the online and the face-to-face environment. She felt valued and her comment indicated the transfer of the new role and the use of her new identity in the face-to-face environment.

> Before, no one used to ask for my opinion in class. In class or in the lab, Kate sometimes asks me - 'Paula, what answers did you get'? or 'Which method are you using?'; Now I feel more that I am part of the class. At least now, there are ones who would like to know what I think and discuss solutions with me, and this happens, not only online, (Paula, Crescendo).

This section demonstrates how Crescendo students experienced a shift in their relational positional learning identities. The Crescendo student mentioned above intentionally narrowed the gap between her own perceived identity and that of her more knowledgeable peers, whom she sought to emulate. As such relational identities developed within the course, students actively sought assistance and modeled themselves after peers they considered more knowledgeable. This process effectively bridged the divide between their own perceived identity and the positional identities of others. The online medium played a crucial role in constructing these relational positional identities. Students who compared their positions to those of their peers gained insights into both the academic competence and the enacted positional identities of themselves and other students (Allen, 2004; Gustafson, Hodgson, and Tickner, 2004). Additionally, some students gained an understanding of how their peers perceived them within the learning community. Ultimately, these relational identities contributed to the overall learning experience.

Interviews confirmed that, at the outset of the academic year, before delving into online learning, Doreen, Paula, and their peers were immersed in a "figured world" (Holland et al, 1998) of didactic learning, moulded by prior experiences of traditional learning. In this realm, the students engaged in passive roles, characterised by listening, observing, and solitary work, viewing chemistry as a subject best learned through conventional means such as lectures and notes. The additional use of computers and the Internet and using a VLE were deemed complex for learning chemistry at college level, and the concept of collaborative learning was met with scepticism.

The online participants were the actors in the new figured world of online collaborative learning. They gradually developed new identities in relation to the new figured worlds (Holland et al, 1998; Wenger, 1998). As actors, they were empowered to become agents taking control of their learning. They took on new roles and participated in innovative activities where being resourceful, reciprocating and taking responsibility for learning became significant meaningful acts of participation and socialisation in this new world. These acts involved research, reflection, discussion and supporting other students. The students were enabled to develop their potential as learners in both the online and the face-to-face class. The in-depth interviews clarified and corroborated the increase in the number of individuals seeking assistance and acting as knowledge mediators as the course progressed throughout the year. This progression signified a shift in student roles and identities, evolving from non-collaboration, through seeking help, to ultimately mediating knowledge.

The interacting learner identities

The newly developed identities interacted iteratively, mutually reinforcing each other throughout the process. As students shifted their epistemological beliefs and embraced collaboration, they adopted new persona related positional identities, demonstrating resourcefulness and eagerness to collaborate. This shift significantly influenced their academic identity, fostering competence in subject content, adeptness with tools, and the cultivation of new learning skills. Moreover, they developed agency, assuming responsibility for their own learning and that of their peers, thereby adopting acted identities as help-seekers and knowledge-mediators. These transitions also gave rise to new relational identities. Consequently, this reciprocal interaction reinforced the academic identity, further enhancing students' competence, agency, and empowerment. Through this iterative process, the transformation of learning identities contributed to the overall enhancement of learning outcomes

A change in the class-room identity

As a result of students' participation in networked learning, the change in individual identities led to an overall positive transformation in class identity.

> At first, I participated only in the VLE, but as more students joined the online conversations and tasks, it became easier to ask and discuss with the others in the classroom, (Janina, Crescendo).

After the first four months of the blended course, more students interacted as help-seekers and knowledge-mediators in both the online medium and in the face-to-face classroom. This generated an atmosphere of connectedness and a spirit of collaboration in the face-to-face classroom. Interview data revealed that this sense of community was also transferred to the chemistry practical sessions in the laboratories and in other contexts such as the library. In addition, online participation made students feel more confident and more engaged with subject content in the face-to-face class.

> Online I felt comfortable asking about a particular problem. There was time to write it in my own words. It felt more comfortable. This in turn made me feel comfortable also in the classroom. This chemistry class has a sense of community; in just a few weeks there was the feeling of togetherness in the classroom, (Francesca, Crescendo).
> You know what is happening in chemistry. Moodle makes me feel more engaged in class. I know what we are doing; you do not feel lost in class, (Doreen, Crescendo).

The following comments convey the learners' feelings about the new learning community which was built in this chemistry A-level class.

> All our work is in Moodle. You can actually see what we have learnt together. I think it is a good idea to extend next year, (Celine, Crescendo).
> In this class, I know many students through Moodle. Moodle made me know the group and we are ready to help and work together in the class tutorials and labs, (Marcus, Crescendo)

A blended learning setting afforded a flow of learning activities between the online setting and the face-to-face medium. Thus, the online practices of the online learning community were eventually adopted in the face-to-face class. As a result of online networking, students developed a strong familiarity with one another, fostering feelings of connectedness, belonging, being valued, comradeship, trust, and mutual assistance within the online environment. These sentiments initially flourished in virtual spaces but gradually extended beyond to traditional face-to-face classrooms, as well as other face-to-face collaborative settings. Consequently, a novel face-to-face classroom identity emerged, characterized by the bonds formed and nurtured in the online realm.
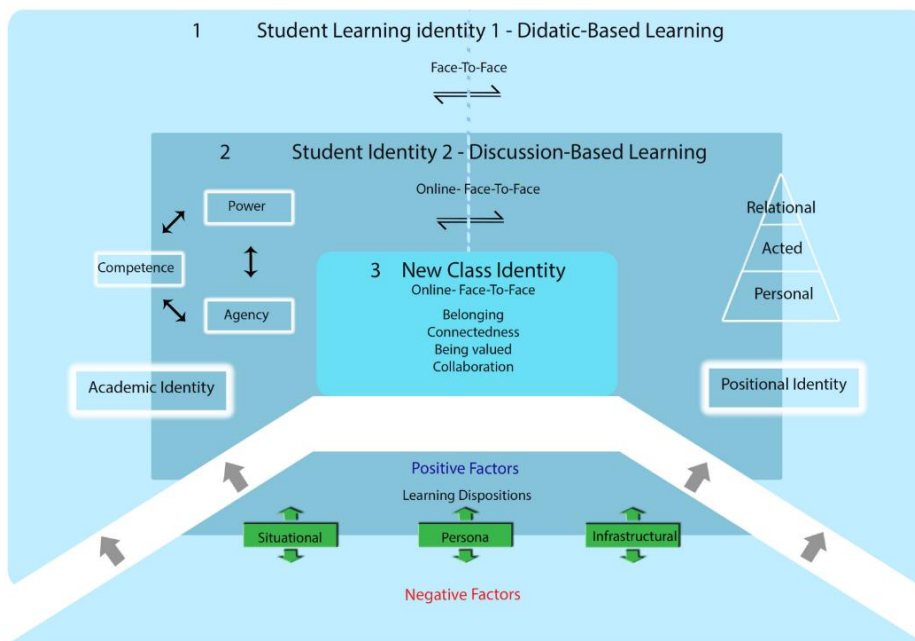
An overview of individual and class identities
Figure 1 gives an overview of the learners' experiences as confirmed by the in-depth interviews with the Crescendo students. It illustrates the transition from the antecedent learning identity 1 (outer light blue Frame 1), developed during didactic-based learning prior to the blended course, to the emerging student learning identity 2 (Frame 2) facilitated by blended learning. It also depicts the formation of the new class identity (centre- Frame 3). The academic and positional identities serve as components of the learning identities. The lower section of the diagram illustrates how negative factors or barriers to online collaborative learning, such as epistemological beliefs and shyness, perpetuated and favored the retention of learning identity 1, cultivated in traditional face-to-face learning. Conversely, positive factors, such as the development of learning dispositions (e.g., resilience, resourcefulness, reciprocity, and responsibility), encouraged the adoption of learner identity 2 in discuss ion-based learning. Frame 3 represents the interactions among the students' new learning identities, developed through networked learning, culminating in the formation of a novel class identity. The components of the learning identity – academic and positional identities – are depicted over Frame 1 and Frame 2, highlighting the significance of discussion-based learning integrating both online and face-to-face modalities.

In line with the work of Garrison and Vaughan (2008), the learners' voices in this study demonstrated that the social, teaching, and cognitive presences developed in the online medium were transferred to face-to-face environments.

Networked learning significantly influenced learning approaches within the face-to-face class. As a result, the interaction of students with new academic and positional identities fostered a supportive and dynamic class environment (Frame 3). In this setting, students projected a sense of belonging, felt valued, experienced connectedness, and engaged in collaborative activities. Kim and Bonk (2006) also suggested that online practices can promote socio-constructive learning approaches in face-to-face classes. Consequently, lectures in the face-to-face classroom became less structured and more interactive.

Figure 1: An overview of student and class identities

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Conclusion

This study provides evidence of the transformative nature of learning identities within a blended learning environment which consisted of traditional face-to-face learning supplemented with online networking. This paper traces the journey of twelve resilient students as they transition from a traditional, didactic learning class to blended dynamic, discussion-based learning environments. This shift, primarily facilitated by online collaborative learning, not only fostered the development of new learning dispositions but also redefined the students' academic and positional learning identities. Academic identity in this context emerged as a blend of competence and agency, where students mastered subject content and learning tools, coupled with student empowerment through choice. Positional identity, on the other hand, reflected the students' personal stance, their enacted roles, and perceived social standing within the learning community. These dual aspects of identity—academic and positional—did not exist in isolation but interactively influenced each other, leading to enriched learning experiences. Additionally, the collective formation of these identities fostered a classroom ethos marked by a profound sense of belonging, being valued, and interconnectedness. This was initiated in the online networked setting and extended to the face-to-face interactions in the classroom. The evidence in this work presents significant implications for educational methodologies. The findings of this study and their analysis in terms of transformation of learning identities emphasise the potential role of blended learning strategies in empowering students to collaborate and learn. These strategies instill confidence and knowledge through

online engagement and also encourage students to be active contributors and create learning communities, where students learn with each other, from each other and mediate each other's learning.

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