**[Facilitating Interaction between Students and Teachers in the Classroom](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1lpBgpWVI719GBJrx3pbd_ANH7SRkFt5MFHXA8dLux1A/edit?usp=sharing_eil&ts=58d5304f)**

(Ven, Alex & Jukka)

Interaction among students, and between the students and the teacher, is extremely important in all kinds of the learning. Generally speaking, there are two perspectives that should be considered, when trying to foster effective interaction-based learning:

1. **Classroom environment**. It is the responsibility of the teacher to foster a positive environment in the classroom, which facilitates productive discussions. According to a guideline provided by Brown University’s Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, the classroom environment should be inclusive, conversations should be constructive and open, and students should be encouraged to participate.
2. **Interaction facilitation methods**. In order to create such an environment, as well as to leverage the learning potential of a positive classroom environment, the teacher can use a mix of interaction facilitation methods. Hyppönen and Lindén (2009, pp. 34-45) describe a large number of interaction facilitation methods that vary in the type of interaction they foster within the classroom (e.g., small group vs. entire class), as well as in the amount of time that is required to prepare and execute their use. The student can “pick and mix” these methods depending on the type of social dynamics and learning sought after.

In our own teaching and learning, we have found the following four types of interaction facilitation methods to be particularly useful. The are not an exhaustive categorization of methods, but provide a framework that can provide initial guidance for a teacher who is searching for appropriate interaction facilitation methods. Depending on the content of the course, a teacher can choose one more interaction facilitation methods to improve the learning process. In a nutshell, the four types are as follows:

1. **Online facilitation methods**: These techniques are used to gather opinions or understanding of the students on a given topic. Methods include in-class quizzes, Online feedback forms and tactile feedback devices. These techniques give an opportunity for the students to clearly express themselves in the classroom. Online facilitation methods helps the teacher assess the understanding of the students, identify knowledge gaps, gauging opinions and experiences, and receive immediate feedback.
2. **Small-scale group interaction:** These techniques provide an opportunity for the students to interact and discuss their ideas about the topic with each other. Breakout groups, brainstorming and dialectical debate are few of the techniques in this category. These techniques are used, for example, to activate of prior knowledge of the students, knowledge sharing among the students, enhancement of understanding, and stimulation of interest on the topic.
3. **Problem analysis:** Problem analysis techniques helps the teacher to unleash the analytical and problem solving abilities of the students. Case studies, Hackathons, and mathematical problems provide an opportunity for the students to rehearse, hone and demonstrate their analytical and problem-solving abilities to the teacher. Using these techniques will improve practical applications of knowledge, inculcate deep learning and help assess the problem-solving and group-work skills of the students.
4. **Role-playing:** In this method, both the teacher and students take different roles or characters to explore a topic, concept or phenomenon. Examples of this method include Experiential simulations (e.g., business wargame) and Drama. Role playing methods allow the students to see a concept or theory come to life through the actions of their own actions and through the actions of their peers. Role playing also helps students to understand different perspectives on the topic.

A teacher can use one or more interaction facilitation methods in the classroom depending on the nature of topic and the desired learning objective.

**Further reading**

Brown University. Facilitating Effective Group Discussions, <https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/sheridan-center/teaching-learning/effective-classroom-practices/discussions-seminars/facilitating> Accessed: 17.4.2017

Olli Hyppönen and Satu Lindén (2009). *Handbook for Teachers - Course Structures, Teaching Methods, and Assessment.* Publications of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit of the Helsinki University of Technology 5/2009