

The Professor Behind the Screen:
Four Case Studies of Online Teaching in Business

by

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Abstract

Although online education in postsecondary education is not new, the number of online courses and programs has grown especially fast in recent years. This shift toward online education has drawn strong supporters as well as critics: some see promise in the immediate and flexible nature of the online environment, while others question the quality of online courses. The debate, in fact, hinges on teaching, just as in face-to-face settings. However, little systematic research has investigated online teaching through the eyes of instructors, and literature about online teaching is based largely on speculation and lacks complexity and depth.

The central aim in this study was to examine online teaching from the perspectives of instructors themselves in order to understand pedagogical decisions, views of online education, and environmental factors influencing teaching. Case studies of four instructors at two institutions were developed. Each instructor taught a fully online, asynchronous undergraduate business course during Fall 2013. I gained access to course websites to view course materials and observe communication between the instructor and students. During the semester, I interviewed each instructor four times using a semi-structured interview format.

The four case studies were composed separately, each with thick description that helped create a detailed and contextualized narrative. In addition to the case studies, I present a cross-case analysis describing themes and offering insights into the constraints and affordances of teaching online. The cross-case analysis contributed to the development of a theoretical framework for studying online teaching. Specifically, I propose an ecology model of online teaching accounting for contextual factors (e.g., institutional setting, instructor background) shaping teaching decisions, experiences, and beliefs in the asynchronous online teaching environment.

This inquiry has meaningful implications for practice and research. First, knowing how instructors design courses and think about the online teaching-learning environment can inform the work of faculty development staff who train and support instructors and shape institutional culture related to teaching. Second, insights from this exploratory study can strengthen future research seeking to answer evaluative or causal questions by revealing essential variables to consider when examining the processes and outcomes of online education.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Although online education in postsecondary education is not new (see Fishman, 2013; Harasim, 2000), the number of online courses and programs has grown especially rapidly in recent years (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Center for Digital Education, 2012). In 2011, almost one-third of students enrolled in higher education were enrolled in an online course, compared with just nine percent in 2002 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Various factors account for this shift: more robust and sophisticated technology supporting online instruction, increased student access to computers and the Internet, and calls from administrators and policymakers for innovative ways to deliver education more efficiently and inexpensively (Bowen, 2013; Center for Digital Education, 2012; Duderstadt, Atkins, & Van Houweling, 2002; Kerry & Isakson, 2000; Waldrop, 2013). The growth of online education in higher education has reinforced and helped shape a “new value system that represents universal access, open content, and reliance on new technologies” (DeMillo, 2011, p. 25).

Online education has enthusiastic supporters as well as critics. Thomas and Seely Brown (2011) write that we are entering a “new culture of learning” in which we have the ability to “produce, consume, and distribute knowledge in an unlimited, unfiltered, and immediate way” (p. 51). Salman Khan, founder of the online learning provider Khan Academy, writes that technology has the power “to make education more portable, flexible, and personal; to foster initiative and individual responsibility; to restore the treasure-hunt excitement of the process of learning” (2012, p. 12). However, critics—perhaps most notably faculty members—have raised

concerns about online course rigor, quality, and assessment practices (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012; Carmean & Friedman, 2014; Carnevale, 2000; Jaschik & Lederman, 2013).

Typically, supporters and critics alike take a normative view using face-to-face teaching as a reference point. Surveys ask faculty and other higher education stakeholders whether online education is *better* or *worse* than face-to-face learning (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012; Jaschik & Lederman, 2014) and studies compare learning outcomes across modes (Bowen, Chingos, Lack, & Nygren, 2012; Cook, Dupras, Thompson, & Pankratz, 2005; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2011). This framing is based either implicitly or explicitly on equivalency theory (Simonson, Schlosser, & Hanson, 1999), which states that the goal of online instructors should be to create a learning experience equivalent to a face-to-face one. Simonson, Schlosser, and Hanson (1999) describe equivalency theory as follows:

The more equivalent the learning experiences of distant learners are to those of local learners, the more equivalent will be the outcomes of the educational experiences for all learners. This approach to distance education advocates designing a collection of equivalent learning experiences for distant and local learners, even though they may be different for each student. The objective of the instructional designer of distance education is to provide for appropriate, equivalent learning experiences for each student.

(p. 68)

The equivalency framing surfaces in practice, in addition to research. Institutional policies, such as those at Midwest Community College and described in Chapter 5, require instructors to use identical syllabi for the online and face-to-face versions of a course. Class materials, assignments, exams, and learning outcomes, administrators say, should be the same for each mode.

The equivalency framing stipulates that online course quality is measured by how closely the course resembles a face-to-face one. In other words, an online course should mimic a face-to-face one in as many ways as possible: teaching, learning, curriculum, structure of the course, and grading and exams. Few have stopped to ask: *Should* equivalency—defined as replication—be the goal or expectation, and under what conditions should we expect equivalency? Fundamental aspects of the teaching environment, including setting and pacing, differ online, and this affects teaching. But how, exactly? To answer this question, and to know whether equivalency is a fruitful assumption or goal for supporting and studying online education, we need to know more about the work of online teaching from the perspectives of instructors. What are the affordances and limitations of the online teaching space? Do instructors think it is reasonable to assume that face-to-face teaching practices translate online? Existing research examining online instructors' own perspectives is limited, so these questions are difficult to answer and the equivalency claim, in its simplicity and appeal to common sense, is hard to refute. However, recent research on faculty experiences teaching online (e.g., Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013; McShane, 2004; Bennett, 2014), including my dissertation study, challenges the usefulness of the equivalency framing and calls for a contextualized approach to studying and supporting online teaching.

In this study, I explored whether, and under what conditions, present-day characterizations and framings ring true in the lived experiences of instructors themselves (e.g., online education is *flexible, immediate, and unlimited*; online education can and should mimic face-to-face education). I found support for both sides of the debate about whether online education promises to transform and revitalize higher education. Although the online instructors I interviewed affirmed characterizations of the virtual environment as “flexible” (Khan, 2012) and “unlimited, unfiltered, and immediate” (Thomas & Seely Brown, 2011), they also called

them into question. For instance, Quinn felt that she taught “in this box,” separated from the *unlimited* quality of the Internet. All instructors avoided making mid-course changes, even though the technology (i.e., the learning management system and the Internet) supported these types of *immediate*, in-the-moment modifications. Further, faculty agreed that the online environment allowed students flexibility to participate from anywhere and any time, but instructors maintained rigid, unchanging course plans because students seemed to rely on a firm structure to stay connected and engaged.

The case studies revealed factors such as teaching load and course level that influenced the constraints and affordances of the online environment, which then mediated the degrees of flexibility, immediacy, agency, and structure that the instructor experiences. These factors affected instructors’ decisions such as how to promote student engagement, an increasingly common focus of study within online education literature (e.g., Savenye, 2005; York & Richardson, 2012; Zingaro & Oztok, 2012). Overall, the case studies indicated that determining relevant contextual factors to consider and the relationships among them is a logical and important next step for studying online teaching in a more nuanced and constructive way. One outcome of this study was the identification of contextual variables affecting online teaching. In Chapter 7, I proposed an ecological model based on the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner that arranges the variables into an explanatory scheme.

My interest in understanding effective teaching in college stems from my own experience as an undergraduate at a small liberal arts college that values good teaching. I became interested in knowing what my instructors *did* that taught me to think critically and clearly, and how they *viewed* learning to be able to transform the way I thought and wrote. Some studies have probed these questions (e.g., Bain, 2011; Terosky, 2005), but these studies focus on face-to-face

instructional settings. With the “new culture of learning” and “new value system” in higher education articulated by Thomas and Seely Brown (2011) and DeMillo (2011), respectively, as well as the increasing prevalence of online postsecondary education, we need a deeper awareness of how faculty experience, understand, and carry out the work of teaching in virtual environments.

My central aim in this qualitative study was to understand instructors’ experiences teaching in the virtual environment of an online course and how instructors conduct and think about teaching within it. Insights from this exploratory study can inform and strengthen future research seeking to answer evaluative or causal questions. Little systematic research has been done to understand the work of online teaching, so debates about how best to do it and support it are based largely on assumptions and, thus, lack complexity and depth. The emergent and evolving state of research on online teaching presents a unique opportunity for exploratory work. Exploratory research is an important precursor to evaluative research because it provides “a means for developing and sharpening [the scholar’s] inquiry so that his problem, his directions of inquiry, data, and analytical relations and interpretations arise out of, and remain grounded in, the empirical life under study” (Blumer, 1969, p. 40).

Although the focus of the debate about online education has been on student learning outcomes, which are important to study, more attention should be paid to understanding the experiences of faculty members who teach online courses because their decisions and views about education directly influence student learning. In her 2012 presidential address for the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Anna Neumann called for research that illuminates the individual experiences of instructors, asserting that these voices have been largely missing from higher education research (Neumann, 2014). In this study, I focused on the

experiences of faculty who design and teach fully online courses with the aim of understanding what instructors do when they teach in this environment, and why.

Defining Online Education for This Study

Several categorizations of types of technology-supported education have been put forth (e.g., Allen & Seaman, 2010; Center for Digital Education, 2012). I drew from Allen and Seaman's (2010) descriptions of web-facilitated, blended/hybrid, and online courses to explain what I mean by *online education* in this dissertation. According to Allen and Seaman's definition, a web-facilitated course is one in which less than about one-third of the course uses web-based technology, such as a course management system. In a blended/hybrid courses, 30 to 79 percent of the course is delivered online, either synchronously or asynchronously. Online courses are those in which at least 80 percent of the content is delivered online. For my study, I included only instructors of courses considered online, using Allen and Seaman's criteria. I did not include web-facilitated or blended/hybrid courses, in which a substantial portion of the course is delivered face-to-face.

Guiding Questions

My primary guiding question for this study was: *How do instructors experience teaching in asynchronous online courses?* Other questions that guided this study include

- What are the teaching processes employed by these four instructors in the courses studied?
- What are the contextual and background factors shaping instructors' experiences in asynchronous online teaching?
- What are instructors' views about teaching, learning, and technology that are reflected in their teaching?

In the next two chapters, I describe relevant extant literature and the study's design and methods that were driven by these guiding questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Enrollment in online courses in higher education is high and increasing (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Institutional leaders and state legislators are eager to capitalize on the perceived cost-savings potential of online education (e.g., Fain, 2013b; Rivard, 2013b) and the potential for technology to enhance teaching (e.g., Kerry & Isakson, 2000). Minnesota policymakers and higher education leaders announced a goal in 2008 to generate at least 25 percent of credits online at Minnesota state colleges and universities by 2015 (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, 2013). California legislators recently proposed a bill requiring public colleges and universities to award credit for online courses whose face-to-face versions are oversubscribed (Lewin, 2013). As a result of initiatives like these, institutions and academic departments are increasingly calling on faculty to teach and design online courses (e.g., Fain, 2013a; Harris, 2013; Young, 2001).

Despite the enthusiasm for online course offerings to increase access and enrollment in higher education, online education elicits a mix of reactions among higher education stakeholders (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Allen et al., 2012; Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2000; Kim & Bonk, 2006). Faculty members are among the most skeptical about the potential of online education to produce high quality learning and cost savings (Allen et al., 2012; Allen & Seaman, 2013; Berrett, 2013; Jaschik & Lederman, 2013; Kolowich, 2013; Rivard, 2013c; Rivard, 2013d; Rivard, 2013e; Straumsheim, 2014). In one survey, 58 percent of faculty respondents reported that they have more fear than excitement about online learning. Eighty-one percent of administrators surveyed, on the other hand, reported more excitement than fear. In the

same survey, one-third of faculty respondents indicated that they believe learning outcomes from online education are inferior to face-to-face education, while less than ten percent of chief academic officers felt this way (Allen et al., 2012). In a 2012 survey of community college administrators, respondents, on average, rated “engaging faculty in development of online pedagogy” as their greatest challenge related to distance learning on their campuses (Instructional Technology Council, 2013).

This mixed reaction to online learning may be, in part, due the changing role of faculty and the new skills and knowledge necessary for instructors to develop in order to teach. While some authors argue that “faculty should not be expected to complete the technical tasks associated with developing on-line learning materials” (e.g., Brahler, Peterson, & Johnson, 1999, p. 1), others acknowledge that designing and teaching online courses are—and will continue to be—the responsibility of many faculty members. Duderstadt, Atkins, and Van Houweling (2002) argue, “Faculty members of the twenty-first-century university will find it necessary to set aside their roles as teachers and instead become designers of learning experiences, processes, and environment” (p. 65). Authors and scholars who believe online instruction is here to stay are turning attention toward the study and improvement of online instruction (e.g., Beaudoin, 1990; Masiello, Ramberg, & Lonka, 2005; Sherron, 1998).

A literature about online teaching exists but has limitations. Plenty of books and articles suggest tips, practices, and habits of mind essential for successful online teachers, but this literature relies on speculation and anecdotal evidence. Research studies on online teaching tend to examine aspects such as workload and satisfaction instead of considering instructors’ views about learning and environmental factors shaping their teaching. We know little from systematic

research about the teaching experiences of online instructors and the contextual factors influencing teaching from the perspective of instructors themselves.

Scholarship on the use of technology in college and university teaching, in general, is more plentiful and lends support for the need to study the complex relationship between teaching and technology. This existing research is promising but cautionary. It suggests that technology can be used in ways that enhance learning through pedagogical techniques such as collaborative learning, problem-based learning, or inquiry-based activities (e.g., Sanden & Darragh, 2011; Zhao, 2003), but faculty members tend to incorporate the technology in ways that are not pedagogically sophisticated, such as simply posting documents or uploading videos for students to view (Carr-Chellman & Duchastel, 2000; Dehoney & Reeves, 1999; Kim & Bonk, 2006; Liu, Lee, Bonk, Magjuka, & Liu, 2007; Mioduser, Nachmias, Oren, & Lahav, 1999; Peffers & Bloom, 1999; Wingard, 2004). Carr-Chellman and Duchastel (2000) write, “many online courses lack basic design consideration and...the web is simply being used as a medium for the delivery of instruction created within another framework” (p. 229). Understanding teaching decisions and views of instructional technologies can shed light on why some instructors struggle to use new technology in teaching and the ways in which face-to-face teaching strategies might or might not translate online.

In a study of changes made by faculty when web enhancements were added to face-to-face courses, Wingard (2004) found that “most faculty began to use the web for pragmatic rather than pedagogical reasons, such as efficient distribution of course materials and provision of easy, round-the-clock access to the broader content resources of the web for students” (p. 34). Mioduser et al. (1999) analyzed web-based learning environments to understand the educational philosophies and pedagogical decisions of the instructors who designed them. They argue that

their findings reflect “one step ahead for the technology, two steps back for the pedagogy” (p. 233). In other words, instructors in web-based learning environments tended to use pedagogical approaches that do not engage students in actively constructing knowledge (e.g., information retrieval activities, rote memorization) instead of ones that do (e.g., inquiry-based activities, problem-solving activities). The authors underscore the gap between the potential of educational technology to enhance teaching and the reality that online instructors often use pedagogies that do not promote active, engaged learning:

A reasonable expectation is that the development of educational Websites would reflect currently accepted pedagogical approaches such as the fostering of the student’s active involvement in the construction of knowledge, her interaction with peers and experts, the adaptation of instruction to individual needs, and new ways to assess the students’ state of knowledge and learning. Moreover, given the innovative character of the technology, it could be also expected that even new pedagogical forms based on the unique features of the technology would arise. The results indicate that this is not the situation. (pp. 235-236)

The challenge encountered by faculty members who try to facilitate active learning online raises concern in light of research that links active learning to increased academic achievement and retention (e.g., Prince, 2004). This suggests a need to know more about how to support faculty as they integrate technology into their teaching in ways that facilitate active learning. Instructional technology professionals echo this weakness of not knowing how to best support and train faculty to use technology effectively. In a recent survey of IT staff across higher education sectors, 81% of respondents reported their top priority to be assisting faculty with integrating technology into their work (Straumsheim, 2014).

Scholars have approached the topic of online education from a variety of angles: some examine administration and accreditation of online programs (e.g., Hardy & Meyer-Griffith, 2012; Moore & Shelton, 2013) and others study institutional support of faculty who teach online (e.g., Herman, 2012; Meyer 2014; Meyer & Murrell, 2014). In this chapter, I review existing literature about online education with a focus on teaching and learning. The literature review is divided into two sections: online learning and online instruction. This latter body of work consists of two general areas: “how to” literature directing instructors about how to teach online, and research on online instruction. I examine these areas of literature and describe their limitations and relevance to my study. To identify articles for inclusion, I focused my search on distance education and educational technology journals. I also included relevant reports, news articles, books, book chapters, and conference papers in my review. I searched a broad range of sources because the topic of online education is widely covered due to its prevalence in higher education today and the strong reactions it can evoke.

Online Learning

The first major area of online education discourse, learning in online environments, is large but less central to my study, so I briefly describe it. Many studies of online learning investigate how students learn in an online environment (e.g., Chen & Pedersen, 2012; McBrien, Cohen, & Cheng, 2009; Richardson & Newby, 2006; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Tu, 2002; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). These studies use a variety of conceptual frameworks or theories of learning, including social presence (e.g., Gunawardena, 1995; Tu, 2002; Tu & McIsaac, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003), cognitive presence and community of inquiry (e.g., Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005) cognitive processing (e.g., Chen & Pedersen, 2012), and self-regulation (e.g., William & Hellman, 2004).

The dominant framework, however, is constructivism (e.g., Huang, 2002). Constructivists consider learning to be an active, not receptive, process in which students construct new knowledge based on prior knowledge (e.g., Piaget, 1970).

Other studies of online learning investigate the effectiveness or quality of learning in online courses, typically comparing student outcomes in face-to-face courses with outcomes in online courses to determine whether learning is equivalent across modes (see Bernard et al., 2004; Helms, 2014; Lapsley, Kulik, Moody, & Arbaugh, 2008; Means, Toyama, Murphy, & Baki, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2009; Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Many studies, including a meta-analysis by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), have not found significant differences in student learning between face-to-face and online instructional modes, even when students are randomly assigned to face-to-face or online conditions (Bowen, Chingos, Lack, & Nygren, 2012; Cook, Dupras, Thompson, & Pankratz, 2005; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2011). However, several studies have identified a performance gap between students in online and face-to-face courses that varies by student sub-group and subject area (Brown & Liedholm, 2002; Coates, Humphreys, Kane, & Vachris, 2004; Figlio, Rush, & Yin, 2010; Kaupp, 2012; Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Males and younger students tended to fare especially poorly online, compared to face-to-face (Brown & Liedholm, 2002; Coates, Humphreys, Kane, & Vachris, 2004; Xu & Jaggars, 2014), and students in social science and applied professions courses, such as business, performed particularly poorly online, relative to face-to-face (Xu & Jaggars, 2014).

Studies comparing face-to-face with online learning are based on equivalency theory (Simonson, Schlosser, & Hanson, 1999) described in Chapter 1. This theory downplays the potential of the online environment to promote active or collaborative learning in ways that may

be difficult to achieve in face-to-face settings. In other words, perhaps the goal of online instructors should not be to replicate a face-to-face learning experience but to utilize the potential of the technology to support active learning. Moreover, these comparison studies do not offer insight into instructors' knowledge and experiences teaching online. The goal of using technology to support learning cannot be achieved without a better understanding of instructors' instructional decision-making and their views of the relationship between technology and pedagogy as they design and teach online courses.

Online Teaching

The second major area of online education discourse is literature about teaching online. In higher education, less research has been done on the experience of online teaching than online learning. Visser (2000) writes, "The educational research in distance education has focused overwhelmingly on the learner, not the instructor" (p. 21). Faculty have even been called the "neglected resource in distance education" (Dillon & Walsh, 1992, p. 5). In this section, I present an overview of existing literature about online teaching.

"How To" Literature Advising Online Instructors

Because of the increased demand for online instructors, abundant literature offers guidance for teaching online (e.g., Boettcher & Conrad, 2010; Conrad & Donaldson, 2011; Cyr, 1997; Draves, 2002; Ko & Rosen, 2010; Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Smith, 2008; White & Weight, 2000). These articles and books aim to support instructors engaged in online teaching and provide a guide for designing and teaching courses. This literature may be a response to more instructors switching from face-to-face to online teaching, which can spur reflectivity about teaching practices (Berrett, 2013; King, 2002; Kolowich, 2013; McShane, 2004; Peruski & Mishra, 2004; Rivard, 2013a).

In this literature, authors propose skills, characteristics, or habits of mind that online instructors should cultivate (e.g., Cyr, 1997; Lynch, 2002; Savery, 2005; White & Weight, 2000; Yang & Cornelius, 2005). Savery (2005), for example, attempts to integrate “best practices” in teaching (e.g., Chickering & Gamson, 1996; McKeachie, 2002) with “the design of learning environments that foster student ownership for learning” (Savery, 2005, p. 141). He writes that online instructors should be compassionate and organized, among other qualities. No research has examined the relationship between personality and online teaching decisions or experiences, although some studies have investigated personality and learning styles of online students (Crews, Sheth, & Horne, 2014; Mellish, 2012; Terrell & Dringus, 2000). Other work considers practical matters related to teaching online, such as services for students, organizational structures necessary to support online courses, and knowledge needed to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws (e.g., Bothel, 2001; Draves, 2002; Levy, 2003; McGreal, 1997).

This “how to” literature is generally written in a way that is accessible to first-time instructors of online courses and prescribes basic models for designing or teaching online courses (e.g., Draves, 2002; Levy, 2003; Smith, 2008). These resources can, however, be reductive or oversimplifications of what it means to teach, billing themselves as “simple” (Boettcher & Conrad, 2010) and “practical” (Ko & Rosen, 2010). This literature is also typically not theoretically grounded and describes “best practices” based on anecdotal evidence instead of empirical research. As a result, it does not help build our knowledgebase about the perceptions and experiences of online instructors. For this, we turn to studies of online teaching.

Research on Online Teaching

Research on online teaching is less prevalent than “how to” literature about online teaching but is more relevant to my study. This literature includes studies of faculty motivation and rewards for participating in online education (e.g., Lee, 2001; Schifter, 2000; Schroeder, 2008; Wolcott, 1997), faculty receptivity to online education (e.g., Bollinger & Wasilik, 2009; Clark, 1993; Fish & Gill, 2009; Kim & Bonk, 2006; Larson, 2005), and faculty workload in online teaching (e.g., Bender, Wood, & Vredevoogd, 2004; DiBiase, 2000; Hislop & Ellis, 2004; Spector, 2005; Visser, 2000). As Visser (2000) notes, these issues are important to administrators and policymakers. However, they do not offer insight into instructors’ experiences of teaching online courses or their understanding of the online teaching-learning environment.

Student Perspectives

A portion of studies of online teaching investigate faculty practices, knowledge, or experiences of designing and teaching courses. These studies typically examine online instruction from either a student or instructor perspective. Gaytan and McEwen (2007), Ali, Hodson-Carlton, and Ryan (2004), Masiello, Ramberg, and Lonka (2005), Swan (2001), and Young (2006) asked students about their attitudes toward and perceptions of an online course using surveys and interviews. Students reported that they liked the social aspects of the online experience, such as discussions among students or with the instructor (Ali et al., 2004; Swan, 2001), as well as the convenience and accessibility of course materials (Ali et al., 2004). Students also noted particular behaviors that they associated with effective online teaching, including providing meaningful examples and timely feedback and showing concern for student learning (Gaytan & McEwen, 2007; Young, 2006). Although students’ perspectives can give insight into what is effective for students in online courses, their voices in these studies do not

reveal instructors' experiences of designing or teaching online courses or their views about teaching and learning online. Faculty voices are a more direct and reliable source of data for exploring these questions.

Instructor Perspectives

Studies of online teaching that gather data from instructors themselves investigate practices related to managing online courses (e.g., Barrett, Bower, & Donovan, 2007; Dehoney & Reeves, 1999; Gaytan & McEwen, 2007; Keeton, 2004; McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, & Waugh, 2000; Preisman, 2014; Wingard, 2004; Wolcott, 1993) as well as instructors' knowledge and experiences of teaching online (e.g., Conceição, 2006; Li, 2003; Kanuka, Collett, & Caswell, 2002; Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007; Royse, 2000). Those that investigate practices focus on tasks, procedures, or tools used in online teaching. Gaytan and McEwen (2007), for instance, asked 29 instructors which online instructional and assessment practices they consider to be most effective. Barrett, Bower, and Donovan (2007) examined whether the practices of 292 community college online instructors were more learner- or instructor-centered. These studies come closer to illuminating instructors' knowledge and experiences of teaching online courses, but they do not reveal faculty members' assumptions or conceptions of teaching and learning that are brought to bear on the practices they employ or the decision-making processes they use when selecting instructional practices.

Conceição (2006) writes, "Studies that investigate instructors' experiences in an online environment are limited" (p. 27). This notion was supported by my search of extant literature. In an extensive review of research on "teaching courses online," Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006) included no studies of instructors' experiences or knowledge about teaching online. Reviewers divided studies into four topics: course environment, learners' outcomes, learners'

characteristics, and institutional and administrative factors. The “course environment” literature includes studies of communication between students and the instructor (e.g., Kanuka & Anderson, 1998; Davidson-Shivers, Tanner, & Muilenburg, 2000), as well as studies of instructional scaffolds to support learning (e.g., Christel, 1994; Greene & Land, 2000). However, these studies focus on student learning as the variable of interest, not instructors’ pedagogical decision-making or conceptions of the online teaching-learning environment.

I identified a small group of studies probing instructor experiences designing or teaching online courses (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2013; Bennett, 2014; Bonk, 2001; Conceição, 2006; Conrad, 2004; Coppola et al., 2001; Li, 2003; Kanuka, Collett, & Caswell, 2002; McShane, 2004; Peruski, 2003; Royse, 2000). Two studies (Li, 2003; Royse, 2000) examined an individual instructor’s reflections about teaching an online course, with some input from students through open-ended surveys. These authors reported aspects of the experience that they enjoyed, that seemed to “work,” or that were frustrating. Li (2003), for instance, found that online discussions were rich and provided an assessment tool. Royse (2000) concluded that online teaching was not “all that much of a radical departure from teaching face-to-face” (p. x157). One study (Bonk, 2001) used surveys of 222 faculty members “to learn about the common obstacles, supports, and experiences” of online instructors (p. 1). Faculty members reported that time constraints and technical support were among the greatest obstacles, and they indicated a desire for pedagogical ideas and advice about teaching online.

Several studies involved interviews with online faculty. Conceição (2006) interviewed ten tenure-track faculty members about their experiences teaching online. Two themes emerged from these conversations: “work intensity” (e.g., length and depth of engagement with the course) and satisfaction with teaching the course. Kanuka, Collett, and Caswell (2002)

interviewed twelve university instructors about their technical and managerial skills for teaching an online course, as well as their pedagogical approaches for fostering learning and community among students. Many of their comments echoed the “how to” literature that prescribes best practices for online teaching. For instance, instructors reported that timely feedback and organization skills were key to effective online teaching. They also reported feeling a sense of “emotional distance” that made relationship-building with students difficult.

Coppola et al. (2001) conducted interviews with 20 faculty members to understand changes faculty made or experienced when transitioning to online teaching from face-to-face teaching. Faculty described cognitive, affective, and managerial role changes, such as a need for tighter course planning and a shift to more formality in interactions with students. Conrad (2004) was also interested in the transition from face-to-face to online teaching. She interviewed five instructors about technological, pedagogical, and management issues encountered when teaching online for the first time. Conrad found that instructors relied heavily on their face-to-face teaching experience to inform their pedagogy and found that, in the online setting, pedagogical issues were intertwined with managerial issues in the minds of the instructors.

Using an activity theoretical framework, Peruski (2003) conducted three case studies of faculty teaching and designing an online course for the first time, using interviews, observations, and course-related artifacts. She examined contradictions and tensions that led to changes in how instructors thought about or performed online teaching and course design. Baran and her colleagues (2013) interviewed “exemplary” online teachers to identify successful practices and discovered that tensions encountered from transitioning to teaching online from face-to-face settings prompted instructors to rethink their teaching roles, expectations, and strategies. In an exploratory study, McShane (2004) interviewed five instructors of blended courses (i.e.,

including online and face-to-face elements) about their teaching beliefs and practices. Like Baran and her colleagues, McShane found that integrating online components into teaching made faculty members more reflective about their teaching, particularly with respect to course planning. Finally, Bennett's (2014) interviews with 16 lecturers highlighted emotional aspects of transitioning to teaching online, which included feelings of anxiety and lack of confidence in using new technologies.

Existing literature about online instructors' experiences and knowledge has limitations. First, it lacks theoretical grounding. Only three studies (Bennett, 2014; Kanuka et al., 2002; Peruski, 2003) explicitly applied a theoretical framework to study instructors' experiences. An absence of theory is not inherently problematic, as in the case of exploratory studies. Moving beyond exploratory work, though, is aided by theoretical grounding modeling underlying mechanisms and processes in online teaching. Second, the focus of investigation in existing work tends to be technical or managerial aspects of teaching online (e.g., procedures or tools used), workload, or satisfaction. This is the case in both qualitative and quantitative (i.e., survey) studies. Based on my searching, few researchers have conducted in-depth investigations of instructors' online teaching experiences and views about teaching and learning online. Such investigations can help build a framework for online teaching in higher education that can steer future research and inform higher education practice.

Chapter 3: Methods

In this study, I explored how instructors experience and understand the work of online teaching. I developed case studies of faculty teaching online courses in Fall 2013 that the faculty themselves designed. Following the examples of Bain (2011), Terosky (2005), Peruski (2003), and Hora and Holden (2012), I interviewed instructors about teaching an online course. Like Peruski (2003), I supplemented interview data with course materials (e.g., syllabi, course assignments) and observations of virtual “classrooms.”

I used a phenomenological approach based on Marton’s (1981) description of this type of inquiry. Marton distinguishes between first- and second-order perspectives: first-order is our own orientation toward the world and second-order is when we orient ourselves towards others’ ideas about the world. I sought to understand the second-order perspective. I presented online teaching experiences from four instructors’ points of view, while acknowledging that I as the researcher was part of the “world” that I wanted to understand and represent. Because this was a phenomenological inquiry, interviews were my primary data source, the optimal method for understanding experiences from participants’ points of view (Merriam, 2009). Supplemental sources allowed for triangulation of data (Patton, 1990) and helped paint a more complete picture of the instructors’ experiences teaching online.

Study Design

A case study design enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of a particular set of instances of the phenomenon of online teaching from the perspectives of instructors themselves,

as indicated by their decisions, actions, and reflections within a single course. Two key features define case studies. First, because case studies involve intensive study, they can provide detailed, “thick” description about each case and about the phenomenon of interest (Geertz, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The advantage of case studies is the depth of understanding they can provide about the phenomenon and the context in which the researcher examines it. Koehler, Mishra, Hershey, and Peruski (2004) suggest that this approach may be especially fruitful for studying online teaching. They write, “Studying engagement of people with real tasks, in real-life situations is crucial to understanding the future relationship between technology and pedagogy” (p. 26).

Yin (2006) writes, “Compared to other methods, the strength of the case method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (p. 111). Yin’s statement alludes to another defining feature of case studies: the importance of context. This may be a particularly useful aspect for studying teaching with technology. K-12 education researchers have advised that implementing systemic technology innovations is “interwoven with the challenges and problems of school reform itself” (Fishman, Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, & Soloway, 2004, p. 44) and researchers should consider broader contexts beyond the classroom. A similar claim can be made for higher education: to understand why faculty members succeed or fail to use technology effectively, we should recognize influences outside the classroom, such as institutional setting or even economic or political forces. Case studies focus on “relation to environment” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301), and contextual factors like these are considered in all phases of the study.

Knowing what constitutes context depends on how cases are defined. As Flyvbjerg (2011) writes, “The drawing of boundaries for the individual unit of study decides what gets to

count as case and what becomes context to the case” (p. 301). Defining what constitutes a case, then, is a key task in case study design. Yin (2006) echoes this point. He writes, “To begin understanding the case study method, for each topic you should ask: what is the ‘case’ (unit of analysis)?” (p. 112). In my study, each case is an instructor teaching an online course during Fall 2013, but I submit the following qualification.

Although the focus of the study is instructors’ teaching experiences in particular online courses, it became clear through interviews that it was not always easy for instructors to separate their teaching decisions and experiences in the one course from their teaching in other courses. For instance, one study participant, Quinn, explained her aims and motivations in the introductory-level course I observed by contrasting it with an upper-level course that she teaches using a simulation activity. Quinn described her introductory course by explaining what it is *not*—that is, it does not foster higher order learning but instead focuses on knowledge and comprehension of concepts and principles. Although her upper-level course fell outside my central unit of analysis (i.e., Quinn’s experience teaching the Introduction to Business course), her reflections on it allowed me to contextualize her teaching in Introduction to Business and better understand her aims and decisions in this course. I learned that her strategy to focus on memorization and knowledge acquisition—as opposed to application and analysis, for instance—was a response to course level and not necessarily a reflection of a lack of awareness of teaching strategies that foster deeper learning.

To reiterate, my unit of analysis is an instructor teaching a particular course in Fall 2013. However, context and instructor background—such as prior teaching—became a lens for understanding experiences in a course because instructors themselves viewed and approached their teaching through these lenses. I attempted to take into account contextual factors while

retaining the particular course as the unit of study. Interviews and the case study chapters that follow cover topics and experiences that may at times seem outside of the unit of analysis but, in fact, are meant to provide a frame of reference for understanding the course-level experience.

Selection of Cases

I used four main criteria to select the cases. First, it was important that the instructor designed the course so that she could talk about her decisions and rationale behind the course design and revisions, as well as her goals for the course. Second, it was important that the instructor had several years of experience teaching online. This made it more likely that the instructor could speak in depth about her experiences teaching in a virtual setting after having reflected on online teaching for multiple semesters. Third, it was important that the instructor was reflective and able to articulate her thinking so that each case study could be well developed. As Stake (1995) writes, “the first criterion [for selecting cases] should be to maximize what we can learn” (p. 4). This is important given the small number of participants. Fourth, I sought participants who teach in the field of business. This was meant to prevent difficulty in moving from one content area to another in my own thinking about cases due to variance in teaching norms and content knowledge across disciplines. I chose business because it is the most common field of study among online students (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2014) and because, taught at the undergraduate level, it is a topic accessible to me (as opposed to a topic in which prior knowledge is essential for understanding new material, such as marine biology or linear algebra).

Participants and Their Courses

Mona and Noah taught at Pine Valley University (PVU)¹, a Catholic university headquartered in the small Midwestern town of Watertown and founded in the early 1900s. The institution enrolls about 2,200 undergraduates and primarily offers undergraduate courses,

¹ Pseudonyms were used for the names of people and institutions in this study.

although it also enrolls about 400 graduate students across its campus locations. Pine Valley University has a residential campus that primarily enrolls traditional-aged college students. However, the university operates several degree completion centers, as well as fully online programs for studying business administration, applied science, health care management, and multidisciplinary studies. The PVU instructors teach business management courses and have MBAs and doctorates in higher education. Both have considerable experience teaching and designing fully online, asynchronous courses. Before being hired at PVU about a decade ago, they taught online and face-to-face classes at Samuel University beginning in the 1990s.

Victoria and Quinn taught at Midwest Community College (MCC), a community college with an open-door admissions policy enrolling over 18,000 students each year. Because of its emphasis on workforce development, MCC's business department has made an intentional move in recent years toward skill building. MCC offers an increasing number of blended and fully online courses. Victoria and Quinn designed their courses, which were approved by the distance learning review panel, and have taught the courses several times. They both also have extensive work experience in business, transitioning to education in the past decade or two, and both have administrative experience with faculty development and online teaching at MCC.

Key features of the cases are listed in Table 1, including details about the courses, instructors, and institutions. I revisit this table in Chapter 6 as a point of reference when discussing the cross-case analysis.

Table 1: Key Features of the Cases

	Mona at PVC	Noah at PVC	Victoria at MCC	Quinn at MCC
The Course				
Title	Leadership	Management Principles and Cases	Shaping the Customer Experience	Introduction to Business
Length of course	8 weeks (condensed format)	8 weeks (condensed format)	15 weeks	15 weeks
Level of course	300-level	400-level	200-level	100-level
Major assignments	Team research paper	Four written case analyses, in teams	Blog posts and journal entries	Activities and exercises in Integrate; end-of-term career poster
Enrollment in section	20 students	20 students	30 students	25 students
Quizzes and Exams	Weekly multiple-choice quizzes	None	Multiple-choice unit quizzes and final exam	Multiple-choice unit quizzes
The Instructor				
Teaching load during Fall 2013	One course with two sections	One course with three sections	Four courses (some with multiple sections), online and hybrid	Six courses (some with multiple sections), online and face-to-face
Most frequent teaching mode	Vast majority of teaching is online	Vast majority of teaching is online	Teaches online, face-to-face, and hybrid	Teaches online, face-to-face, and hybrid
Has dedicated office space on campus?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Graduate training	MBA, PhD in higher education	MBA, PhD in higher education	MBA, PhD in business	MBA, DM in executive leadership
The Institution				
Institutional approach to online education	Instructor owns the course; committee periodically reviews course	Instructor owns the course; committee periodically reviews course	Master courses overseen and approved by centralized office	Master courses overseen and approved by centralized office
Type of institution	4-year residential campus with remote degree completion centers and online programs	4-year residential campus with remote degree completion centers and online programs	2-year community college	2-year community college
Enrollment at institution	2,600 students (undergraduate and graduate)	2,600 students (undergraduate and graduate)	18,000 students	18,000 students

Data Sources

I interviewed each instructor once before the course began in order to learn about the course and instructor's background. I also conducted two mid-term interviews and an end-of-

semester interview for a total of four interviews with each instructor during the term. In addition, I met or corresponded with each instructor for a six-month follow-up interview for member checking and clarification questions. The interviews during the course were conducted either in person or via Skype and lasted between one and two-and-a-half hours. I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. Although I wanted participants to talk about topics or experiences that were salient to them, I also wanted to guide the conversation to be about their experience teaching the particular course I observed.

The initial structure of the interviews was based on Seidman's (2013) three-interview series in which each interview has a particular focus: 1) context, 2) lived experience, 3) reflection on the meaning of the experience (see Appendices A, B, and C for interview protocols). However, I conducted two interviews of the second type, "lived experience," for a total of four interviews with each instructor. The main focus of the first interview was the instructor's background and history teaching the course. The second and third interview protocols focused on their teaching in the course. In the fourth interview, I asked instructors to reflect on their experience teaching this course. My aim was to understand how they believed the online environment shaped their pedagogical decisions in these situations, as well as their views of the online teaching-learning environment and their experiences as instructors. In the follow up interviews, I asked for clarification or elaboration on particular topics. For instance, in the initial interviews several participants used the term "good" to describe teaching or course content but did not provide enough detail for me to explain what they meant by this. In follow-up interviews or written exchanges, I probed what they meant by the term "good."

In addition to interviews, I gained access to each course's online website to monitor instructor and student activity. The sites have multiple uses: they are "landing pads" for members

of the course to view announcements, repositories for course materials, and hubs for communication among class members, including instructor and students. The two institutions in the study used different learning management systems (LMS), and each LMS is widely used in higher education. I visited the course sites before, during, and after the course, viewing videos or recorded lectures and reading announcements and discussion boards to read communication between students and instructors. Although my analysis drew from both online course sites and interviews, the interviews were the primary data source because they most closely convey the experience of the instructor. Merriam (2009) explains, “To get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 25). The data from the online course sites primarily informed my interview questioning by raising topics, issues, or activities that may be salient to that person’s experience of teaching that particular online course.

Online data-gathering for social science research is increasingly common and presents unique challenges and opportunities (Johns, Chen, & Hall, 2003; Mann & Stewart, 2000). One unique aspect of my study is that artifacts from the online course sites, such as syllabi, are not very different from “observational” data, which may be considered to be the interactions between students and instructor, such as discussion boards. Most of this “observational” data is captured in text form (an exception would be video messages or video lectures). Observational data, then, is similar to other text-based data, but non-interactive, such as syllabi, grading rubrics, external sites linked to course site, and assignment descriptions. Because of this unique study setting, observational data (e.g., threaded discussions) and documents (e.g., syllabi) “run together” and identification of one type of data is not necessarily used to inform identification of the other.

Member Checking

After case studies were drafted, I followed up with each participant to review case study drafts for accuracy and “palatability,” as Stake writes (1995, p. 115). I asked whether the themes that I identified aligned with their own experiences of teaching the course and whether they felt comfortable with the quotations included in the case study. I also asked each participant to review the drafts for factual accuracy. Each participant indicated that, on the whole, the content of the chapters represented them and their experiences, but each offered minor clarifications or edits to improve accuracy or add depth.

Participant Confidentiality and Informed Consent

To protect the anonymity of participants, I used pseudonyms for the names of the four participants and their two institutions. I also used pseudonyms in instances in which places, courses, or people could potentially identify participants. Before the first interview, participants signed an informed consent form explaining that participation in the study was voluntary and describing how data would be used and stored. This informed consent form is included as Appendix D.

Pilot Study

During the summer of 2013, I conducted a pilot study of an instructor teaching an online course that he designed. The pilot study had two main purposes. First, I practiced interviewing an instructor about his thinking and course design decision-making. My study relied on understanding participants’ ways of thinking and decision-making processes related to course design. Learning to collect this type of information through an interview required practice as I learned the balance between allowing the interviewee to shape the discussion and guiding the conversation toward particular questions I wanted to answer. Second, through this process I

identified limitations of my initial interview protocol and revised the protocol accordingly. For instance, the pilot study revealed that my initial design of only three interviews per person was inadequate for developing an in-depth understanding of teaching experiences, so I increased the number of interviews per person to four.

Potential Validity Issues and Limitations

In an article describing the nature and process of phenomenographic research methods, Åkerlind (2012) writes,

validity is widely regarded as the extent to which a study is seen as investigating what it aimed to investigate, or the degree to which the research findings actually reflect the phenomenon being studied. However, a phenomenographic researcher asks not how well their research outcomes correspond to the phenomenon as it exists in “reality,” but how well they correspond to human experience of the phenomenon (Uljens, 1996).” (p. 123)

I have made attempts to establish validity of the research presented, including member checking and triangulating data across interviews and course website content. However, limitations exist.

One limitation of this study stems from faculty knowing that they are participating in a study and being observed. Since this detracts from the naturalistic quality of their environment, instructors may not have behaved or spoken in an authentic way, as they might have if they had believed they were not being studied or observed. Developing a trusting, respectful relationship with each instructor was key to creating a partnership in which the instructor felt comfortable teaching as she or he normally would and speaking candidly and openly in interviews. Member checking helped to reduce this limitation; participants reviewed drafts their own case studies and indicated that the studies represented them and their experiences.

A second limitation of case study research is the inability to generalize to cases in other contexts, which is referred to as “external generalizability” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 294). However,

although this is something I need to keep in mind, the main goal of the study was not to make claims about the generalizability of the findings. Indeed, Rubin and Rubin (2012) note that qualitative research, in general, “is judged more on its freshness—its ability to discover new themes and new explanations—than on its generalizability” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 16). Rather than to generalize to all online instructors, the main goal of my study was to better understand the phenomenon of online teaching *as it was experienced by the four instructors who participated*. Nonetheless, findings can be used to develop propositions for future research or to build theory (Yin, 2014), which is sometimes called theoretical generalization (Becker, 1990; Eisenhart, 2009) or analytic generalization (Yin, 2014). Theoretical generalization involves refining an understanding of a process or phenomenon (Becker, 1990).

Analytic Process

I used an inductive approach to analysis in which themes and concepts emerge from the data through a systematic coding process, as opposed to *a priori* coding for preconceived themes or concepts. Charmaz (2006) writes, “Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. Coding is the first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (p. 43). Grounded coding, in contrast with *a priori* coding, involves an iterative, ongoing process of creating categories of data, or codes, then comparing data with existing codes to revise or expand the codes. Thus, “coding is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 45).

The first step of coding, called *open coding* (Strauss, 1987), involves “breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198). In this initial stage, codes are “provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data” (Charmaz, 2006,

p. 48). I started preliminary open coding as I transcribed the interview transcripts. In this step of transcription-as-analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009), I marked passages that illustrated themes that I tagged as potentially important. Specifically, I was noting and looking for key events, people, issues, processes (as recommended by Patton, 1990) related to my guiding research questions. Riessman (1993) notes, “Analysis cannot be easily distinguished from transcription,” because “[transcription] often leads to insights that in turn shape how we choose to represent an interview narrative in our text” (p. 60). Further, because I started transcribing before all interviews were completed, these initial interviews informed emerging themes I noticed and, hence, the subsequent interviews. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to this practice when they write about analysis as a process “of generating, developing, and verifying concepts—a process that builds over time and with the acquisition of data” (p. 57). This approach, they explain, “allows a researcher to identify relevant concepts, follow through on subsequent questions, and listen and observe in more sensitive ways” (p. 57).

A second type of coding is called *axial* coding (Strauss, 1987) and involves “relating concepts/categories to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198). Open coding and axial coding are not necessarily separate processes. Corbin and Strauss (2008) write that they “go hand in hand” because “as analysts work with data, their minds automatically make connections because, after all, the connections come from the data” (p. 198). After open-coding by hand with printed transcripts, I created an initial coding structure that started to relate categories to one another. In the coding structure, I identified three general categories, which map roughly onto my sub-questions: teaching processes and tasks, context, and views about learning. Each of these categories included between three and twelve subcategories.

The next step of axial coding was to systematically create a more nuanced picture of how the themes related to one another. After using the initial coding structure to code transcripts with qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) I identified the codes that were used most frequently. Because I asked interview questions based on my research questions and what I wanted to know, the number of times a code is used is not a perfect measure of what is salient to the instructor. However, in interviews I did try to “follow” the participant and allow them to shape the conversation within the bounds of the study’s focus. Thus, I am making the claim that frequency suggests a level of saliency of theme from the perspective of the faculty member.

These frequently-used themes were used to develop what I called “meta-themes,” which became the building blocks of my case study chapters. The meta-themes were devised by “triangulating” (although, not in the traditional sense of this term as it is used in qualitative research) themes across the three levels represented by my research sub-questions. (See Figure 1.)

they teach (“context”). For instance, for Victoria, three frequently-used themes in my coding were 1) her view that students should be able to apply what they learn and learning is most effective when it relates to personal experiences (“inner”), 2) course assignments that require students to find examples of course concepts in their own lives (“outer”), and 3) Victoria’s extensive background working in business in various roles (“context”). Taken together, these three themes constitute the meta-theme of Victoria teaching in a way that asks students to draw on their own personal experiences. I reasoned that Victoria’s background in business—which required her to learn on-the-job as she filled various roles and learned by trial-and-error—shaped (or was shaped by) her view that learning is most effective when students relate it to their own personal experiences. This, in turn, influenced how she designed course assignments that were meant to teach key concepts. Meta-themes, then, represent salient aspects of the instructor’s experience or thinking about teaching online, and each meta-theme cuts across three dimensions of teaching: views about learning, behavior, and context. In the end, each of the four case chapters was developed using two to four meta-themes that were each devised using this strategy of relating cross-level codes.

The next step of analysis involved looking across cases for common themes and then integrating themes for theory development. Corbin and Strauss (2008) write, “Theorizing is interpretive and entails not only condensing raw data into concepts but also arranging the concepts into a logical, systematic explanatory scheme” (p. 56). The framework was meant to create a “logical, systematic explanatory scheme” for understanding the experience of teaching online that can be used for studying online instruction. Theory development does not necessarily require a large sample size. Glaser and Strauss (1967) write that this method of analysis “requires

only saturation of data—not consideration of *all* available data, nor are the data restricted to one kind of clearly defined case” (p. 104).

Finally, I identified two to four meta-themes in each case to develop in the case narrative. In the next two chapters, I present the four case studies. They are grouped by institution because setting became an important lens for understanding participants’ experiences. Each pair of cases (Mona and Noah at Pine Valley University, and Victoria and Quinn at Midwest Community College) is prefaced by a brief description of the institutional setting. These descriptions represent one place in which the methodology of portraiture shaped my work. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) write,

[T]he portraitist makes deliberate and specific use of context in several ways that reflect her focus on descriptive detail, narrative development, and aesthetic expression, as well as her interest in recording the self and perspective of the researcher in the setting. (p. 44)

In the spirit of portraiture, I wanted to convey my own reaction and exposure to each setting, as I perceived it at the time of the study. Following the case studies, Chapter 6 provides a cross-case analysis and discussion, and Chapter 7 describes the resulting framework from integrating categories for theory development.

Chapter 4: Mona and Noah at Pine Valley University

The organizational structure of Pine Valley University (PVU) is difficult to decipher from its website, and the relationship between PVU's Main Campus and its other campuses is not immediately apparent. The "Locations" tab at the top of the school's homepage features prominently and lowers a dropdown menu of several cities within the state where campuses are based. Clicking on a city displays that campus's program offerings and staff. At the top of the list of cities is Watertown, and behind it in parentheses reads "Main Campus." Several other links on the institution's home webpage pertain to the residential campus: "Student Life," "Athletics," "Campus Visit." Judging by the home page, the site seems designed primarily for members of the residential campus and suggests a high degree of independence of each campus.

The website also suggests a division between the populations served by the residential campus and the other campuses. Each non-Watertown campus webpage leads with a statement explaining its mission of serving adult students. The pages display images of cheerful, mid-life adults, often working together in groups with stacks of books or scribbled-on whiteboards in the background. In contrast, clicking through webpages about the university's Main Campus in Watertown reveals stereotypical images of 18- to 22-year-old college students: smiling young people at a cafeteria table or huddled around a mascot, dressed monotone in school colors and cheering with arms raised high.

Noah and Mona are two participants in this study. Their official home unit at PVU is the Metro Springfield Program (MSP), but they are faculty within the Professional Education Center

(PEC). The organizational relationships among PEC, MSP, and the residential Watertown main campus appear complicated. Noah explained to me that MSP was the original office administering the university's off-site (i.e., non-residential) programs over three decades ago. Now, however, PEC also administers online and off-site adult education programs. From my outsider perspective, PEC appears to have been created to serve administrative, behind-the-scenes purposes, since I do not find a link to it anywhere on the university's website. After his attempt to explain to me the relationship between PEC and MSP, Noah added, "Confused yet?" to underscore the dizzying organizational structure of the university and its branches.

When I looked for a direct link on PVU's webpage to the learning management system (LMS) to learn about Mona and Noah's teaching environment, I found none. I took this as perhaps another sign of the division between the main campus and the online and off-site programs that also utilize the LMS. A small PVU logo hovers in the top left corner of the LMS, signaling affiliation with PVU. A course website within the LMS displays a vertical bar along the left-hand side of the screen, organized with links to administrative components of the course (e.g., "Calendar," "Syllabus"). Below this is a link to each of the eight weeks of the course. Each of these expands to display links to course readings, weekly discussion forums or "seminars," and "lectures." These "lectures" are not videos of the instructor talking; they are a series of webpages within the LMS displaying course content (e.g., links to external sites, summaries of key concepts) written or assembled by the instructor.

Despite the tidy arrangement of the LMS interface, as a new user of this particular LMS, I initially felt somewhat confused and overwhelmed by the course sites. Each site within the LMS represents an entire course bundled together by many interconnected links. At first log-on, it was difficult to tell what was behind the various links and how they related to one another. I

wondered how students who are less comfortable using computers fare as online students in this LMS. I wondered: How long does it take students of online courses to learn what is essential on the course site versus what is supplemental? What is interactive (e.g., discussions, virtual office) versus what is static (e.g., lectures and documents)? Mona later explained to me that online students at PVU are strongly encouraged to watch a video orienting them to the online course site, but she noted that not everyone watches this.

Although Mona and Noah play active roles in the institution, the complicated structure of the university does not necessarily affect them on a day-to-day basis. Mona and Noah spend most of their work time in the online environment of the LMS. Their “classrooms” are the course sites within the LMS. This is where they interact asynchronously with students and where students post discussions and submit assignments. This portable teaching environment follows Mona and Noah wherever they are, as long as they have a computer and Internet access.

Mona

Introduction

When Mona joined the faculty of Pine Valley University, she was a veteran of online teaching, having taught online for about a decade at specialized schools of business. For this study, I observed her Leadership course that she had been teaching and developing for several years. Through my conversations with Mona and my observations of the online course site, four themes emerged. First, Mona's teaching emphasized peer learning through the use of student teams. The teams were designed to facilitate peer and self-directed learning, which aligned with Mona's socioconstructivist views of learning. Second, Mona considered the development and presentation of course content to be a key task of the instructor. Third, Mona believed that providing feedback to students was one of her key responsibilities as an instructor. I describe ways in which she provided feedback and factors that influenced her decisions about when to offer feedback. Fourth, Mona reflected on teaching in an asynchronous online environment and the ways in which it was, and was not, similar to teaching face-to-face teaching.

Context and Background

I first met Mona six years prior to our interviews when she visited my graduate class to speak about online teaching. From this brief interaction, I learned of her soft-spoken, direct manner and detected a serious yet supportive approach to teaching and working with students. Since Mona works online and remotely, we met for interviews at my university's campus or a coffee shop, rather than at her office or her institution's campus. My university is the same one Mona attended for all three of her postsecondary degrees—BA, MBA, and PhD. We also conducted interviews virtually via teleconference when Mona travelled. Mona was generous with

her time but clearly a task-oriented person, answering my questions directly and succinctly without offering many tangential comments or reflections.

Mona taught her first online course in 1994. At that time, Mona recalled, online teaching was “DOS based and FTP, ‘get file.’ A lot of it initially was more like a correspondence course... The technology was kind of cumbersome.” In college, Mona did not plan on a teaching career. With a communications undergraduate degree and an MBA, she worked in management positions at manufacturing companies related to the auto industry and started teaching face-to-face classes on a part-time basis in the early 1990s. The provost at Samuel University, where Mona did most of her adjunct teaching, was enthusiastic about the burgeoning use of online instruction in higher education, and he was pivotal in her move to teaching online.

Mona enjoyed college teaching enough to pursue it full time but realized that a PhD would be an important asset on this new career track of being a professor. She earned a PhD in higher education with a focus in higher education organizational behavior and management because, Mona reasoned, “it would enhance my teaching but it would also enhance my administrative work.” After finishing and then teaching briefly at Louise College, another specialized school of business, Mona returned to teaching full time at Samuel University. After working for years at Louise College and Samuel University, Mona grew dissatisfied with specialized schools of business management that “operate more like business[es].” These institutions, she said, tended to view students as customers and faculty as employees, instead of viewing faculty as professional educators deserving of respect for their expertise and ethical judgment. Mona “wanted a sort of a liberal arts setting, and Pine Valley University offered that opportunity.” Compared with the specialized schools of business where she had taught,

[PVU] provides a more traditional faculty culture. Faculty are respected as professionals, with faculty governance over academic decisions. Students are students. They are valued, but not considered customers. Learning is the central goal, not revenue generation.

The way that students and faculty are viewed and treated at PVU aligned better with Mona's own views. She believed in providing a blend of balance and personalized support for students, and she believed faculty members should be trusted to work independently and collegially. Mona learned of the job opening at PVU through a former dean at Samuel University. One of about 400 applications, she interviewed and was offered a full-time position as a business professor at PVU.

In addition to PVU's residential campus of about 2,200 undergraduate students, the institution operates the Professional Education Center (PEC), a branch of the college for students enrolled in online degree programs or at its degree completion centers located in satellite campuses. Mona's formal appointment is with PEC, and she is one of eleven full-time, online PEC instructors. Although PEC hires adjunct faculty to teach, PEC relies heavily on full-time faculty to design and teach online courses. Mona explained, "We aren't designed as a primarily adjunct-driven institution so our adjuncts really are adjunct to the operation." In Mona's eyes, this reflects an institutional commitment to high quality online education:

Pine Valley University is a teaching institution, and they hired me on there as one of a small group of full-time online faculty. Unlike a lot of institutions, they didn't want to staff most of their online courses with part-timers. They wanted full-timers because they felt that if we're going to go into this we want to make sure that we're doing it well and it's not an afterthought. So we want people who are fully devoted to the online classes. That's how I came on board at Pine Valley University.

While PEC's name suggests that it offers exclusively professional education courses, some PEC faculty, in fact, teach liberal arts courses such as philosophy and religious studies. "It's not an accurate name when we say professional studies," Mona explained, and the current structure is "just how it evolved." In practice, PEC is a multidisciplinary group of faculty. Although PEC faculty members do not meet often in person, Mona said that they are a "really close, tight-knit group." They interact "quite a bit, actually. We're over email with each other almost every day," discussing technical or student issues, for instance. "We have a pretty close collegial relationship with our small group."

Mona works mostly remotely, since she primarily teaches online. She typically teaches one or two courses each term, and each course might have two or three sections of about 20 students each. In addition to this teaching load, Mona serves on committees with other faculty. A few times per month, she drives from home about an hour to the college's residential campus to meet with her colleagues who are business faculty in the Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS). Other times, she joins these meetings by teleconference. Despite their separate organizational units, faculty in LAS and PEC serve together on committees and collaborate on administrative projects. Mona and Noah spearheaded an initiative to create a comprehensive cross-course outcomes assessment plan for business students in LAS or PEC, and LAS faculty have been enthusiastic about the ongoing project. Mona commented,

The entire LAS... business faculty are very excited about it so we have this whole collaboration going on with PEC and LAS, which is started again from the grassroots. The top administrators have not told us to do this, we just initiated it. And they [LAS faculty], they're very welcoming. It's interesting because we're off on the outside [of LAS] but

Noah and I are offering this stuff, and they're like, "Oh, this is great," and we're welcomed right in and they loved the idea. So everybody's collaborating on it.

Although LAS and PEC faculty work together on committees and academic initiatives, the nature of their work differs in key ways. First, the student populations of LAS and PEC vary substantially: LAS students are typically 18 to 22 year-old, first-time college students, while PEC students tend to be older than the traditional college-aged student and often come with community college experience. Second, LAS faculty teach primarily on-ground courses while PEC faculty teach online or at satellite campuses serving students in the state's large metropolitan areas.

For the most part, faculty interactions are collegial and warm, as Mona experiences them. She commented,

I really thoroughly looked at Pine Valley University's culture before I went there. Every place has its problems, but I love Pine Valley University and I love the people there. They're really good people. They're very genuine.

Occasional rifts arise, though, related to the different nature of work between PEC and LAS faculty. When PEC wanted to offer a statistics course, for instance, one LAS faculty member resisted the idea, believing that math cannot be taught online. In the big picture, though, Mona views disputes like this one as minor: "It's like a little gnat flying around a glass of red wine. It's annoying, but it's small."

As a full-time faculty member with over a decade of working at PVU, Mona enjoys a good deal of academic freedom and autonomy to teach, design, and modify her courses. She feels a sense of ownership of her courses, and owns the intellectual property rights to the courses

she designs, although Mona noted that PVU administrators hope to change this policy. The institutional value of academic freedom, Mona thought, is perhaps related to LAS's traditional values that have spilled into PEC:

I think academic freedom is valued. And I think it's an assumed value at Pine Valley University. I think that the main school, the Liberal Arts and Sciences on the main campus, shapes that culture.

Mona has taught online for institutions with a more centralized, standardized approach to online education, but she found it far less satisfying as an instructor. "I don't think it's fulfilling to teach somebody else's course... I just don't feel the same sense of ownership." Mona sees value in allowing faculty freedom to design courses and teach as they see fit, reasoning that "perhaps different faculty have different ways of getting to those same outcomes. And if those outcomes are achieved, does it really matter how they did it?" This comment points to a bottom-line orientation that Mona has regarding teaching and learning, in which the focus is on outcomes while the means to achieving those outcomes is less important.

Teaching Leadership

In Fall 2013 when I interviewed Mona, she taught two eight-week management courses, both online: Leadership, and Organizational Behavior and Management. Leadership, the course I focused on for this study, enrolled about 20 students in each of two sections. Mona has taught Leadership at PVU since 2005, first as a hybrid course (occasional face-to-face class meetings but also online) and then fully online. All students in the course are PEC students. Students in the course tended to be business majors but some took it as an elective for a different major. Mona explained that her students may be training to be "sign language interpreters or firefighters.

Nursing students. You just never know.” Most PEC students live in-state, but not always. Mona recalled that in Fall 2013, PEC enrolled students in 28 states.

Besides her teaching load, Mona had other professorial responsibilities in Fall 2013. She served on two faculty committees: the Institutional Review Board committee and a curriculum committee. Mona chaired the curriculum committee, served as a faculty coordinator mentoring adjunct business faculty, and worked with Noah to spearhead an initiative to create a comprehensive outcomes assessment plan for PEC and LAS business students. In Fall 2013, Mona was also doing preliminary work for a study she planned to conduct during her Winter 2014 sabbatical. Outside of her work at PVU, Mona advised dissertations for a for-profit, largely online, private institution and consulted with other higher education institutions to offer teaching workshops for faculty. These many responsibilities outside of her PVU courses illustrate that, while teaching is central to Mona’s job, her professional work encompasses a great deal more.

Emphasizing Peer Learning while Fostering Independence

Students in Mona’s Leadership class engaged in the course in a variety of ways: participating in full-class online discussions, writing papers, taking multiple-choice exams, and communicating directly with the instructor. All of this was done within the LMS, although Mona occasionally received emails from students outside the LMS through her work email account, usually regarding special requests such as deadline extensions. Some activities and assignments were completed independently and others were done collaboratively with students in the course. Students worked in teams of three or four to complete a research paper during the eight-week term. These teams were a core part of the student experience and the design of the course. Mona explained, “I’ve always used teams in this class because it’s part of leadership. It’s part of the content of what you study in leadership.” This focus on practice and skill development was

emphasized in the course syllabus. Under the section called Course Outcomes, the syllabus stated, “The student will have developed their skills to practice leadership, become aware of their leadership potential and style(s), and resolve leadership issues as encountered in the contemporary environment.” In course assessment, students work in teams and are graded through the team paper as well as student peer evaluations of one another. These accounted for about 20 percent of students’ grades.

Within the online course site hosted by the institution’s LMS, each team assembled by Mona had access to a virtual discussion board where team members could communicate with one another asynchronously. This discussion space could be accessed by Mona and the students assigned to that particular team. Although Mona tried to remain “hands off” while teams work together, she did provide materials to support students as they learned to work together and wrote the paper. For instance, she provided sample papers available on the course website that students could read to understand the assignment expectations, and she encouraged students to complete a worksheet called a “team performance contract” in which each member wrote their expectations for the team.

Mona aimed to provide support for learning but also encouraged students to learn independently. These teaching goals could come into conflict, particularly in the online environment where Mona believed that, at times, more support or guidance was needed to quell anxiety. The following exchange about providing sample papers revealed this tension between fostering independence while guiding learning:

I think that there’s a lot of insecurity that can happen online. So having the sample [paper] that says, “Here’s what I mean by this... this is what the end goal would look like.” That, perhaps, takes away some of the anxiety... I’m more inclined in the online

[environment] to show examples and things like that as a way to convey standards that you might be able to have [in] a more informal back and forth conversation if you were in the same room with somebody week after week. Now, I think that sometimes those examples can be limiting because people think, “Okay, that’s my goal” and they don’t think as creatively to go beyond that. So there are pros and cons for doing that. But it’s a pretty efficient way of taking away some anxiety. I think online the more comfortable that you can make people so they can focus on learning, as opposed to worrying about not knowing what they’re supposed to do, the better.

This comment illuminates the balancing act between encouraging independent learning and providing support to guide students in the course, and it suggests that the online environment can complicate finding this balance. The passage also reveals the efficiency-minded and practical approach that Mona uses in her teaching.

In the team performance contract, or “team charter,” teams established ground rules for working together. In a document posted online, students wrote expectations for one other (e.g., desired frequency of communication in the team forum) and their preferred roles on the team. Mona also posted guidelines for a week-by-week task timeline for teams to follow to help them organize and pace their work. Again, Mona tried to strike a balance between providing support to guide learning and remaining hands-off to encourage peer learning and self-directed learning. She explained,

Because [teamwork] is self-managed, I try to stay as hands-off as possible. I do monitor what they’re doing, but I try to let people figure out on their own how they’re going to work together. I try to [provide] tools like the team charter to give them some suggestions... in Doc Sharing there’s a suggestion that “By this week, you should be at

this point in the process” and that kind of thing. I once in a while have to contact an individual student who hasn’t shown up frequently enough and say, “Hey, you’ve got to get in your team and participate more.” But I try to remain as hand-off as possible.

Again, Mona’s comments imply that the online environment complicates the balance between providing support and expecting students to take responsibility for their own learning. While she emphasized independent learning, she perceived that in the asynchronous virtual classroom setting, students need more guidance and scaffolding than in a face-to-face environment. This, she said, reduces anxiety and increases clarity of communication in the absence of face-to-face social cues.

In the team forums, students divided the work for the project among themselves and checked in with each other along way, giving feedback on written sections and making sure tasks were getting done in time for the paper deadline. Mona monitored these discussions to check that all team members were participating and that teams stayed on track to finish by the due date. She rarely posted in these team forums, leaving it to the team members to inform one another of expectations and progress. Mona viewed learning to work in teams to complete a task as a key learning goal of the team paper assignment. On the whole, teams got along or worked through minor disagreements on their own, if they had them. Mona stepped in once, though, when a team of three students experienced conflict over deadlines and work quality. The conflict escalated to the point where one member characterized another member’s behavior as “bullying.” Mona proposed that the team could split if needed and the member who felt bullied could submit a separate paper. After several days of posts and emails—many involving Mona—the team worked through the conflict and opted to stay together and submit a joint paper as planned.

In her communication with students during this conflict, Mona underscored that the main purpose of the team paper assignment was learning to work in virtual teams. She wrote, “The paper itself is straight-forward and easy to write (only eight pages total). The difficult part is working in teams.” Mona explained that the conflict was an opportunity for students to apply the leadership principles of the course. In an email to one student, she wrote, “Although this is frustrating, perhaps this can be viewed as an opportunity to work through a managerial scenario like this... As team leader, this is an opportunity to see if you can turn the situation around.” She also warned students of a difference between working on virtual teams and face-to-face teams, posting in the team forum that “sometimes the tone in online communication can be interpreted in a manner harsher than intended.”

Mona’s communication with students throughout this conflict illustrates the centrality of the student self-managed teams to achieving the learning goals of this course. It also demonstrates Mona’s deeply held view that students learn from interacting with one another in situations in which the instructor does not dominate. Although Mona intervened in this conflict, she did so mostly as moderator. Rather than directing the team about how to resolve the conflict or simply imposing a resolution herself, Mona proposed ways of how the team might proceed. She gave feedback to team members on their emails to one other (for example, “Great note. The tone reflects that of a good leader.”) and coached individual members on how to communicate with their peers. Mona wrote to one team member,

There is not one “right” way to deal with this situation. However, if at all possible, if you were to draw out better communication from [student’s name] as the leader, everyone may learn about working through team conflict. In addition, consider even letting her

know what would motivate you as a follower. This type of message needs to be focused on behaviors, not personal attacks, of course.

This instance of managing team conflict reveals Mona's philosophy of teaching, which emphasized the importance of allowing students to direct their own learning. In Mona's words, I honestly think that we [teachers] have to get out of the way. We have to be more student-centered. What's going on with the student? What is the student doing? What's going on with how the student is processing information and breaking things down and making connections? You can't do that for somebody. You can sort of lead a horse to water but you can't make the horse drink... This approach to learning requires a certain maturity level on the part of the student, too, because the student has to take more responsibility. But I think the deeper learning is going to come from students taking more responsibility, no matter what the forum, on ground, online or anything.

It is also important to note that Mona relied heavily on self-managed teams in this course, in part, because of the course topic, leadership: "Part of leadership is teamwork, so they're still learning it experientially as they go along." However, teamwork can be taught online in many ways. Mona's approach of emphasizing "self-managed" teams while providing many supportive resources—team charters, paper templates, grading rubrics, and guides for writing, plagiarism, and navigating an online course—seemed to stem from her assumption that learning should be self-directed and that knowledge is socially constructed. She explained,

I think knowledge is socially constructed; it's not received. So, I think really the role of the teacher, a good teacher, is someone who wants to try to help walk students down the path and to get out of the way so that they can learn the material themselves. So, providing them

good content, good learning materials, good exercises for what to do with their time, and good feedback along the way. I think that's a lot of what good teaching is.

Mona provided dozens of downloadable resources on the course website: paper writing guides, APA format guidelines, and links to information about conducting a library search, for instance. However, few of these were required reading or incorporated into course assignments; students were expected to access and read these materials on their own.

“I Don't Like to Coddle Too Much”: Developing Content for Self-Directed Learning

To Mona, a major responsibility of the instructor was to find and develop “good” course materials that are accessible to students and to present them in a way that enables students to learn in a self-directed way. Mona defined “good” content and learning materials as those

that structure their learning. This means providing background readings and lectures that provide foundation, and which organize principles and concepts. It breaks things up into manageable chunks, much like concept mapping. The materials also encourage reflection and interaction (e.g., self-assessments, websites to visit and evaluate, current event readings, videos, and podcasts that provide examples of principles and theories). Part of this includes learning activities, which encourage practice, reflection, and time on task, often through discussions, written assignments, and even quizzes (for grasping basic knowledge). By good content I mean an overall structure through which students can participate and navigate. They interact with this material so they can put their own construction on it.

In this comment, Mona mentioned student reflection multiple times, suggesting that she believed student reflection to be a strategy for learning. When asked what she meant by *reflection*, Mona responded:

That they [students] contemplate, deliberate, meditate, speculate, and ruminate over ideas, questions, and applications. They think about their past experiences, combined with new content they are studying, to develop new propositions concerning case studies, current events, and their own professional lives as they respond to discussion questions. They develop their ideas in writing. The very process of typing and reading taps into that reflective process.

Here, Mona alluded to two important aspects of her teaching approach or philosophy of learning. First, she wanted students to reflect about past experiences, current events, and their own professional lives, suggesting that students learn by integrating their own experiences with course content, as opposed to learning by analyzing texts, for instance. Second, Mona mentioned the importance of writing as a reflective process. Writing was an important tool for learning, in Mona's eyes. This perspective may be a result of teaching almost solely in an asynchronous online environment in which written communication is the only mode of communication. Alternatively, this perspective may be *a priori* for Mona and she may have been attracted to teaching online *because* she views written communication as a valuable skill.

Although Mona provided many materials to offer support for students, her teaching style emphasized student responsibility for learning. For instance, she expected students to ask questions if they were struggling. She recognized that some students may have been uncomfortable with the online environment as a learning space, but she wanted them to overcome this themselves—with the help of resources provided—so that it did not hinder learning. She explained,

Students are supposed to have gone through an online orientation before they even get into the class. So I don't like to coddle too much to that because if they haven't done that they haven't done something they were required to do. I figure if I start feeding into that too

much by saying, “Oh, let me walk you through this,” then I’m rewarding them for not doing what they were told they had to do before they came into the class.

Mona noted that the issue of student discomfort with the online environment occurred especially with adult students in business who had jobs leading companies or managing employees. Mona noted, “It can be kind of humbling to them,” as they develop proficiency using the LMS. One student in Mona’s class, though, was not able to become proficient at navigating the virtual environment because, Mona surmised, the student did not understand the logic behind the course management system. The student had difficulty navigating the course site to find the resources she needed and to find the discussion forums where she was required to post. Mona commented that the student “just seems so overwhelmed with not being able to follow anything in the class. She just can’t seem to conceptualize how it comes together online.” Mona recommended to this student that she take any future courses in a face-to-face or hybrid format, instead of online.

Mona’s emphasis on self-directed learning was one reason why she did not rely heavily on lecturing. To Mona, learning is most effective when students take ownership of their learning and have an active role in the learning process, which the traditional lecture does not support. Mona believed that something needs to occur in the student—reflection, for instance—in order for learning to take place. Lecturing, Mona argued, does not facilitate this:

You can’t just get up and lecture to somebody and think that they get it. They’re not going to get it until they’ve reflected, until they’ve thought about their own understanding and how they connect to it and relate to it. You can’t do that for a person. You have to get out of the way so they can do that for themselves. And they’re only going to learn if they go through that process.

Mona tried to give students time and space to actively participate in the learning process in order for connections to be made that lead to retention. This onus on the student to “learn the material themselves” was balanced with the array of materials that Mona provided on the course website that are helping “walk students down the path” of their learning.

“Very Private and Personal”: Providing Student Feedback

In addition to course design, Mona viewed feedback to students as another key responsibility of instructors, whether they teach online or face-to-face. In her leadership course, Mona gave written and sometimes video feedback to students about their written papers. She also posted in discussion forums to offer feedback to students on their posts, which were in response to a prompt provided by Mona. She promised a quick turnaround for feedback to students: the course syllabus indicated that “all graded work will be back to you within 24 hours of when it was due.” Although Mona had no face-to-face contact with students in her leadership course, she found ways to communicate frequent and detailed feedback to her students, sometimes enabled by technologies not part of the LMS such as Jing, a free online tool for recording and sharing short videos.

Mona spent a good deal of time providing feedback to students and viewed it as a “coaching moment” that is “very private and personal.” When students posted publicly in the course, Mona could respond privately to only that student or publicly so that the entire class could see her response to that individual. Mona described her process for deciding when to post, beyond the once-per-weekday institutional mandate:

What I usually do is to post, for instance, five to six questions related to the case study.

Monday I’ll post a question and Tuesday I’ll post a new question and so forth all the way through the week. I like to let people offer their thoughts on one question and then I’ll

come in at the end and kind of summarize and try to pull it together. Then I'll post the next day's question. Maybe occasionally I'll comment on one or two people's comments within the list of posts that have been under that particular question. But I try not to get in there...

I want to give people the chance to provide their own thinking on it.

In the online forums in which the entire class participates, Mona strove to post feedback to students' individual comments in a way that let students know she read their comments but did not lead to one-to-one conversations with her. She wanted students to interact with one another.

This approach evolved over her years of teaching online:

I used to respond to every single post that a student made... But in my leadership class, I try to step back more. Because what happens is, if I respond too much to each individual student, everyone thinks they have to only talk to me and I want them to be talking with each other. So I try to be a little more in the background. I'm there every day, but not every single student [gets a response from me].

She recognized the risk of students feeling ignored if their posts received no comment from her.

With multiple sections and courses during a term, it could be difficult to keep track of how many times she responded to particular students' posts. She considered ways of keeping closer track of this to ensure fairness, such as rotating her responses among students, but she had not yet adopted such a systematic approach.

The decision of whether to offer feedback publicly or privately—and how much feedback to offer—depended on the context. In one instance in a discussion forum, a student erroneously referred to the federal government as an organization. Mona corrected the student publicly by posting, “I do want to clarify [that] the federal government is not an organization as we define it in management.” However, she did not choose this moment to explain why it did not fit the

definition in management. When asked why, Mona replied, “I thought about that, and I thought that wasn’t really the point of their conversation,” which was to come to agreement on a paper topic. Mona expanded, “In that context, I didn’t want to make him [the student] feel bad and just go on and on.” Deciding whether and how much feedback to give in discussion forums depended on the contextual factors, including aims of the discussion and Mona’s perception of how the student might react.

Mona’s decision to post in a discussion also depended on whether a student was dominating the conversation and needed to be reined in. Mona noted, however, that this problem was less common in online discussions, compared to face-to-face ones. In the face-to-face context, an instructor may feel compelled to respond to each comment from a student, but online

you can pick how often you’re going to respond [to a student who is dominating conversation]. You don’t have to keep encouraging it... There might be somebody who, if they were on ground, would be dominating the conversation and mowing over people, not being able to offer their ideas. But that same student could type her comments in a discussion forum—and they’re out there—but whether or not you choose to respond to that person, and other people respond, you pick and choose. Once in a while you’ll respond to the person, but they aren’t going to dominate the conversation like they would on ground.

In Leadership, Mona provided feedback to students primarily on their assignments and in discussion forums. Assignment feedback was extensive and usually written, although Mona has occasionally recorded verbal feedback using an online video capturing tool. Discussion forum feedback to students was given in the form of a post—usually public for the whole class to see, but sometimes private—from Mona to a student. In her feedback to students in the online

discussions, Mona considered several issues, such as faculty presence and fairness: she balanced having a presence with staying “in the background,” and she tried to spread her feedback posts among all students.

“You Can’t Just Passively Fade into the Background”: Comparing Online and Face-to-Face

Mona’s approach to teaching, she said, applies whether the learning environment is face-to-face or online. She commented, “I don’t really see [online teaching] as being that different” from face-to-face teaching. She believed that principles of learning and teaching are no different between online and on-ground environments, and learning outcomes need not be stunted by online environments. She explained,

I believe learning is socially constructed and that you can try to create a scenario in which students are free to try to put their construction on what they’re learning in a way that they’re going to retain it and do well. You don’t have to be face-to-face to do that. Now, if you’re going to be measuring other things—and I’m not sure what those would be—then perhaps there are some differences. But what is it that educators are caring about? [Learning] is usually what they’re measuring in their assessment programs, and so I’d make the argument that, no, I don’t think that students are being shortchanged [online]. I would say that if I had my druthers and the luxury of being able to be in the traditional student scenario where I was put in the college warehouse to mature and grow up and I had all these extracurriculars and social stuff going on, and... even a living learning community, I would say, yeah, that’s probably richer. But if we’re really getting task-oriented at the course level and not looking at other dimensions, [online] is different but I don’t think you can say that it’s worse.

This comment again points out Mona's bottom-line and efficiency-minded approach to teaching and education. She even empirically tested this theory by comparing learning outcomes among several sections of a different business course in PEC. In this course, external evaluators rated student work across delivery modes: online, blended, and face-to-face. Evaluators' ratings were highest for students in the online environment. Along with Mona's comments, this study that she conducted illustrates Mona's views of online learning as both promising and unexceptional.

Although Mona stressed that many aspects of online teaching are "not that different" from the traditional face-to-face teaching mode, she noted ways in which she believed online and face-to-face teaching differ. For instance, although teaching online compels Mona to be present online (i.e., logged in to the LMS) around the clock, it also allows her time to formulate responses to students more carefully than she would in a face-to-face setting. This suited Mona well because, she said, "I tend to be a little more introverted anyway." She explained,

I can be more thoughtful in my responses [online]. It gives me time to think about what I'm going to say. I don't have to think on my feet quite as much. I really am more energized when I am alone and have more reflective time than when I am always being around a lot of people. My social energy, believe it or not, comes from when I go to the gym, when I go to group exercise classes. So [teaching online] is a good fit for me and my personality.

Mona's comment reveals the role that personality or self-assessed work style can have in determining the degree of "fit" between the instructor and teaching mode.

Besides work setting and conditions, Mona described other ways in which the online environment differs from her face-to-face teaching experiences. In Mona's experience, the nature of communication and the type of information Mona learns about students differ between online

and face-to-face environments. In the online environment, communication tends to be task-oriented. Mona explained,

It's hard to have that informal interpersonal stuff. You notice we have a "Watercooler" [for informal interactions within the LMS], but it isn't necessarily getting used much. So any communication tends to be more task-oriented... I think that part of learning, if you want to think about it as holistic, is more than just discussing the content. So, I think that might be a limitation [of the online environment].

In the Watercooler, Mona initiated introductions at the start of the course, but students were on their own to engage in further informal interaction in this space, which no one did.

Although Mona noted that this lack of non-task-oriented, informal conversation was a limitation of the online environment, she also saw benefits of communicating only asynchronously online with students. She reflected that she learned more about how students think than perhaps she would face-to-face: "I think perhaps you get to know about how they think when you're online because they have to commit and put [their thoughts] in writing." This comment suggests that Mona views writing as more closely able to portray students' cognitive processes than in-class discussions, which may be one reason why Mona values the online mode of teaching.

The absence of face-to-face contact has advantages and disadvantages, and it may require extra effort on the part of faculty and students to read and convey tone. Mona observed that online,

The focus is more on your ideas and what you're saying and the content of whatever message you're posting, as opposed to what you look like or body language or anything like that... I think there's probably good and bad about that. I think that... missing some of

the nonverbal cues can be an impediment to understanding intent in a message. And you know how all the research on communication says that only a small percentage of the communication is the spoken word and people really will give more credit to the nonverbal language. You have to read a posted message at face value. I think everybody has to make an effort to think about, “Is my tone coming across harsher than intended?”

Another advantage of the online environment, Mona observed, is that discussions in the online environment tend to be “deeper” and less superficial. By “deeper,” Mona seemed to mean that students explore a topic or thread of conversation longer or more thoughtfully than they might in a face-to-face setting. She explained that online, students can take time to formulate their thoughts and they can return to a topic later if they have more to add. Mona reflected,

I actually think the discussions are... for comparable skill level and intellectual development level of students, I think the online classes do get into more depth than you’re able to get into in the classroom, just because ... the dynamic of it, you’re not cutting someone off and moving to the next topic, because ... if it’s within that starting time of the unit of the week, they can put it there. So if someone wants to go back and visit something and take it to a deeper level, they can.

The “deeper” discussions Mona observed online may also occur because students have to put their thoughts in writing in this environment, which may make students feel that their contributions are more permanent and should be well thought out. Mona reflected that in the asynchronous online environment, “There’s a permanent record of everything you do,” and this applies to both faculty and students. Mona commented,

I think people are a lot more reflective and thoughtful [online]. You can’t hide. You can show up for a [face-to-face] class and never say a peep for the whole week. You meet for a

three-hour class and never open your mouth and the person teaching it either may not have noticed that or factored that into participation. If you aren't showing up [online], it's noticed at the end of the week because all your comments are reviewed and go into how you're graded for that week. So, you can't just passively fade into the background. And you have to be perhaps more thoughtful about what you're saying. Because I think there's something about putting it in writing that just feels more permanent and more important because whatever you post... stays there.

The flexibility of the teaching-learning environment allows for students to contribute to discussions at any time, as long as the discussion forum is active. This flexibility that the environment allows is especially good for the PEC student population. Mona commented, "You have working adults who are busy. Giving them some options and some flexibility [with posting] is something I'm a fan of. If they can get there through whatever path it's okay with me." Again, Mona's comments suggest a bottom-line orientation to teaching and learning, in which the route taken to achieve outcomes is perhaps less important than the outcomes themselves.

Although Mona saw value in the flexibility that the environment allows, she also has found that she needs to build structures within this environment. In general, Mona avoids mid-course changes in course design, such as alterations of assignments, readings, or due dates because "in my experience if you change things, it's very stressful to students. It's a lot easier to make changes on ground." She commented on the tension between providing a clear course structure that prevents confusion and making changes mid-course to incorporate current events or news articles:

I'll have a course calendar, I'll have course announcements, a course landing page, all this stuff saying, "That's what we're doing this week." [But] you never know if

somebody's checking all the right places... If you put yourself in the student's position and say, "Oh gee, I was going to do this, I feel like a total failure." Then you [the student] panic. It's just very emotional when something like that happens for the students, so I don't like to make changes. I mean, I'd love to, but I think even if it would improve the current course... I don't really make changes. What I may do is post, "Oh, here's a relevant article to what we're discussing this week."

Although the asynchronous online environment allows Mona the flexibility to adjust the course mid-term to add a discussion or article about a current event, for instance, Mona has found that establishing an unchanging, predictable course structure is crucial for students to successfully navigate and complete the course. When asked to articulate why she avoids making mid-course changes, Mona attributed this tendency to both the nature of the computing environment and the characteristics of students. First, she described the influence of the online environment on her decisions about mid-course changes:

Because I cannot know what students read when they enter a course, I am not certain they will receive the message of a change. For example, I may post an announcement and send an email; however, some students don't read announcements or open email. If I edit a course page, I cannot know whether or not a student will visit that page. He or she may have read it once, printed it out, and never navigate to it again. So this aspect is the dimension related to the computing environment.

Second, Mona cited the demographic of students who take her classes:

The student aspect concerns habits of adult learners and an accelerated format. Many are busy, working adults. How they manage their time varies considerably. Some students work through the course sequentially. Others work ahead well in advance of a due date. If

I were to change an assignment, for example, there's a good chance that a significant percentage of students in the class will already be working on or have completed it.

Mona's teaching decisions were affected by her perceptions of the characteristics and features of the asynchronous online environment. In particular, this teaching mode relies on written communication and on students taking time and initiative to read any course updates. However, Mona is not able to know if, or exactly when, all students read or notice messages or revisions to the course. Mona was aware of some aspects of her students' backgrounds and time limitations and considered these in her teaching decisions. This suggests that Mona's teaching online is personalized, to some extent, in a teaching environment that could easily become automated and impersonal.

Summary

After years of working at an institution that she has enjoyed being a part of, Mona feels a strong sense of belonging and commitment to improving teaching and student learning there. She enjoys the high degree of academic freedom to design and teach courses with little oversight. In Mona's leadership course, the central component is student self-managed teams in which students collaborate on a term paper and, in the process of doing this, learn to work on virtual teams, a key learning goal of the course. This team component of the course reflects Mona's view that learning is most effective when it is self-directed by students and that knowledge is co-created through interactions with others.

Mona's teaching approach emphasizes efficiency and a bottom-line orientation that prioritizes outcomes over a particular process, and she has found that the online environment suits her introverted personality. She believes firmly that the online environment can produce learning experiences that are similar or even superior to classroom environments that involve

synchronous, face-to-face interactions. She even conducted a study comparing learning outcomes by course type for students at PVU, and the findings supported her belief. While Mona believes learning outcomes are comparable across online and face-to-face delivery modes, she observed differences in the process of teaching and learning between these modes. For example, she talked about differences in the nature of student interactions and in the give-and-take between structure and agency in course design.

Noah

Introduction

Noah is a full-time business faculty member at Pine Valley University, teaching primarily online courses. For this study, I observed Management Principles and Cases, a course that Noah had taught for several years in both online and face-to-face formats. Two aspects of this case that emerged as notable include Noah's emphasis on problem-based learning using case studies and his goal of teaching deductive reasoning through class discussion forums. A third aspect was Noah's reflective and ongoing process of course (re)design that was both facilitated and complicated by the online environment and LMS that hosts the course.

Context and Background

Noah's official appointment is professor of management with the Metro Springfield Program (MSP). As such, he had office space where MSP administrative offices were housed, although he very rarely visited this space. It is located about 45 miles from Simontown, where he lives, and about 80 miles from PVU's residential campus in Watertown, where he occasionally attended meetings. I interviewed Noah on my university's campus or at coffee shops, and once virtually by Skype when he was visiting his lake house across the state. My own university is the same one he attended as a doctoral student, so we know many of the same people and talked about courses and people we both knew.

Noah's strong personality was balanced by his quick-to-laugh demeanor and self-deprecating sense of humor. He exuded enthusiasm for teaching online and a sincere passion for business education. Before teaching, though, Noah worked in several other professional areas. An undergraduate psychology major, he worked after college as a vocational counselor and from this experience became interested in human resources. He returned to school to earn an MBA

and built a career in banking, starting in human resources and then moving to bank operations. The market crash in the late 1980s ultimately led to Noah getting laid off two years later. By that time, Noah had started teaching college-level introductory banking courses at an institute for bank employees and then taught community college economics courses.

About a year after leaving his job in banking, he started teaching at Samuel University, a specialized school of management. In the early 1990s, he began teaching online at the suggestion of an administrator who was enthusiastic about online education. After a few years, Noah realized he would need a doctorate degree to be competitive in the faculty job market and continue on his path in college teaching:

I could see the handwriting on the wall in the early '90s... I was figuring I'd end up at a community college around here because all you needed was a master's degree. Well, as I'm doing that, the job market changed, the labor market changed. All of a sudden there were PhDs willing to go work at a community college... So it was like, "Oh, the market has shifted, this is not good. I better get a doctorate."

Noah earned his PhD in higher education while enrolled part-time and continuing to teach. In the graduate program, he focused on organizational behavior and management in colleges and universities. His dissertation was about innovation and teaching in business schools and the role that organizational culture plays in the innovation process. During and after graduate school, Noah taught business courses on an adjunct basis at Samuel University and at Lodi College, a small, private Pine Valley University. In 2007, he started teaching part-time at PVU, and moved to a full-time position there two years later.

Noah has taught both online and face-to-face, but he generally has been teaching only online courses. In his experience, he observed, teaching face-to-face courses is not compatible with teaching online courses during the same term. He reflected,

One thing that I learned early on also is you really don't want to live in both worlds [online and face-to-face during the same term]. This is something that I learned early and I've seen over and over again for 20 years. You can't easily teach online and on ground at the same time. It's two different ways of working... I'm never not working... [I'm] keenly aware that there is stuff going on in my class right now.

Noah was careful to point out, though, that this constant awareness of his class and sense of “never not working” did not amount to a feeling of pressure. Rather, he said,

It's like driving a car. Things have to be checked all the time—other drivers, road signs, curves in the road, etcetera. But these aren't pressure, since I like to drive and find it meditative. Or like canoeing in a river. Once launched, the current takes over and while it's possible to fight the current, it's better to use it, anticipate the rapids that need lots of work and attention, and enjoy the calm stretches before the next rapids.

As this comment suggests, Noah enjoys the online teaching environment. In fact, teaching online suited Noah from the beginning because he values the flexibility and freedom that the online environment allows. Noah explained, “With the structured time element removed, and with place removed, work can be done anywhere, any time. The converse is that work is easier to be ‘always there.’” Noah recalled teaching his class while taking a trip to Florida, and he often visits his vacation home while classes are in session. He noted that advancements in technology have made the advantage of a flexible lifestyle even stronger and easier to achieve.

The way I tend to look at it is: Does it [the technology] prevent me from doing what I want to do? And it's mostly software and then telecommunications technology. Those things are all becoming less and less important, really not getting in the way. Like, wi-fi is pretty much everywhere.

While technology that enables easy and fast communication may be steadily improving, as Noah mentioned, he noted that the software tools and their user interfaces of his online courses often lack user-friendliness. He suspected that interface designers of learning management systems (LMS) and other educational software do not have instructors mind. He explained, using an example from his own experience,

I think the piece that's really missing, and some learning management system is really going to take off and fly when they figure this out, is the whole human-computer interaction [piece]. The software is still designed by IT folks and they're getting input from the end user but not to any significant degree and not really making this [teaching]... easy. For instance, in the course home page where the video is embedded... there are three views that I have. One of them is design view, where I just type in stuff and change the font and all that. One of them is HTML, and one is preview. What I have to do is create the page and leave a space for where I'm going to embed the video. Then get the embed code from YouTube. Then come back and click HTML, which shows me all of the HTML programming for everything. Then I have to figure out where in the page am I going to stick this video. And then I go back and save everything, and then go back to design view and see if it showed up where it was supposed to. It's a major pain.

While the technology Noah used for teaching online has improved over the years, he believed that the usability of the interface could be better designed to improve efficiency and intuitiveness

for instructors. Nonetheless, Noah valued the flexibility that teaching online allowed him for traveling and working remotely, and he acknowledged the considerable improvements that have been made in the technology, despite some persisting limitations.

Noah appreciated that PVU has a long history of offering online courses and believed the institution is unique in its decision to rely heavily on full-time faculty to teach online courses at PEC. In PVU's organizational structure, PEC faculty members are separate from—but collaborate with—LAS faculty on the residential campus. While Noah's formal appointment is with PEC, Noah also works closely with LAS faculty members in the business department on the residential campus. He attends meetings with LAS business faculty and gives input into curriculum design and other administrative issues or initiatives.

Although Noah seemed to think of himself as somewhat of an outsider among his LAS counterparts in the on-campus business education department, he had good working relationships with LAS faculty. Noah believed that having separate organizational units protects the arrangement that allows him to teach exclusively online and thus protects the flexible lifestyle that he enjoyed. Noah said there are “significant pockets of resistance [among LAS faculty] to online courses,” especially those that are numbers-based, such as statistics or finance, which Noah teaches. However, Noah observed that skepticism about the effectiveness of teaching online had been diminishing in recent years: “I think they buy into online...more and more. They see that we're having success with it.” In fact, Noah has observed that in recent years many LAS faculty members have expressed interest in teaching their classes online.

One difference between the online and face-to-face courses at PVU, Noah said, is that his online courses require students to complete readings and assignments before class begins, which Noah believed is much less common in face-to-face courses. Given this difference, Noah

reasoned that an online course can cover more than a face-to-face course over the same time period. Noah reasoned,

What happens in their first week of class [of a face-to-face class] is they meet once on a Thursday night, they come in [and say], “Hey everybody, glad to see you, how are you? Any questions? Okay, see you next week! Get started on the readings.” What we do [online] is we tell them, “Read this stuff ahead of time and, by the first day, prove to me that you read it. Take a quiz, write me an essay.” We require that ahead of time... And the last week [in a face-to-face course] is, “Here’s the final exam. Turn it in on your way out.” I do that online.

As a full-time business faculty member for PEC, Noah was responsible for coordinating adjunct faculty who teach business classes for PEC. In this role, Noah and Mona (the other coordinator for adjunct business faculty) advised part-time business instructors regarding content and teaching strategies. New adjuncts first teach their courses using copies of Noah’s or Mona’s already-created courses. After adjuncts teach the course once or twice, they are encouraged to make changes to the course in order build a sense of ownership for the course. Many PEC adjunct faculty members have taught there many years, which allows for longer-term relationships between full-time and adjunct faculty. Noah explained,

I think our adjunct faculty have been with us, some of them, 20 or 30 years... These are people that we have relationships with and they like teaching part time. They have careers somewhere else, and this is something that they like to do.

In addition to his faculty coordinator role, Noah chaired PVU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), which reviews and grants approval for research conducted by members of the campus community. The IRB of six faculty members, including both PEC and LAS faculty,

meets in person once per semester on the residential campus. Noah also served on PVU's committee on faculty salary equity and phoned in for bimonthly meetings with LAS faculty members. He occasionally drove to the residential campus to attend the meeting in person, but he chose when and how often to do this.

Besides his service on committees at PVU, Noah engaged in other work to improve teaching and learning on and off campus. Noah and Mona were working together to develop an outcomes assessment plan for business students, and they consulted with other campuses to improve teaching practices. On the side, Noah advised dissertations for a largely online, for-profit institution where, Noah said, "my job is basically mentoring the student through the process" of writing and defending a dissertation. Noah also remained connected with professional communities related to teaching and learning, attending conferences to present on teaching strategies and discuss problem-based learning and professional education. He described this latter interest:

Professional education [is] another big interest of mine... It's clear to anybody who's looking around [that] management education isn't living up to what it needs to [do].

Medical education turns out good doctors, for the most part. Legal education turns out good lawyers, for the most part. MBA education turns out cheaters and liars. [laughs] So, where's the professionalism?

Noah has a multi-faceted career as a professor of business, working mostly at PVU in various capacities but also consulting at other institutions and advising dissertations at a for-profit institution. At PVU, he works closely with PEC faculty as well as LAS business faculty, although he visits the residential campus in-person only a few times each semester. On the whole, Noah

enjoys his colleagues and the institutional culture of PVU, and he values the flexible lifestyle that teaching online affords him.

Teaching Management Principles and Cases

In the eight-week term during Fall 2013 when I interviewed Noah, he taught three 20-student sections of Management Principles and Cases. During this term, he taught only these 60 students, but he also regularly teaches other business courses at PVU, particularly finance and economics classes. Management Principles and Cases had undergone several iterations over many years. Noah first taught a version of this course face-to-face in the early 1990s and soon after that designed a version for students taking it online asynchronously. He taught the course to students at a specialized school of management and to graduate students at a different Catholic institution where he worked part-time. He started teaching it at PVU when he was hired in 2007.

Noah observed that PEC students tend to be older, working adults, which contrasts with the student population enrolled at PVU's residential campus. PEC students often transfer there from a community college after learning technical skills. Noah noted that they come to PVU for "the broader liberal arts kind of stuff" in their path to earning a bachelor's degree. He also explained that as older, working adults, PEC students often have a different set of challenges than the typical residential college student might have. LAS students, he said, include "20-year-olds who are playing volleyball on a scholarship... We [PEC] have 40-year-olds with mortgages and families."

The eight-week course was divided into four sections, each two weeks long. Each section focused on one of four "major stages" of management: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. During the first half of each two-week section, students spent their time reading and

participating in online discussion forums. In the second half, students worked in teams to apply their learning to analyzing a case that Noah provided.

Overall, the course was designed to support “lifelong management learning and professional growth,” as the syllabus stated. While Noah emphasized professional skill-building, he also aimed to educate students more broadly in “liberal arts learning,” “ethical integration,” diversity, and social responsibility. This came, at least in part, from Noah’s interest in improving business education so that it becomes more professionalized, as in medicine or law. He made this goal clear in the syllabus:

In the past few decades, the various majors of business education have been the consistently most popular undergraduate majors. Unlike other professions (medicine, law, architecture), business is the one profession with which the ordinary citizen interacts far and away most frequently (Colby et al., 2011). Therefore, business education should receive significant attention for educational improvement, since improvements here will resonate widely in society.

This syllabus excerpt conveyed Noah’s passion for improving business education and his intentions to be transparent about these views in his communication with students.

“Management is about Making Decisions”: Using Case Studies

A central component of Noah’s course was problem-based learning (PBL) using case studies that Noah developed or borrowed from Internet sources. Although problem-based learning can have a specific, narrow definition, especially when it is used in medical education (e.g., Bligh, 1995; Donner & Bickley, 1993; Neufeld & Barrows, 1974), Noah used the term broadly to refer to the case studies that students analyzed. Students worked in teams of four or

five students—grouped randomly by Noah—to apply principles learned from the class as they collectively wrote answers to questions Noah provided.

Noah started using PBL in his teaching after he read about it in his doctoral coursework and tried it in his courses. In the beginning, he used a trail-and-error process of judging success of the method based on students' reactions to it, and students seemed excited about learning through case analysis. He speculated that students came to “understand it [the course material] better because they had to figure out how to explain it to somebody else. And that’s a powerful tool for deep learning.” Noah believed that professional education, such as business, lent itself especially well to PBL because of the emphasis in professional education on competency and application of skills, which were central to Noah’s course goals. Noah wanted students to also be able to apply what they learn to their own professional lives because

management is about making decisions. So we need to make a good decision maker out of you, and there’s lots of ways to do that... It becomes easier for us [instructors] with problem-based learning; it’s easier to make connections for students that [convey that] this is practical and it affects your life. This is the kind of thing you’ll do as a manager.

The focus on application of learning, Noah believed, leads to less reliance on lecture and to deeper learning. Drawing from his graduate training in education, he referenced Bloom’s taxonomy of learning (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) when describing his teaching aims:

We really need to move the classroom so that learning starts at the third level of Bloom: application, analysis, then move up from there. The basic comprehensive knowledge and comprehending kind of stuff, that goes on on their own.

Noah compared PBL with the “flipped classroom” model in which students read course material or view recorded lectures before coming to class and spend class time in small groups or engaging in activities with peers. The emphasis on peer learning that PBL fostered made Noah think of his role as “a guide on the side,” which he enjoyed and believed that students did, too. He commented, “I think students really liked the fact that I wasn’t in there telling them what to do all the time. It was their classmates who were helping them out.”

Noah observed that one advantage of the online environment is that “you [can] see students saying things that would have been lost in the verbal environment.” He presented at a teaching and learning conference about his own experiences using PBL to teach finance. For the presentation, he used archives of student comments across terms saved in the LMS. This was useful, he said, because “I don’t have to rely on my memory to play back. I can go back and look at what people wrote.” He analyzed the comments, “looking at problem-based learning and how that worked with students. I analyzed the conversations that they had about how that worked for them.” The online asynchronous environment captures all student communication and allowed Noah to study it to reflect on his course.

“Discussion Takes You Deeper Into The Material”: Discussion Forums

A second core component of Noah’s Management Principles and Cases course was the discussion forums. In these forums, students commented in response to prompts posted by Noah and in response to one another’s comments. Discussion participation constituted about one-third of students’ final grades, a relatively large percentage, “so that it’s important enough for the student to take it seriously.” In this space, Noah’s aim, as stated in the syllabus, was for students to “interact with other students in a community of learning to deepen your understanding of the course material and how to use it to analyze and solve problems.”

Noah was active in discussion forums every weekday, posting prompts for students to respond to and commenting on student posts. He explained, “Every day I have to be present in the class somehow so they see that I’m there.” Noah encouraged students to post several times per week, spreading their contributions over the week. His expectation was that students completed readings on weekends and were prepared to participate in the discussions on weekdays in a way that demonstrated or extended what they learned through readings. Noah stressed in the syllabus that “discussion is mainly for your [students’] collective benefit” and believed that the value of discussion largely came from students learning from one another. He wrote in the syllabus,

Discussion takes you [the student] deeper into the material, helping you to apply the course principles to more real-world situations—the “practical application of theory,” which is a core ideal for this course. I subscribe to social-construction of learning theories (common in educational psychology). These say that knowledge is not something that your professor pours into your brains. You construct knowledge for yourself through social interaction.

Although—or perhaps because—his students had no face-to-face contact with class members, Noah believed that students felt compelled to engage in discussions, even beyond the minimum required posts. This may be due to the characteristics of the virtual space in which all communication is written and participation is measured by number of content of posts. He believed that

it’s harder to hide online... because everything you say is permanently there, and if you don’t say anything, I’m going to find out pretty quickly. The system can tell me, “No participation.”

Noah also believed that discussions fostered a sense of community. He defined “community,” as students “gain[ing] meaning from interaction with others... It is also kind of like crowd-sourcing the learning, since another student might be able to explain something in exactly the way another student needs it.” Defined this way, Noah’s idea of community seems to pertain to a learning community in which students interact with particular collective learning goals in mind. When asked how he built community among students in this course, he pointed to the weekly discussion in which students engaged with one another about course material and their own related experiences. He made clear to students that their interactions with other students are important by grading their contributions. In the rubric that Noah used for evaluating students’ posts in discussion forums, “engaging others” was one of the five criteria. Students had access to the rubric through the course website.

The term “role” in literature about teaching is laden with meanings. In this section, I write about Noah’s role in terms of what he viewed, and what I observed, as his responsibilities in discussion forums. Four main roles emerged: teaching deductive reasoning and logical thinking, evaluating written communication, correcting misconceptions, and synthesizing themes. The first two roles—teaching deductive reasoning and logical thinking and evaluating written communication—are roles that Noah described in interviews as his teaching goals for the course. The other two roles—correcting misconceptions and synthesizing themes—are roles that I observed through discussion forums and that Noah confirmed and expanded on in interviews.

First, Noah expected students to learn and demonstrate what he called deductive reasoning. He saw one of his main roles in discussion forums—and in the course as a whole—as **teaching deductive reasoning and logical thinking**. Noah emphasized to students through the

course syllabus that “deductive reasoning, through the application of management principles, is the foundation of management case-study analysis.” He explained,

The students... like to use their own experience and not do the heavy lifting of figuring out which principles of management apply and deductively apply those to the case in class.

To combat this tendency, Noah emphasized the importance of drawing from the readings to support discussion comments. He summarized, “I don’t care *what* you think, I just care *how* you think.” Required course readings for Week 1 included a description of “logical fallacies,” such as irrelevant connections and generalizations that, the handout explained, “must not be confused with logical thinking.” The handout included a long list of examples illustrating rhetorical devices that students should avoid, such as circular reasoning or questionable premises. Noah saw the skills of deductive reasoning and logical thinking as important for managers to practice; he believed them to be skills that are not well-honed by most people. Thus, learning to think deductively and logically represented value-added that he could provide. He noted, “It’s kind of my small thing, sort of a small liberal arts kind of piece that I can put in [the course].”

Second, Noah viewed one of his roles as **evaluating and offering feedback on writing** to students. He had high expectations for students’ communication in the course, which Noah saw as “the backbone of online education and a key element in good management practice.” In the grading rubric for discussion forums, “good writing mechanics” is one of five criteria he used to evaluate student participation in discussion forums, and this included grammar and spelling. Noah elaborated on his rationale behind having high expectations for students’ writing in this course:

I tried to say, I want your posts to reflect management communication, so you need to basically be writing as if you were writing to everybody who works for you in the

company. You're not going to send something that's misspelled and grammatically incorrect. This is not a chat log. You are doing management communication.

Typically, feedback to students about the quality of their writing was given through the Gradebook tool on the LMS or private messages through the LMS that were viewable by only the individual student, instead of in the discussion forums that were viewed by all class members.

When correcting or giving feedback to students about their reasoning process, Noah tried to provide some feedback publicly so other students could also benefit. However, he also occasionally sent the individual student a private message with a more detailed or stern message. He commented on his process of deciding whether to offer feedback publicly or privately:

Part of me thinks I don't want to send private messages because I want every other student to see that this was not good. I don't want other students to think that my silence [means that] I'm condoning it. It becomes tricky. Probably the best way to do that is to say something soft in public about, "Yeah, I think we can do better than this." And then say something more pointed in private.

Third, Noah used discussions as a place for **challenging and correcting students**, as needed. When one student misused the term "group think" in a discussion thread, Noah posted in the public forum to correct him: "Actually, it is incorrect to label what you describe here as Groupthink, since that term has a specific definition. It looks like you are using a version of brainstorming or Nominal Group Technique. FYI..." Noah explained that he, in general, intervened to correct students publicly "if they've [students] really missed something... if I think it's important for the rest of the students." He recalled about the "group think" exchange, "I wanted

everybody to see that [I corrected him] because people were starting to pile on, saying, ‘Oh, that’s a great idea.’ I thought, ‘No, it’s not a great idea... It’s wrong.’”

Fourth, Noah **synthesized themes** running through students’ discussion posts. He read comments as students debated a topic or tried to discern concepts, and then he posted a comment summarizing key points. In one forum, students tried to understand the difference between *tall* and *flat* structures of businesses, attempting to categorize particular companies as one or the other. On day three of this discussion, which by then contained ten comments, Noah posted a comment to synthesize the discussion up to this point:

This has been a great line of conversation, thanks! While it might be true that most large organizations have tall structures, not all do. None of these are cut-and-dried, hard-and-fast principles. It’s good to keep in mind they are generally true (to become management principles) but they are social science principles. That means there is lots of variation.

After this post, students continued to discuss the meaning and examples of *tall* and *flat* structures, and they went on to other topics as well. While some online instructors may fear that their own comments suppress discussion among students, Noah’s presence in online forums did not seem to have this effect but rather encouraged continued dialogue. Students appeared to engage one another just as often—or more often—than they engaged Noah, which may have been a result of the “engaging others” criterion in the grading rubric for discussion participation.

Noah placed heavy importance on discussion forums in his Management Principles and Cases course by weighting them heavily in students’ grades. As such, Noah spent much of the time devoted to this course on reading and posting in the forums. His contributions served different purposes and fulfilled different roles that he saw for himself: teaching deductive reasoning and

logical thinking, evaluating written communication, correcting misconceptions, and synthesizing themes.

“We Have an Opportunity to Reinvent the Curriculum”: Course (Re)Design

As a full-time faculty member at PVU, Noah had academic freedom and autonomy to design and redesign his course as he saw fit. Like Mona, Noah owned the intellectual property rights to his course. This engendered a strong sense of ownership of his courses and a literal ownership, as well. If Noah were to leave PVU, he could take his course with him and teach it elsewhere. This ownership may have facilitated his enjoyment of course design, which he viewed as an important part of online teaching. One of his main responsibilities as a course designer, he said, “is to accumulate good quality stuff. I’ve got videos, I’ve got links, I found this textbook. I find stuff and aggregate things that are good quality so that students don’t have to.” Noah explained that in this context, “good” materials are those that “extend some aspect of the reading to a deeper level” or present content in a different way that may work better for some students. Oftentimes, he noted, this meant presenting the material in a different format, such as a video. As a result, Noah reflected, the course had become “more of a multi-media experience.”

Course design, however, involved other tasks besides collecting good content, such as deciding how to engage and evaluate students and putting content online to make it available to the class. For some of these tasks, people on and off campus were available to help with technical aspects of course design and creation. PVU has IT support staff, and Noah could contact representatives from the LMS for technical help, too. Noah rarely utilized their help, though. After many years of designing and teaching online, he felt comfortable with the technology and confident troubleshooting alone.

Although Noah had a great deal of autonomy when it came to designing and teaching his course, some institutional oversight existed to assure that online courses met certain standards. A committee of administrators and faculty (including those who teach online and those who do not) set design standards for online courses and reviewed these courses on a regular basis, providing formative feedback to instructors. The outcome of the review was not tied to rewards or promotion and was only meant to identify areas in which faculty could improve the course. The criteria used by the committee to evaluate courses, Noah said, center around the usability of the interface and course structure, not the content or alignment of course materials with learning goals. When asked if the committee assessed content or course materials, Noah replied,

No, none of those kinds of things, like course content, course sequencing, pedagogy, learning materials, textbook choices, none of that stuff is part of it. It's just the course design and the way it looks on the computer screen.

In this comment, Noah seemed to define *course design* as accessibility, navigation, and clarity, which are components of the committee's evaluation rubric. Noah seemed content with the limited scope of the review committee. He asserted that faculty who teach online want to protect the independence they have over the course components such as content, materials, assignments, and evaluations: "We [faculty teaching online]... guard that academic freedom... As far as the content or the assignments, or any of that kind of stuff, that's up to the faculty."

After years as a PVU faculty member, Noah has internalized the mission and culture of the school. Institutional values drawn from the Catholic tradition shaped Noah's ideas behind course revisions, even though he is not Catholic himself. In particular, he had been interested in how to challenge students to think about ethics and collective good in his course. This emphasis came from PVU's mission, which Noah recalled was "to help people become more competent,

purposeful, ethical in a teaching-learning environment that respects the dignity of all.” Using this mission as “a good touchstone,” Noah aimed to teach competence but also ethical decision-making and reflective judgment. He reflected,

I spend more time on the competence end of the mission statement, making sure people are competent. But I’ve been thinking that I really want to do more to shift into the purpose to: why do we have managers, and why do you want to be a manager? What’s the point of this? And the ethical decisions related to Catholic social justice and how does that fit [into business].

In the course, students already reflected on ethical decision-making in business in the context of a case study involving a company that unknowingly benefited from child labor. However, Noah believed that “we don’t really do as much as I think we could [with teaching business ethics].” Noah planned to continue teaching an ethics component in the course, but he hoped to make the connection between social justice, common good, and the Catholic institutional mission more explicit.

I wondered if Noah’s efforts to connect his courses more closely to the college’s mission were driven by administrators or other faculty at the institution encouraging such alignment. When asked about this, though, he cited a more personal and practical reason: he planned to retire soon. He explained that his intention to increase the emphasis on ethical decision-making in his courses was “part of a bigger thing” to help revamp the curriculum before retiring. He felt uniquely suited to the task, given his special interest in improving business education and increasing “professionalism” in the field. He explained,

That’s the piece that I bring to the party because I’ve studied that... If we change the shareholder value and start injecting some of these common principles of professionalism,

then management changes. It's not about me and these other senior managers, it means I have a duty to take care of the customers, employees, and local communities... We [educators] have an opportunity to reinvent the curriculum along these lines. Because right now, it's a pretty standard curriculum you'd find at every business school around. We're all teaching the same stuff. But how we teach it and what we emphasize and those kinds of things is where we [have control].

Although Noah enjoys modifying his course to improve it, he typically waits until the next offering of the course to make the changes. He explained that while mid-course changes might improve the course, he has noticed in the past that making changes to a course-in-progress can confuse and frustrate students. Noah observed,

[Students are] juggling all this stuff [in their lives] and really trying to make everything work. They're planning their time out and if I make a change even in an assignment due two weeks from now, that's screwing up their life.

If he does decide to make a mid-course change, Noah has learned that he needs to "overcommunicate," in order to prevent confusion or frustration among students. This requires making several changes in different parts of the online interface. He described this tedious process for dropping an assignment after the course had begun:

I went and looked at the [assignment to be dropped]. Nobody has started working on it. Fine. I can hide it; nobody has done anything with it. Then I had to put something in week eight that says, "Here's why you can't find this, here's the change in the assignment." Then I had to go into the calendar and change the calendar. Then I had to go make an announcement. Then I had to send an email in case they missed the announcement. Then I had to put a notice in the [virtual] office. And then I had to change the grade book so that

they don't see that the week eight assignment is there anymore... I had to do all this IT stuff to make sure the threads are all connected up because as soon as you miss one, then somebody will pop up and say, "Wait a minute, I don't understand." Which is what they should do.

Although the LMS and virtual environment allows Noah to make changes to the course at any point, modifications can be tedious to carry out and can be unsettling to students because students rely on a predictable schedule as it was initially presented when the course began.

Summary

Noah's circuitous route to college teaching led him to a faculty position at PVU's Professional Education Center as one of two full-time business education faculty members. He primarily teaches online courses, which allows him flexibility to work off-campus and to travel while class is in session. When I interviewed Noah, he taught three sections of Management Principles and Cases, his only teaching assignment during that eight-week term. Besides teaching this course, he also chaired the university's IRB and co-spearheaded an initiative to measure business students' learning outcomes across courses.

Noah first taught Management Principles and Cases in the 1990s and has revised the course considerably since then, enjoying the academic freedom and autonomy afforded by PVU to modify the course with little oversight from administrators or other faculty members. The course design centered on problem-based learning with case studies, class discussion forums, and the development of deductive reasoning. These three focal points of the course reflect Noah's assessment of what makes the course successful: problem-based learning, sense of community, and faculty presence. He summarized,

If there are a couple of major themes about what makes an online class successful, it's building a sense of community, a safe place to try things out. And along with that, the faculty presence... So, faculty presence, building an online community, and then problem-based learning. If I do those three things and I do them well, I'm going to have an easy time of it, life's going to go on, I'm going to get good reviews, and people are going to be happy. And if I don't do one of those three things, then I'm going to get a lot of pushback and a lot of complaining.

Besides his own views about teaching and learning, Noah's teaching and course design decisions were influenced by the institutional context in which he teaches. Within the parameters of PVU's guidelines about course design, he revised the course from term to term and tried to incorporate the college's institutional values of ethical decision-making and support for the common good into the course, an aspect of business education that he sees as lacking or weak.

Chapter 5: Victoria and Quinn at Midwest Community College

Midwest Community College (MCC) sits in a tree-covered area of the state, abutting secluded residential neighborhoods tucked away in a woody expanse that flanks a winding river. The campus lies between two medium-sized cities home to several higher education institutions, including two large, public universities. A vast parking lot surrounds the campus. I arrived at MCC for my first interview a day before the official start of the fall term. The parking lot was nearly empty but would be full the next day. MCC is a commuter campus. Some students travel across the state to attend classes in MCC's specialized certificate programs; others live nearby and take a class or two. Many enroll in two-year programs to earn an associate's degree.

The campus looks well-maintained and clean. Some of the plain, grey structures resemble a sterile office park, while other areas of campus reveal a buzzing, diverse, rapidly growing college. On one visit, I arrived early and sipped tea in the coffee shop of the newly renovated student center. I recorded my observations about the new student center: "Gorgeous and well-designed. Clean spaces and furniture, open spaces, vibrant colors and sleek lines." I watched students and faculty grab coffee on their way to class or type on laptops as they waited for their next classes. One student wore headphones and watched a television show on her computer. The atmosphere was casual, comfortable, and bright in this centrally-situated campus nook. I was reminded of a tour of the campus that I took five years ago when I visited the new campus recreation center. I was struck then by that space: walls of windows letting in sunlight to bathe the open floor plan, the latest models of exercise equipment, and a crisp, blue swimming pool.

From my outsider perspective, the institution appeared then—as it did now, from my vantage point in the student center—well-funded and well-used.

The building that housed the Business Education Center (BEC) appeared slightly older and more worn than the student center. The carpet inside was starting to tear at its edges. Stains and fading from years of foot traffic marked the carpet. A sign read “No Smoking on Campus” and warned of fines or suspensions for violators. The halls of the BEC were quiet. A few people walked by—custodial and administrative staff, people carrying equipment and water bottles. Voices echoed down the hall of people familiar with the place and with each other. A woman asked if I was there to see someone. I told her I had an appointment and made my way to the faculty offices, which were grouped together in one large suite. The suite was brightly lit and showed indications of work life: schedules pinned to walls, inbox baskets filled with papers, computer monitors glowing. This suite was the professional home base of Victoria and Quinn, two participants in my study.

Victoria

Introduction

Victoria started teaching full time at Midwest Community College (MCC) after decades working in corporate business. I observed a course that she developed called Shaping the Customer Experience. Four aspects of the case emerged as significant: 1) the influence of Victoria's business career on her teaching, 2) the emphasis on learning by drawing from personal experiences, 3) the importance of setting clear expectations for students, and 4) Victoria's views of her role and presence in this online course.

Context and Background

My pre-interview impression of Victoria came from videos I watched from her online course Shaping the Customer Experience. The videos were professionally produced with crisp picture quality and clear sound. In one, Victoria introduced the course, sitting at a news broadcasting-type desk with "Online MCC" logos—the college's centralized online education office—printed on signage around her. She spoke warmly and confidently, first looking into the camera then scanning the room to make eye contact with an audience. I was impressed by the high quality of the video and the poise and professionalism Victoria displayed.

As I waited for our first interview, I sat in the small waiting area near the entry to the faculty office suite. Victoria arrived and greeted me, carrying a bag, binder, and oversized Post-It notes. A young man in casual dress and a baseball cap was waiting outside her office. Victoria had invited the student to collect books that she no longer needed so that he could sell them. "You need the money more than I do; you're paying off your student loans," she told him. He left with a stack of books in his arms. Victoria sat down at her L-shaped desk that hugged a large window. Nearby, an easel stood with oversized Post-Its covered in scribbles—multi-colored

handwritten lists connected by lines, circles, and arrows. One office wall was half-covered with shelves supporting thick books and rows of three-ringed binders. The small room was sprinkled with stacks of empty boxes that Victoria planned to use for her upcoming house move.

Victoria came to teaching later in her career after working for over three decades in corporate business. She earned an MBA and PhD in business and held a variety of positions—mostly in retail and supply chain—from merchandising manager to vice president of strategy and development. Her jobs had taken her to different states and required frequent travel. She eventually chose to move closer to family and opened her own consulting firm, which allowed her to work fewer hours. Not long after this move, Victoria received a call from MCC's president, who asked her to meet with him. She learned at this meeting that he was considering her for an administrative post at the college, although she never learned how he obtained her name and resume. She had not applied nor expressed interest in the job. She conveyed to the president that she was not interested in this position since it would mean working full-time, something she had recently made a conscious decision to avoid.

Victoria's resume circulated within MCC and made its way to the dean of business education. When a faculty member took a leave of absence, Victoria was asked and agreed to fill in. After this temporary teaching assignment, she continued to substitute teach. When a full-time teaching position opened in the department, she was offered the job. She agreed to try it for a year, reluctant to take on full-time work but happy to have more teaching responsibilities and classes of her own. Victoria had not planned to work in higher education; research and the tenure process did not appeal to her. She reflected,

I knew I never wanted to teach at the university level because I didn't want to get into research and that publish-or-perish [system]. [But] I like the idea of the community college because community colleges are teaching colleges.

After working at MCC and getting a taste for teaching, she realized that a community college might be a good fit because of its teaching mission.

Victoria taught her first courses face-to-face. Although she had no formal experience teaching college students, she quickly figured out how to draw from her business background to inform her teaching. She also drew from what she remembered from her own education: instructors teach by lecturing. Victoria described her transition to teaching,

It was a real learning experience for me because my model for college teaching was you get up and you lecture. So, for my first business communication class, I spent hours—because I came from business—creating a beautiful PowerPoint presentation, pulling in all my business background.

Sometimes this strategy of pulling from her business background and her own experiences as a student worked well, and other times it did not. For the most part, Victoria learned as she went and adjusted her teaching approach along the way. She was not afraid to make in-the-moment changes or to consult with students for feedback if she noticed that something was not working in her course. Perhaps this quality came from her years of making on-the-spot business decisions. She described her first class sessions teaching at MCC and the moment she realized that a lecture format was not working:

Got through the first class okay. Came to the second class, and I was about ten minutes into the lecture, and I stopped. I said, "I don't know about any of you, but I am so bored.

I can't do this. I can't just stand up here and talk at you." So I pulled on the many seminars I went to while in the corporate world and had the students at flip charts brainstorming their expectations for the class. Then I reworked the rest of the semester in keeping with the master syllabus yet honoring what the students shared with me about their expectations. We revisited those expectations at the end of the semester to see how we did.

Victoria did not view her business background and indirect path to teaching as a limitation but actually saw it as a benefit. Teacher training or years of teaching experience, she surmised, could tie instructors to particular habits or ways of thinking that may obstruct their ability to modify their teaching or adapt to new situations. She explained,

Teaching is not my background. I'm not coming with years and years of experience in an academic setting. I had years of experience attending business seminars that are much more interactive. So I haven't been bound by those [teaching] paradigms. When I came to [teaching], my corporate training was: you need to do what you need to do to get something accomplished. My guess would be that not being tethered by these traditional teaching paradigms and pulling from various exercises I did in the many business seminars I attended, I was able to just have more freedom in the way that I thought about teaching.

Soon after she was hired, Victoria had an idea for a new course called Shaping the Customer Experience and proposed it to the department. However, because the course was not connected to an existing program, the department chair declined. A few years later, when the energy technology department wanted a customer service course for a new certificate program, Victoria saw an opening for her Shaping the Customer Experience course. She viewed the

concept of customer *experience* as more comprehensive than customer *service* and thought her course would serve the energy technology department's needs well. Victoria recounted,

I convinced [the energy technology department] that it needed to be a customer experience course because some of these [energy technology] people are the people who come to your home to fix your air conditioners, or they go to businesses. When the air conditioning goes down or the heating goes down or something happens, one of them goes there. They have to make sure that they're creating that total experience for the client when they walk in. It's more than just the customer service aspect; it's how they dress, what the truck looks like, what their tool kit looks like. When they open the tool kit, is it organized? So I was able to convince them, and I created the course.

The energy technology department wanted the course designed for the asynchronous online format so that students could enroll from other areas of the country. Victoria did this and has only ever taught the course online. Since its first offering, the course has been designated as a requirement or elective for several other programs besides energy technology, including sales and marketing, computer information systems, and culinary arts. The course has been popular among students, and for five years Victoria has taught two 30-student sections each semester. Because of her integral role in creating the course and her passion for the topic, Victoria takes pride in this course and its success at MCC.

As her role in the history of this course suggests, Victoria has a sharp sense of when and how to push an idea into fruition, perhaps honed by years of growing businesses and helping clients grow theirs. MCC's president noticed this talent and tapped Victoria to lead the newly established centralized online education office for the campus. At that time, online courses were not new at the institution, but there was no oversight for designing or teaching the courses. The

president was concerned about inconsistent quality and content across online offerings and resolved to create a centralized office that monitored course quality and oversaw the development of all online courses. The new approach was built around master courses, which are designed by experts or experienced instructors and then used by all other instructors teaching that course. The system for developing online courses—a process that Victoria helped to devise—requires instructors to use a standardized, process overseen by Online MCC for proposing, constructing, and modifying master courses. Victoria recalled this time of transition to the master course system,

The president created a big stir on campus because he considered the [initial] online effort to be a renegade effort. There were some instructors who created an online course, but it was just, “Read the book, take the test” and the instructor did nothing. So rather than trying to filter all this out, he [the president] just stopped online teaching altogether... About six months later, he said, “This is how online is going to work here. We’re going to have a master course. That’s the course. If anybody else wants to teach this course other than the person who developed it, you use the master course.” So if you take business communication course online, no matter who you get as an instructor, the student is going to get a similar experience.

Victoria was tasked with developing the system for creating and evaluating online courses, but she quickly realized that one of her first tasks would be to cultivate faculty buy-in to the new system. The new system for online education was instituted rather suddenly and significantly altered instructors’ roles and level of autonomy in online teaching. As a result, many faculty members resisted. She recalled,

It took me about a month in the new position to realize that I needed to do all this other stuff [besides oversee the development of master courses]. My main job was to change the culture. That was my job.

Victoria worked closely with faculty to incorporate their input into the new system for online education. For example, instead of prohibiting faculty from altering master courses, faculty were given opportunities to choose from several versions of an assignment, all approved by Online MCC. Gaining faculty buy-in was not always smooth, though. When Victoria once referred in a faculty meeting to the job of online instructors as “facilitating,” she received backlash from other faculty members who saw this comment as minimizing the job of teaching and the importance of the instructor.

Eventually, most faculty endorsed the new system and the Online MCC office was up and running. Victoria happily returned to teaching full time. Looking back, Victoria reflected on how being the first Dean of Online MCC changed her views about online teaching. She recalled,

[As Dean of Online MCC], I was able to see how a number of instructors approached putting together online classes. I started expanding my concept of what you could and could not do [online]. So it was really helpful from that standpoint. It was helpful in looking at ways to engage these students... I started understanding the power behind online learning.

Despite the job’s challenges, Victoria’s deanship expanded her views about online learning and introduced her to ways of creating interactive activities that, in her estimation, can improve student outcomes.

Teaching Shaping the Customer Experience

Influence of Business Background on Teaching

Victoria's professional experience outside of higher education has shaped not only her ability to transform ideas into action but also her teaching and course design decisions. At times, the influence has been obvious, such as when she drew on the knowledge of former business colleagues for designing her courses. Other times, the connection was less apparent but equally significant. For instance, Victoria's emphasis on learning through personal experience and the application of concepts seems shaped by her own experience of learning and applying what she learns on-the-job as a businesswoman. In this section, I expand on these two connections between Victoria's professional background and her experience teaching and designing *Shaping the Customer Experience*.

When she designed the course, Victoria called on the expertise of colleagues and acquaintances from her years working in business. Through her consulting work, she had crossed paths with Dan Book and Raj Client, who specialized in the customer experience and mass customization, a related concept. She occasionally worked with them on consulting projects, and Book and Client later wrote a book on the customer experience, which Victoria has drawn from—but does not require—in her course. She also incorporated videos into the course of Raj Client speaking about the customer experience. When Victoria was designing *Shaping the Customer Experience*, Dan Book and Raj Client referred her to Sue Hardee, who lived and worked near MCC and specialized in the type of work that Dan Book and Raj Client write about: designing the customer experience. Hardee introduced Victoria to another local businesswoman, Rae Nye, and Hardee and Nye have played a key role in creating and recommending content for *Shaping the Customer Experience*. Victoria explained,

I started meeting with them [Hardee and Nye] when this [course] was a concept. Then I spent hours doing a meta-analysis of what was out there and trying to figure out a structure of how to make it flow and how to start introducing all this kind of stuff. And then I ran it by them [Hardee and Nye]. They helped with a lot of things. They send me resources all the time.

In addition to the videos, Hardee and Nye have offered Victoria suggestions and feedback regarding other aspects of the course, such as student assignments and course structure. The idea for a student journal came from Victoria's collaboration with Hardee and Nye:

[Hardee and Nye] are out there working with companies, helping companies implement this customer experience concept. They're very open and sharing, "At this one company I did this and it worked really well..." They were telling me the different types of things that they do when they go into companies, having companies learn about the [customer] experience and how to bring that customer experience culture into their companies. It was very helpful for me in thinking of ways to [teach this] in an online environment. That's the genesis of the journal idea. As students go through the different concepts, they talk about how they applied them in some aspect of their job that's within their sphere of influence.

In a sense, Hardee and Nye served as content experts or instructional consultants for this course, offering ideas and recommendations for what to teach and how to teach it. Victoria, however, made final decisions about course content.

To judge content and determine which materials to include, Victoria used three main criteria: recency, accepted theory with application, and expertise. First, material qualifying as "recent" means that, in the area of customer experience, the concept or resource was developed relatively recently. Second, material meant to teach a theory or concept should include an

application of that theory or concept. Third, course content should be supported by experts in the field; ideally, the material is written or delivered by professionals whose job is to create or consult about customer experiences. For instance, Hardee and Nye themselves were featured in course videos in which they described their own work and interviewed other customer experience professionals.

In Victoria's decisions about content and course design, her connections to the business community directly influenced her experience as the instructor of Shaping the Customer Experience. Other times, however, the connection between Victoria's business career and teaching decisions was perhaps less obvious. Victoria's views of learning and teaching seemed shaped by her business background that required and rewarded learning by doing. Because of decades spent working in business, Victoria has a strong sense of the day-to-day environment of corporate settings and wanted students to learn by application, as she had done. She commented,

When we take in new information, we usually tie it to a reference point of some type, from our own experience and past knowledge... We try to connect it somehow or another. So forcing students to try to connect it with their work, I'm hoping that what happens is that they start looking at what they do differently and begin to digest, absorb, and understand how they can actually use, right now, what they are learning.

She modeled this for students, often sharing her own experiences with students and even exposing business blunders. She disclosed, "I've shared with students stupid mistakes I've made, things that didn't work as well. You don't go through 35 years in the corporate world not making a few mistakes."

“The Way You Learn is by Doing”: Learning by Drawing from Personal Experiences

Most work that students complete for Shaping the Customer Experience required them to apply what they learned and reflect on their own experiences. When she first started teaching, Victoria observed that this approach—sharing and asking students to share their experiences—seemed to resonate with students, especially in a course about the customer experience. Everyone has had experience as a customer or serving a customer, Victoria noted, particularly when *customer* is defined broadly. Victoria recalled,

In the classroom, students seemed to respond when I could share, “There was a time...” They could relate to that. And then they could come up with their own stories. There are things even in your personal life—it’s not all business—that relate to the concepts. Your spouse is a customer, of sorts. Your children, your friends. So some of these concepts are universal and can be applied in your personal life as well as in business.

All written assignments for the course—journal submissions, discussion forum posts, and blog posts (very similar to discussion forums)—invited students to reflect on their own experiences as customers or as someone serving a customer. For instance, in their first journal entry students identified “customers” in their own lives and described the nature of their relationships with these customers. In an early discussion thread, Victoria asked students to write about a pizza delivery experience that turned out to be a disaster from their point of view as a customer, and why it was a disaster. In another entry, students were asked to apply the concept of “work as theater” to their own work: describe your role, script, performance, props, and costume. These assignments called on students to use their own experiences as the test bed for understanding and applying course concepts.

Workforce development as a teaching goal resonated with Victoria, perhaps because of her intimate knowledge of previous workplace settings or perhaps because of MCC's emphasis on job training. She related an article she had recently read that advocates for education as workforce preparation.

I saw this [article] and thought I'm going to adopt it because I loved it. Because it said what I feel... It said that in education, the move is to go away from knowing about things and stuff to one of active thought, active expression, active preparation for the workforce. I loved it. Because I thought: that's what I'm trying to achieve here. When I look at all my classes, I want active thought, active expression, and active preparation for the workforce... It's moving from answering the question, "What should every college graduate know?" to "What should every college graduate know *how to do*?" And those three words make a difference.

Victoria's underlying belief behind her approach to teaching, both online and face-to-face, seemed to be that education should teach students how to apply and integrate what they learn to their own lives. She drew distinctions between *declarative*, *procedural*, and *functional* knowledge, asserting that functional knowledge—when students can apply knowledge in a new situation—was her ultimate goal for her students. The following comment further illustrates Victoria's emphasis on skill-based learning:

[Learning] is not so much about declarative knowledge, what you know... and it's more than just procedural knowledge, how to do something. You try to get to that functional knowledge where they can really integrate it with work and everything else. So the only way you get to functional knowledge is through a learning process and the way you learn is

by doing... I just think some instructors might focus more on declarative knowledge—do you know it, do you not know it?—versus having a focus on functional learning.

“Every Graded Activity Has a Rubric” : Setting Clear Expectations for Students

Victoria coupled this emphasis on application and learning through personal experience with very specific expectations for students’ written work. This was not always the case, though. She reflected,

I’ve become better about letting [students] know what the expectations are. For example, at one time I did not use rubrics... I’ve become much better at setting the expectations. Now, every graded activity has a rubric that students can review ahead of time so they know what is expected of them and how they will be graded.

She also provided sample work that modeled her expectations. In discussion forums, student responses followed a specific template that Victoria modeled for students. She has not always provided this direction, though. She observed early in her teaching career that many students did not organize their thinking well and needed guidance. She wanted to emphasize to students the importance of good written communication in business and wanted students to practice it.

Victoria explained,

In the discussion, their main posts are mini papers. Five paragraphs. I’m trying to have them develop their business writing skills and organize their thinking because that’s the most difficult thing that people do, organizing your thinking so that there’s a logical flow to it. ... Before I started this more structured way of writing posts, students would just go out and write and write and meet the word requirement, but you didn’t know what they said.

Discussion prompts asked students to state opinions while blogs required them to describe how concepts applied in their own lives. Victoria observed that blogs and discussions were very important to her teaching in the course because, she said, “it’s the discussions and the blogs...that really help me understand whether or not they get the concepts.”

In the blogs and discussion forums, students received instructions for posting and responding. In one discussion, Victoria asked whether or not companies should create a Chief Experience Officer position. She required a five-paragraph format and detailed the general content for each paragraph: “Paragraph 1: State your opinion and three reasons why you think that; Paragraph 2: explain reason #1; Paragraph 3: explain reason #2; Paragraph 4: explain reason #3; and Paragraph 5: summarize your post.” Students were also directed to use at least one outside source besides the resources provided in the course and at least one personal experience to support their opinion.

These detailed expectations were accompanied by specific grading criteria spelled out to students. Victoria rewarded participation and following instructions more than “right” answers. Most student work for the course—with the exception of a few brief, multiple-choice quizzes that students could retake—required students to describe their experience or opinion, instead of defining concepts or providing definitions. She explained,

In business, you are asked all the time for your opinion. Should we do this project? Should we hire this person? Should we run this marketing campaign? So I’m looking at: Did they voice an opinion? Did they give three supplemental reasons? Did they support those reasons with their own experiences and outside sources? ... I’m not looking for a right answer. I am looking for an opinion with clear, logical, and easy to understand support. That is helping the student develop a career-enhancing skill.

This comment highlights Victoria consistently goal of preparing students for work and teaching skills that students can apply in their own careers.

“I’m This Avatar Out There”: Instructor Role and Presence Online

Although this approach to evaluation aligned with Victoria’s emphasis on drawing more from personal experience than from textbooks to learn, she might also have taken this approach for practical reasons. Reading and sorting out right and wrong answers in student posts is time consuming, and her time was stretched thin. While teaching two 30-student sections of Shaping the Customer Experience in the fall of 2013, Victoria also taught three additional courses: three sections of Business Communication (two online and one “blended” that met in person weekly), one online section of Introduction to Retail, and one online section of a course on motivating employees. This teaching load was not atypical of full-time instructors at MCC. With so many courses and students, limited time may have been a factor in some of Victoria’s teaching decisions.

I wondered whether limited time also may have been a factor in her decision to refrain from commenting in response to student posts in class discussion forums or blogs. Victoria gave another reason for this, though. She used to comment on student posts when she started teaching online, but she worried that her comments either stifled conversation or made some students feel overlooked. She reasoned,

Two things can happen [when the instructor participates in discussion forums]. . . . As an instructor, you can hijack the conversation. Because as soon as you put your opinion out there, well guess what? Or as soon as you write something like “That was a really good. . .” [the student might think], “You mean the others weren’t?” And so you can hijack a whole discussion if you aren’t really, really careful in your responses.

She has since decided to refrain from posting in discussions, beyond providing the initial prompt to which students respond. Instead, she simply scans forums for inappropriate comments or language.

She explained,

I don't need to make comments. I look through the posts, just to make sure there's not something out there I need to remove. But for the most part, that whole netiquette... they get it, and they stay on track.

Despite an absence of a conspicuous faculty presence in the forums, students remain professional, Victoria's observed.

Just as Victoria was aware of how her own posts might influence student participation, she also thought about how students may have been influenced by reading other students' posts. In previous offerings of this course, she noticed that some students who posted later in the discussion repeated the content of other students' posts, since they could view what others had written. Concerned that this format prevented students the "hangers-on" (i.e., students who posted later than others) from thinking independently, Victoria modified the course in fall of 2013 so that students could not view peers' comments until after the student submitted a main post. She reflected, "I think the fact that the hangers-on have to do their own thinking and cannot see what other people have done has had an effect on the participation and the quality [of posts]." The most complex thinking or deepest reflection typically occurred in the initial student posts responding to Victoria's prompts. After these initial posts, student-to-student comments were brief and did not typically develop into longer discussion threads in which students debated a topic, for instance. Reply comments, as they were called in the course, tended to simply agree or disagree with the initial post.

Besides discussion forums, most interaction students had with the course was with Victoria. Because of this and because students wrote about their own personal experiences in the course, Victoria said that she got to know students well. In fact, she believed that, in general, she gets to know students better in an online class than a face-to-face one because students feel more willing to share in the virtual space. Victoria explained,

[Students] tell me a lot about their job and I learn a lot about their frustrations and how they feel about themselves in their jobs... Students seem more willing to open up and tell you more if it's in writing than talking face-to-face. And there's that perceived anonymity... I think they get even get more courage online, versus face-to-face... I find that the students are much more open about things that are going on in their lives... I think that not seeing me face-to-face ever [makes a difference]. Because if I'm in the classroom and you sent me something really [personal]... and I come to the classroom next time, you may feel uncomfortable because I know.... Whereas, if you never see me, I'm like an avatar! I'm not a real person; I'm this avatar out there. So I think it [students' comfort with sharing about themselves] may have to do with some of that physical presence, or lack thereof, in addition to just being used to saying things online that we find difficult to say in person.

Students' comfort with communicating online may be reflective of a larger change in college students that Victoria has observed. She observed that, in general, students in her classes have been increasingly comfortable with using computers and internet-based communication.

You don't need to do as much with students, teaching them how to use the online learning system. That was a big part of it in the beginning. You're seeing students come who, even if they haven't used [the LMS], have more of that technical background that they know how to click around and figure things out, sometimes better than the instructor does... I'm

finding students are more prepared for the technology. And they're used to that computer screen interaction. It's not this foreign thing to them anymore because they get a lot of other information that way. Websites and Facebook and all these other types of things... this is just another way that they're getting information. So there's not that... getting acclimated [phase].

Despite the absence of face-to-face interaction with students, Victoria felt that she still got to know her online students, perhaps in some ways better than if the class met in person. However, she found that teaching online has limitations, too. The learning management system (LMS), for instance, placed constraints on what she could do as an instructor. She noted that the interface of the LMS

forces you into somewhat of a structure based upon the way that they've written software. It forces you into a structure, combined with what Online MCC has said are certain requirements they're looking for... So, you have some limitations forced on you.

Other times, institutional policy combined with the LMS has gotten in the way of changes Victoria wanted to make. On the course's site in the LMS, *learning units* contain the course material that students read and are tested on. Students viewed each learning unit by clicking through several pages containing brief text (written by Victoria) and links to videos or external links. Victoria did not require students to use a textbook for *Shaping the Customer Experience*, so she wanted students to be able to print or download material contained in the learning units. However, transferring the content and links of the learning units to printable format would have meant that the links to LMS content or external sites would not work. Victoria also thought that being able to print the material would "give them [students] more freedom, more flexibility in how they want to approach [the course]."

Victoria grappled in other ways with teaching in an environment that is in many ways highly structured and sometimes constrained by technology or institutional policy. On one hand, she was careful to set clear due dates because “students need a very structured way to move through a course.” She explained,

You can’t have chaos. You just can’t have them [the students] going out and doing whatever the heck they want... Students do need some type of structure. But then give me freedom within that structure. I think that’s just the way most of us are. We like structure.

This tension or balance between structure and agency in online teaching that Victoria described was echoed in comments of the other instructors who participated in this study. I expanded on this theme in the cross-case analysis discussion in Chapter 6.

Summary

After decades working in corporate business, Victoria came to teaching when she was invited to substitute teach and then try out a one-year full-time position at MCC. She enjoys teaching and designing courses, especially *Shaping the Customer Experience*, a course that she proposed then designed to teach a concept—the customer *experience*—that she feels is increasingly important in business. Her passion for working with students and support for the teaching mission of community colleges prompted her to accept a permanent position at MCC. She led the effort to establish Online MCC, a centralized office for developing, managing, and evaluating online education at MCC. After this interlude as dean, she returned to teaching full time in the business education department.

Although Victoria left behind her corporate business career, her experience there shapes her teaching decisions and views about learning. For instance, she solicits input about course design from colleagues working on the customer experience and invites these colleagues to share

their own experiences with students. Perhaps also related to her background working in business, Victoria designed the course so that students draw from personal experiences to understand and apply concepts. In assignments, students relate content to their own experiences as customers and as employees serving customers. Victoria reflected on her role as an instructor in the asynchronous online environment, such as when and how much to participate in discussion forums and how to balance a consistent structure with freedom and agency for students. Over time, she has reduced her presence in discussion forums and started to offer less rigid windows of time when students can complete work, even allowing students to work weeks ahead if it suits them.

Quinn

Introduction

Quinn has taught full-time at Midwest Community College's Center for Business Education for several years. During the term I interviewed her, I observed her Introduction to Business course. Quinn designed the course, but her version of the course also has been taught by other faculty members, according to the centralized "master course" system of online education at MCC. In my interviews and observations of the online course site, four aspects of the case emerged as prominent: 1) using an externally developed online learning tool to improve the course, 2) reflections on the master course system at MCC, 3) engaging students online, and 4) the effects of teaching online on her teaching in general.

Context and Background

Classes were in session when I visited MCC for my first interview with Quinn. Sitting in the lobby area of the Business Education Center before the interview, I surveyed the hustle and bustle of a semester underway: people walked through the halls while others sat eating, knitting, or checking cell phones. Many appeared young, in their late teens or early 20s. Most were white, and most were women. Dress was casual: t-shirts, jeans, and brightly-colored tennis shoes. People moved with direction and purpose, but not urgently. Occasionally, I saw someone, older, wheeling a suitcase and holding an armful of papers or folders. Professor? Instructor? Faculty member? What are they called here at a community college, I wondered? I took note of my unfamiliarity with this institution type and its norms, students, and faculty. In the background I heard a television airing speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. Most people I saw did not talk or make eye contact, and many instead stared into their cell phones. One student, though, talked to

another about a class, relaying what happened in class and what is due next time. “See you next week,” he added, then returned to eating out of a white Styrofoam container, opening a small packet of sauce to pour over heaps of glistening Chinese food.

As I waited for my first meeting with Quinn, I reflected on what I had learned about her up to this point. Before our first interview, I spoke with Quinn by phone after email correspondence. On the phone, she talked quickly, moving from one thought to the next with excitement. She was quick to respond to my emails and was gracious, willing to share her time and interested in my study. Her personal website summarized her courses and the consulting services she offers for curriculum development and small business marketing and management. The brief biography highlighted Quinn’s decade working in the technology industry in sales and marketing and listed her three degrees in business: bachelor’s degree in marketing, MBA, and doctorate of management in executive leadership. Her biography and professional website struck me as impressive, and I wondered for a moment if my questions would seem trivial to this high-powered businesswoman-turned-professor.

When I met Quinn, though, I quickly dismissed this worry. Warm and welcoming, she invited me into her office where family photos and children’s drawings adorned the walls. She eagerly shared her time with me, but it was clear that her professional life brimmed with activity and commitments. During our conversations, her phone rang often and occasionally students or faculty members stopped by to talk with her. During the 15-week semester when I interviewed Quinn, she taught six different courses, some online and others face-to-face. She admitted that this load was high, even for MCC where instructors dedicate nearly all of their time to teaching. Quinn added, though, that teaching online courses—especially introductory ones—typically requires less of her time than face-to-face ones after the class has begun. For online courses, she

spends time setting up the classes before the semester begins. Once the course is underway, much of it is automated or requires administrative tasks that may be tedious but can be done quickly. Quinn explained,

The online classes are a lot of work in little things, but the structure of the class is embedded, it's there. I don't have to go online and turn a test on. It's done. There are a lot of things that are automated in the class... I go in and spend the first week of school setting up everything for the whole semester. So it's done [when the course begins].

Besides her teaching, Quinn is interested in scholarship on teaching and learning, both reading about it and engaging in it. She reads business education journals and attends conferences on business education and online teaching, aiming for two conferences per year in the summer. Her dissertation on reflective learning in the workplace also attests to her inquisitiveness and passion for learning.

Despite the heavy teaching load, Quinn enjoys her job at MCC, although she did not initially plan to be a professor. After college, she worked in the technology industry in marketing and sales but guessed that she might like teaching. She taught web design and computer classes on an adjunct basis at Red River Community College and decided to seek a full-time teaching position, with the intention of eventually working at a university. She was hired by MCC at a time when community college full-time teaching positions were scarce and decided to stay. One for staying was the institution's mission. She became passionate about teaching community college students, whom she saw as often needing extra support to stay motivated and engaged in courses. She commented,

The middle and the bottom [of the achievement ladder] are the students that we get... As a community college, our role and our job is to give these people a second chance, to give them an opportunity that maybe other people didn't [give them]... We've got to figure out how to engage them and excite them.

MCC is an open enrollment institution, so applicants are not required to meet a particular level of previous academic achievement. As a result, as Quinn pointed out, MCC serves many students who need extra support academically. The open enrollment policy also contributes to high overall enrollment, which helped spur the expansion of online course offerings and the creation of the centralized Online MCC office.

Teaching Introduction to Business

I observed Quinn's Introduction to Business course that enrolled about 50 students, divided into two sections. Quinn developed the master syllabus for this course and has taught it for several years, both online and face-to-face. Since it is a survey course, Quinn tried to keep the material accessible to students new to business. She explained that as an introductory course, the curriculum

is very low in regards to [students'] need to be able to apply... and analyze [content]... I think that when I first started teaching, I wanted every single class to require students to think at this high level. For me, having a better understanding of curriculum [now]... every class can't be at that high level. After Intro to Business, they're going to go to marketing and management and take those other courses that are at the higher order of the taxonomy, versus that [introductory] class.

The focus on basic concepts and knowledge acquisition was not always how Quinn taught the course. She recalled,

The first time I taught Introduction to Business, I had students do a business plan. That's just completely unrealistic... But I was a new teacher; I didn't know that. I'm always trying to figure out: what are we doing here? What's the point? And then... not trying to go too far.

Quinn modified the course after realizing she expected too much from students. Over time, and through a process of trial and error, the learning objectives for Introduction to Business have come to focus on knowledge acquisition and comprehension, as opposed to application and synthesis of ideas, for example.

YouLearn and Integrate: Publisher-Developed Online Learning Tools

Students participated in discussion forums in Introduction to Business, but these forums were not intended to be central to students' learning in the course. Quinn saw discussion boards as not interactive enough, perhaps because of limitations of the way the LMS operates. She commented,

One of my biggest disappointments with the progression of [the LMS] has been the lack of it being interactive. In [Introduction to Business] the discussion boards are flat; it's not a rich discussion... I would like for it to be a little bit more... back and forth. And it doesn't work that way.

As a result, she relied on other ways to achieve what she considered interactive learning. She explained,

I don't treat the discussions like the "meat" of that [Introduction to Business] class. In some of my classes, in the discussion boards I'm actually introducing new concepts. But in the Introduction to Business class, I don't need to do that because I've got these other rich tools to do those kinds of things.

These tools are YouLearn and Integrate, which are web-based tools created by the publisher of the course textbook. YouLearn is meant as a study tool and Integrate is designed to provide a way for students to apply what they learn in course assignments.

Quinn believed strongly in the high-quality content and effectiveness of the textbook and web-based learning tools of YouLearn and Integrate. She even coordinated with representatives of the textbook publisher to recruit other instructors to incorporate the learning tools into their classes. The representatives worked with Quinn to provide optional face-to-face training sessions encouraging students to utilize the study aid YouLearn. I attended one session held in MCC's student union, organized by Quinn and facilitated by three textbook representatives. Students received extra credit and pizza for participating. The publisher representatives demonstrated the features of YouLearn on a screen at the front of the room while students followed along on their own computers.

YouLearn and Integrate played a central role in the design of Quinn's Introduction to Business course, as it looked in Fall 2013. These tools were intended to help students review textbook content and allow them to complete assignments that are auto-graded and linked to the instructor's grade book. The most valuable aspect of YouLearn, Quinn said, is that it utilizes adaptive learning technology that tracks students' progress and provides study tools accordingly. For instance, a student might complete several fill-in-the blank practice questions, and the tools repeat—in the current study session and in future sessions—the questions that the student

answered incorrectly. The tool was also designed to take into account students' self-reported level of comfort with material, which Quinn saw as supporting the development of students' metacognitive skills. Quinn commented, "Students are actually getting a feel for their own study habits and their own study skills and where they should study more or less." The application does this by allowing students to record their level of confidence with each response.

Integrate content material is directly linked to the course's textbook. Integrate's role in Introduction to Business was to prepare students for class and to take the place of activities that students might be doing in class if it met face-to-face. Quinn reflected that Integrate

is very important because students are not just reading and regurgitating the text. They're actually engaging with the material like they would do in a classroom, in a more valuable kind of way. They're watching video cases, answering questions, and interacting with business case studies like we would do and talk about in the classroom.

Quinn used the Integrate assignments as a replacement for a stock market simulation activity that students do in her face-to-face version of this course. The simulation activity, Quinn decided, did not work for the online class because it did not have clear beginning and end points. She explained,

I don't do that [simulation] online because I've not figured out a way to do it without throwing something else out there that would confuse a consistent flow. I try to not put things in an online class that don't have consistent intervals. Because... it seems like students kind of get a rhythm going that it's hard for it to not be the same... But for the most part, my approach to teaching a class online is the same as it is on ground, except that I'm using technology to build in some of that richness through some of these interactive assignments.

Quinn summarized, “The class has evolved in terms of updating the online class, integrating some publisher videos and publisher content that make the course a little bit more rich than how the class started.” While her initial online class was based on her face-to-face version of it, she has changed the online version to make up for limitations of the mode by adding publisher-created, Internet-based tools. These tools offered several advantages, and she has even incorporated the tools into her face-to-face courses, to some degree, because of these benefits. For instance, she encourages both online and face-to-face students to use YouLearn because it models effective study habits. Overall, Integrate made up for the absence of in-class interaction and simplified her teaching responsibilities by auto-grading assignments.

“Teaching is So Personal”: Reflections on the Master Course System

Despite some initial resistance to the master course system that was perceived by some faculty to diminish instructor autonomy and academic freedom, faculty have become more accepting in recent years, Quinn said. She described the attitudes of administrators and faculty toward online education,

It seems that [online education at MCC is] accepted but... some of the faculty are probably not sure yet... But I think we’ve gotten to the point where everybody feels like, “Okay, this is not going anywhere, it’s not a fad.” The administration is saying, “This is the way of the future.” But faculty are still in different camps about it.

Quinn noted her own reservations about online education, which seemed to have more to do with its particular implementation at MCC than the effectiveness of the mode in general. She worried that MCC may be moving too quickly in its efforts to increase online enrollment and wondered

whether the institution should take time to figure out if online courses are really serving all of the students who take them. Quinn explained,

I'm probably one of those people who feel like, "I'm not sure if this is going to work for everything." Some faculty are gung ho about it, but I think there may be some holes in it. I'm not sure if everything's going to translate online. Not sure if this is helping some of the students who need the most help. So, I have some questions about it... Most schools are going online and we're going full speed ahead, but there has not been a campus-wide discussion about it and there's not a lot of discussion among faculty.

Quinn's remarks suggest mixed feelings among MCC faculty—and within Quinn herself—about the institution's strategy to offer online courses using a master syllabus plan. In our conversations, Quinn expanded on her reservations, which were in response to two aspects of teaching online at MCC: the master course approach and the limitations of the LMS and asynchronous online environment to serve all students.

First, Quinn's hesitation to embrace the master syllabus approach to teaching stems from her view that teaching is personal. Teaching from a pre-designed course, Quinn said, is difficult because the instructor does not always understand the reason for a particular assignment, for instance. Making adjustments to an already-designed course in order to personalize it or insert an instructor's own teaching goals can be challenging. Quinn commented that, although each master course has an instructor manual written by the faculty member who designed the course, that manual can still be difficult to follow. She commented,

To me, teaching is so personal, so it's hard to know why [an instructor] set it up a particular way, or what was their intention behind something... Because you're asking [the new instructor] to facilitate something that they didn't create. I think of it like this: somebody

creates a flyer in Microsoft Word and then you have to go in there and change it.

Sometimes it's easier just to make your own flyer.

Recalling her own experience teaching a course designed by someone else, she reasoned,

We all teach differently, which is why I'm not sure about us having these [master] classes. I'm still not sure about that. If you want to teach a class, shouldn't you be able to teach it the way that makes sense to you and feels genuine and not awkward? I've taught classes that I didn't create and found that to be a very awkward experience.

Quinn described a diagram she created to represent an overview of the course content and structure. The diagram was displayed on the course's home page so that students viewed it each time they logged into the course, and she believed that this graphic representation of the course plan was useful to learners. However, it was replaced with the Online MCC logo in the centralized office's efforts to standardize online education and build the brand of Online MCC. This is an example of tensions Quinn has encountered between personalizing instruction and teaching in a virtual environment that is overseen by a centralized office that values standardization.

Second, although Quinn has enthusiastically incorporated new technologies into her teaching, she questioned whether the asynchronous online environment of the LMS suits all learners, particularly those at MCC who, Quinn observed, are not necessarily full-time students:

I think our students probably have more needs and more barriers. They have kids, they have families, they're working, they're not on campus. "Student" is not who they are by definition. It's probably a secondary or third-level [identity] of who they are.

Given the student body demographics that Quinn observes at MCC, she wondered whether the online environment—as students encounter it through the institution’s LMS—adequately engages and supports these students. She explained,

The thing I’m struggling with is, in an online environment, are students really getting an experience that facilitates really learning, deep learning? We’re doing more online education. Should we be pausing to think about some of this, based on the requirements of the economy and society and where students are and how they come to us, especially at a community college when students have more challenges and more needs? Is this really a good way to be doing this? I just wonder about that.

Specifically, Quinn questioned whether the absence of face-to-face contact allows her to identify and reach out to students who may need additional support. She reflected,

Our students probably have more needs than other groups of students, and they’ve got more going on... There are a lot of cases when they’re not able to manage it... and I can’t tell where there’s a need for intervention because I can’t see them.

Whenever possible, Quinn has taken on the job of supporting her students in ways beyond teaching course content. If she notices a student having difficulties unrelated to the course, she refers them to a campus office that offers appropriate support. Without face-to-face contact with her students, Quinn worried that she is not able to identify those students who need help. This concern illustrates Quinn’s approach of playing an active role in assisting students.

Another example of this goal in practice is Quinn offering herself as the first line of support when students have technical difficulties, even though MCC staffs an IT support office available to students. Quinn described her reasoning,

I do prefer that students come to me first [with technical issues]. Once a student asks me, I very rarely direct them to somebody else. I'll email [tech] support myself or the publisher [of the online learning tools] and try to figure out what's going on. Now, some students will go to those guys first, but I usually try to figure things out as much as I can with the students... I think it's because I want to know what's going on, because if it's a big problem, it may not be [affecting] just one student. It may be something I need to better understand to be able to be proactive next semester about it. But I feel accountable that I put you [the student] in this environment, so I'll figure it out for you.

In part, this preference to assist students herself comes from wanting to be alerted to issues that may be affecting multiple students, but it also comes from a feeling of responsibility for making sure students are successful navigating the online environment.

With the automated assessment and no face-to-face contact with students, Quinn has missed interacting with students about course material, and she wondered where the teaching happens in this course. She decided that, besides the announcements that she sends during the course, the *teaching* happens when the course is designed. She explained that when it comes to teaching in this course,

You've got curriculum design and then I get this little announcement. Every once in a while... you'll get an email from a student who says, "I don't understand this concept."

And you say, “Yay! You want to talk about it? You want to come to my office?” ... You wonder how much teaching is really happening.

This narrow teaching role perceived by Quinn frustrated her at times because it limited opportunities to enrich the course with spontaneous discussions and her ability to identify students needing additional support or encouragement.

“The Best Way for Them to Learn is to Go To Work”: Engaging Students Online

Quinn believes that learning occurs when students are engaged with topics or ideas that relate to their own lives, whether at work or not. She elaborated,

Learning is extremely exciting, like when you’re learning something new. For me, it’s a personal belief... I know personally and professionally that... when people engage with material and learn by doing... that it’s going to be a lot stickier... I remember sitting [in college] thinking “I don’t understand half of this stuff” and not getting it until I got to work. So, I’m always thinking, “How can I make students get it now, before they go to work?” Because we do know that the best way for them to learn is to go work. And maybe talk about it while they’re working, or reflect back on it... I’m trying to create a work environment in the classroom for them to make those connections.

Quinn has sought ways to make learning fun and connected to students’ daily lives. For instance, she organizes an annual online Super Bowl party for students to interact with her through social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, and discuss ads aired during the game. Quinn even awards small prizes to students. Although the Super Bowl party occurs just once per year and is not mandatory for students, this example demonstrates Quinn’s creativity and enthusiasm for engaging students by using familiar current events to stimulate discussion of relevant business topics.

Because Quinn believed in connecting course material to real world events, she was especially frustrated by the limitations of the LMS and online teaching environment that prevent her from doing this. She felt limited in her ability to teach or interact with online students in ways that are not pre-planned in the initial course design. In face-to-face classes, she typically spends the first ten minutes of each session discussing relevant current events, but she lacks this opportunity online. She occasionally sends class announcements through the LMS drawing connections between course topics and current events, or she creates new discussion forums inviting students to comment. However, she questioned whether students read the announcements, and the non-mandatory discussion forums elicit scant participation. Quinn has avoided mandating participation in these last-minute discussions because the class is already carefully planned for students, and she worried that changes would confuse or frustrate students. She reflected,

One of the things we learned when we first started doing this [teaching online]... is that you've got to have a system. I mean, this is how the class is laid out, this is what we're going to do. If I start adding assignments, students think, "What is she doing?" That's not a good experience either, if I'm just throwing stuff at them all the time. But the thing is, on campus, I can throw them stuff all the time without having to grade it or change anything because I always have the face-to-face conversation.

Quinn is enthusiastic about social media (she also teaches a social media class) and connecting material to current events but feels that the current LMS and course structure prohibit integrating these elements effectively into her teaching.

“I Do Think More Structurally About the Course”: Effects of Teaching Online

Although the online format at times feels constraining and overly-rigid to Quinn, she also described the positive influence that teaching online has had on her teaching. Quinn reflected that designing online classes led her to reflect on her face-to-face teaching in constructive ways. The Online MCC office requires designers of online classes to “storyboard” courses. Instructors create a detailed plan for the course, from start to finish, including all assignments, readings, and exams. Quinn reflects,

Having gone through that process [of storyboarding] and seeing that visual of that class and how it’s connected, I now look at my other classes that way, even on ground. In every one of my classes now, I can tell the students, “This is where we’re going, and why we’re doing this assignment.” ... I can now explain the journey to the students, what it’s like, up front, at any point in time, because I do think more structurally about the course, having designed those online classes.

Quinn articulated a phenomenon that Victoria also mentioned and other researchers have found in studies of online instructors (e.g., Baran et al., 2013; McShane, 2004). Teaching online can prompt instructors to become more reflective about their teaching practices in general and can even lead to changes in how they teach their face-to-face courses.

Summary

Quinn worked for several years in the technology industry before she tried teaching at the college level and eventually taught full-time at MCC. She enjoys the community college student population and the challenge of teaching online, but she harbors concerns about limitations of the LMS and the master course approach to online education at MCC. Quinn’s course that I observed, Introduction to Business, is one she has taught many times and redesigned over the

years. A main feature of the course is publisher-created online tools, YouLearn and Integrate, designed to help students study and apply their learning. Quinn believes that these tools enhance student learning by facilitating engagement with class material and, thus, filling the gap left by a lack of face-to-face class time in which students can be “playing around with the concepts.”

As someone who teaches both online and face-to-face during the same term, Quinn often reflects on the differences and similarities between the two teaching environments. She finds that opportunities for spontaneous conversations about current events, for instance, are lacking in the online environment but believes that the environment has the potential to support these types of teaching moments, if the right tools are used. Quinn also notes that teaching online—and the necessary careful planning and assembly of materials that goes into designing an online course—has improved her face-to-face teaching by helping her articulate for students the “big picture” of the course plan and objectives.

Chapter 6: Cross-Case Analysis

All instructors offered their perspectives about the virtual teaching environment and what it is like to teach online, and they shared thoughts about what this means for students. The distinction between instructor and students, or between teaching and learning, reflects the body of research about online education, which is generally divided into studies of instructor or student perspectives, as I noted in Chapter 2. In the first part of Chapter 6, I describe cross-case themes organized by whether they are focused on teaching or learning. Table 2 provides a reminder of the key features of each case. In the second part of this chapter, I explore instructors' views of the constraints and affordances of online teaching and examine the equivalency framing by describing the ways in which faculty view online and face-to-face teaching as the same or different.

Table 2: Key Features of the Cases (reprinted from Chapter 3)

	Mona at PVC	Noah at PVC	Victoria at MCC	Quinn at MCC
The Course				
Title	Leadership	Management Principles and Cases	Shaping the Customer Experience	Introduction to Business
Length of course	8 weeks (condensed format)	8 weeks (condensed format)	15 weeks	15 weeks
Level of course	300-level	400-level	200-level	100-level
Major assignments	Team research paper	Four written case analyses, in teams	Blog posts and journal entries	Activities and exercises in Integrate; end-of-term career poster
Enrollment in section	20 students	20 students	30 students	25 students
Quizzes and Exams	Weekly multiple-choice quizzes	None	Multiple-choice unit quizzes and final exam	Multiple-choice unit quizzes
The Instructor				
Teaching load during Fall 2013	One course with two sections	One course with three sections	Four courses (some with multiple sections), online and hybrid	Six courses (some with multiple sections), online and face-to-face
Most frequent teaching mode	Vast majority of teaching is online	Vast majority of teaching is online	Teaches online, face-to-face, and hybrid	Teaches online, face-to-face, and hybrid
Has dedicated office space on campus?	No	No	Yes	Yes
Graduate training	MBA, PhD in higher education	MBA, PhD in higher education	MBA, PhD in business	MBA, DM in executive leadership
The Institution				
Institutional approach to online education	Instructor owns the course; committee periodically reviews course	Instructor owns the course; committee periodically reviews course	Master courses overseen and approved by centralized office	Master courses overseen and approved by centralized office
Type of institution	4-year residential campus with remote degree completion centers and online programs	4-year residential campus with remote degree completion centers and online programs	2-year community college	2-year community college
Enrollment at institution	2,600 students (undergraduate and graduate)	2,600 students (undergraduate and graduate)	18,000 students	18,000 students

Themes about Learning or Students

Views about Learning and Course Objectives

Instructors held a variety of views about learning and the type of learning outcomes their

courses promoted. Noah and Mona both believed that learning occurs through interactions with others and used student teams in their courses. For Mona, this perspective was especially influential in her design of the leadership course where students' experiences working in teams represented a primary way they learned the concepts of the course. For Noah, learning to think critically and use evidence from texts (versus personal experience) was paramount to the course objectives. He believed these were general skills that would carry over to other courses and life experiences. Noah occasionally referred to these types of skills, such as thinking critically, as liberal arts learning outcomes that he aimed to foster in all of his courses.

Quinn and Victoria, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of skill-building in their courses and the need to train students for work settings. Victoria believed that one of the key objectives in her course was teaching students to write well, particularly in business settings, which could be considered a liberal arts outcome that is not specific to preparation for a particular career path. However, her underlying view of education was that students should learn skills applicable to work settings. Quinn's course focused on knowledge acquisition, perhaps because of its introductory nature, which she explained was a survey course meant to introduce students to a wide array of basic business concepts and terms. Her assignments on Integrate and the study aids she offered through YouLearn emphasized learning through repetition and memorization.

Student Characteristics and Course Level

One important difference between PVU and MCC cases was the course levels. Mona and Noah taught upper-level courses, while Quinn and Victoria taught 100- or 200-level courses. On average, students in these courses differed in their experience with subject matter and with college-level coursework. Noah and Mona had taught some of their students in other courses,

which is perhaps more likely in an upper-level course requiring prerequisites. Students also differed across cases because of institution type. MCC students were community college students taking classes for a wide variety of reasons: some may work full time and take a course for professional development, while others may have recently graduated from high school and may be taking community college courses on their way to a two-year or four-year degree. Student demographics likely overlapped to some degree between the PVU and MCC courses, though, because PVU attracts community college transfer students, Noah and Mona explained. However, the PVU students in the courses I observed were more likely than the MCC students to have already declared a business major in a four-year degree program.

Perceptions of Students

Despite little or no contact with their students, instructors reported that they get to know students well. Victoria even believed that she gets to know her online students *better* than students in her face-to-face courses. She suggested that this may have been because students tend to be more forthcoming in virtual spaces and feel more comfortable sharing about themselves in writing in a non-group setting, compared to the face-to-face classroom in which students talk in a group. Noah and Mona echoed the point that the online mode does not prohibit them from getting to know their students and may even enhance their ability to do this. They both explained that students are not able to “hide” online as they might be able to do in classroom setting; students must contribute to an online discussion and they are assessed on their contributions. Mona noted that she gets to know students in different ways than she would if she taught them face-to-face. Students put all communication in writing online, so Mona said she gets to know “how they think” because, in Mona’s view, writing may better approximate cognitive processes than on-the-spot discussion comments.

Although instructors perceived that the online setting could benefit students who are more comfortable participating virtually versus face-to-face, some instructors also observed that particular students were hindered by the online mode of learning because of a lack of technical ability. Two of the four instructors, Quinn and Mona, had noticed students lacked technical ability and comfort with computers, although this was rare. They believed that this interfered with these students' participation or success in the course. Both Mona and Quinn offered support to help these students overcome this limitation: Mona encouraged them to watch an orientation video and answered questions about using the LMS, and Quinn encouraged students to meet with her for one-on-one tutoring sessions. Quinn even kept a notebook in which she recorded notes about students, including her perception of their comfort level with computers.

Themes about Teaching or the Instructor

Grading and Assessing Students

All instructors except Noah used brief multiple-choice quizzes (i.e., about ten questions) to periodically assess how well students were learning the material and to provide incentive for students to complete course reading assignments. (Noah at one time used quizzes in the course but removed them to focus more on discussions.) Mona and Quinn used items from a question bank created by a textbook publisher, but Victoria wrote her own questions for the test bank because she did not use a textbook for her course. In each course, the LMS drew questions randomly from a test bank of about 50 to 75 to create each student's quiz or exam. At MCC, the order of answer choices was presented randomly so that if different students encountered the same question, the correct answer would not be represented by the same response choice (e.g., the correct answer might be "A" for one student but "C" for the next student). This was meant to deter cheating, since students completed quizzes and exams on their own and could theoretically

complete them together. Although most participants used multiple-choice quizzes in their courses, only Victoria gave a final, multiple-choice exam. Mona and Quinn required students to complete an end-of-course summative assignment, though. For Quinn, this summative assignment was a career poster, and for Mona, this was a research paper that student teams wrote throughout the course.

For evaluating work that was not a multiple-choice exam or quiz (which were auto-graded by the LMS), instructors often relied on rubrics that they designed or borrowed. Noah used different rubrics for evaluating discussion posts and for assessing case study analyses that students submitted as teams. These two rubrics were created by someone else but were discovered by Noah, one at a conference and the other online, and modified by him to reflect his emphasis on deductive reasoning. The rubric for grading case study analyses stressed comprehension of concepts and identified aspects of the case that students should address (e.g., symptoms and causes at play, related theory), while the rubric for discussion participation emphasized skill development (e.g., writing mechanics, using sound arguments, engaging others).

Mona used a rubric that she created for evaluating participation in discussion forums, which represented about a third of students' grades in her course. In the rubric, she considered response frequency (i.e., number of times posted per week), response distribution (i.e., number of days posted per week), and posting quality. *Quality* meant "add[ing] significantly to the discussion by suggesting other solutions, pointing out problems, or even respectfully disagreeing." Victoria's rubrics underscored her focus on preparing students for the work force. Her rubrics stressed the skills of expressing and supporting opinions because, she said, in

business “being able to voice [an] opinion and support it in a logical way is a career-enhancing skill.”

Student Assignments

The type of assignments that instructors required varied greatly. Mona and Noah had students write group papers. Students in Mona’s course completed one research paper in teams. Mona provided a sample paper template, but aside from this Mona did not dictate the structure or topic. Noah’s students each completed four written assignments in teams, and each assignment was a case analysis that was structured according to specific prompts or topics that Noah presented. Victoria also presented prompts and clear grading criteria to follow for written assignments that were submitted as discussion posts or blog entries.

Although most of Quinn’s assignments were completed and graded through Integrate, students completed one written assignment, a career poster, at the end of the course. It was an exploratory, individually-created poster that presented information about a career that interested the student. In the assignment description, Quinn wrote,

The purpose of this assignment is for you to explore industries and careers that would interest you. You will be applying your conceptual knowledge gained from the course to describe the overall role of the specific job within an organization.

Students were asked to research their particular interest (i.e., earnings potential, examples of companies to work for, actual job descriptions) and then explain how the position would interact with the functional areas of business that were discussed in the course (e.g., human resources, accounting). While other instructors’ summative assignments tested students’ knowledge of course content, one of the main goals of Quinn’s end-of-course career poster assignment was to

motivate students in their personal career paths. The poster, Quinn said, is a kind of “vision board” for students to keep after the course to remind them of their career goals.

Teaching Load

Teaching load varied between PVU and MCC instructors, but within an institution the teaching loads were similar. Noah and Mona each taught only the course that I observed. Noah taught three sections of about 20 students, and Mona taught two sections of about 20 students. Their courses, however, were in an “accelerated” format, so each course was designed to move through material twice as fast as the 15-week courses that they sometimes teach at PVU. This teaching load is not unusual for Noah and Mona; they typically teach one or two courses each term, but each course has multiple sections of about 20 students. Although each has taught face-to-face in the past, they both teach almost exclusively online at this point in their careers.

The teaching loads for Victoria and Quinn were significantly higher. Quinn taught five courses in addition to her Introduction to Business course, and Victoria was teaching three courses in addition to her Shaping the Customer Experience course. For both Quinn and Victoria, many of their courses had multiple 30-student sections. Victoria and Quinn were “transclassroom” instructors, teaching courses in a face-to-face or hybrid format in addition to their fully online courses. For each of them, some class sessions (of the courses I did not observe) met in person during the semester that this study was conducted. This is a notable distinction between the study participants from MCC and PVU, who never visited a brick-and-mortar classroom for any of their teaching.

Allocation of Time

Participants explained that compared to teaching face-to-face courses, their course preparation is done before the semester begins instead of throughout the term. In a face-to-face

course, instructors might decide what happens in class just a day or two before class begins, but the online instructors in this study reported that the entire course is planned out ahead of time and posted online before the term starts. All assignments, readings, discussion prompts, exams, and quizzes were chosen and uploaded prior to the first day of the course. As a result, the ongoing teaching tasks in which instructors engaged while the courses were underway were different from what they might do in face-to-face courses that require weekly preparation. The ongoing teaching tasks included posting in discussion forums (Mona and Noah) and providing individual feedback. While these are also tasks required of face-to-face instructors, the online instructors said they spent more time on them because they spent no time during the term preparing for course sessions or giving live lectures.

Instructors generally devoted more time to assessment and student feedback, compared to teaching face-to-face. Mona, Noah, and Victoria, in particular, gave frequent and detailed feedback to students in response to assignments or discussion comments. Victoria believed that because most of the work of teaching her course was done before the class started, her role once the course began was to interact with students. She perceived this as a net benefit of teaching online:

[Online] your job is to interact with the students and give valuable feedback in a timely way. That's another reason why I like teaching online: I can have that focus [on students]. I don't have to worry about getting a test ready for the next unit.

This comment also highlighted Victoria's emphasis on prompt feedback, which other instructors also said was important to them in order for students to learn from what they have submitted for evaluation. Although Victoria taught several courses with at least 30 students enrolled in each course, she graded and gave comments to students on their work within a day of students

submitting the assignment. Mona and Noah were also prompt with feedback; Mona returned assignments within 24 hours. This quick turnaround was, in part, because the PVU courses were “accelerated” and meant to cover the material of a 15-week course in only eight weeks. In Noah’s course, a paper was due every two weeks and he wanted students to be able to use feedback from one paper to inform their writing of the next.

Participation and Instructor Presence

All four faculty members thought that staying in contact with students and having a presence online was important for making sure students felt connected and engaged in the courses. However, what that presence looked like and the degree of presence they maintained varied. The primary way that Mona and Noah made their presence known to students was through posting daily in discussion forums in response to student posts. Quinn and Victoria did not comment in discussion forums, aside from the initial prompt to which students responded, but they sent weekly announcements to the entire class. In these messages, they sometimes commented on student discussion posts or assignments in order to give feedback and show students that they were present. These different ways and degrees of establishing and maintaining presence in the course may be due several factors such as course level, teacher’s time available for course (i.e., teaching load), or institutional culture around teaching. I explain how these aspects might affect teaching decisions in later in this chapter.

Course Materials for Teaching

Instructors each wrote course material that summarized content and presented this material in the LMS’s “modules” or “learning units,” which were pages of text or diagrams that students clicked through. Although the material in modules was written or summarized by the instructors, the modules occasionally linked to material on the Internet, such as videos related to

the course topic. All instructors created the modules when they first started teaching the course, but they revised them to varying degrees for each new offering. Quinn and Victoria were thinking about rewriting or removing the modules in their courses. Quinn observed that the modules replicated what students were learning through Integrate, and Victoria remarked that the material in modules was becoming outdated and should be presented in an easily printable format.

A few instructors mentioned that a key role in constructing an online course is selecting course material. Noah defined good course materials as those that “extend some aspect of the reading to a deeper level” or present content in a new way. To Mona, selecting “good” course content meant “break(ing) things up into manageable chunks” and finding resources that scaffold learning to minimize confusion and boredom. Mona, as well as Victoria and Quinn, also believed that good materials and assignments encourage reflection, especially when it is related to personal experience. For instance, Victoria taught the concept of “work is theater” and asked students to reflect in a blog post on their role, script, and even costume in their own work environment.

Institutional Support and Policies for Teaching

Instructors at both institutions said that their schools offered the support of instructional designers or other support staff who could assist them with designing and putting their courses online. However, because the four instructors were experienced online teachers and they designed the four courses I observed years ago, the instructors did not call on the help of instructional designers or support staff during Fall 2013. When they designed the courses initially, they had different levels of contact with the support and administrative staff. The department chair and the Online MCC staff reviewed the course plan at different points, and an

instructional designer assisted with using the LMS. As with any new online course at MCC, the instructors created detailed outlines of the course schedule and components, called the course's storyboard. Both Victoria and Quinn believed that the process of storyboarding improved their teaching by helping them identify course objectives and the role of each assignment or reading in ensuring that students meet those objectives.

Compared to Mona and Noah, MCC instructors encountered more institutional procedures and guidelines surrounding the design and review of their online courses. Mona and Noah had their courses reviewed periodically by a committee of faculty and administrators, but the committee, Noah noted, focused more on aspects of the course such as site usability and organization of content than on the content itself. The multi-phased process for MCC instructors to propose and design a course is detailed and highly prescribed by the Online MCC office. It should be noted that as the first Dean of Online MCC, Victoria had a large role in designing the initial process through which new courses were approved and designed, so her buy-in to the system may be influenced, at least in part, from her role in designing it.

Motivation for Teaching Online

While Mona and Noah were motivated to teach online by a preferred lifestyle that suits their personality and allows for exploration of outside-of-work activities, Victoria and Quinn started teaching online in response to organizational priorities at their institution that necessitated more instructors to teach online. Mona mentioned that online teaching suits her introverted personality because she has little face-to-face communication with students and colleagues. Noah explained that he enjoys the flexible lifestyle that teaching online allows; he is a boat enthusiast and makes frequent trips to his lake house, regardless of whether class is in session. Thus, Mona

and Noah sought out the opportunity to teach full time online on a long-term basis, while Victoria and Quinn were asked to teach online, in addition to their face-to-face courses.

Professional Experiences and Education

All instructors have graduate degrees in business and experience working full-time in a corporate setting. However, their experiences and education varied in some ways that may have influenced their teaching. Noah and Mona received doctoral degrees in education, in addition to MBA degrees. They occasionally cited learning theories that they encountered in their graduate education program. Noah mentioned Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives as an influence on his teaching decisions and Mona described her views of learning as socially constructed, a concept derived from learning theorist Lev Vygotsky. The graduate program, which they completed at the same time and place, may have given them foundational language or ideas for thinking about student learning in their courses.

Quinn and Victoria, on the other hand, called more on their work or personal experiences when they described their teaching decisions or views about learning. Quinn, for instance, remembered that when she was a first-year college student, she completed an assignment in which she researched a particular career path that interested her at the time. She discovered through this assignment that she did not want to pursue this career, and this experience was an impetus behind the career poster assignment. Victoria drew heavily from her experiences as a business professional and trainer when she designed her courses. Instead of lecturing, she used interactive approaches that she had employed as a trainer of business professionals. For example, she asked students to brainstorm together what they wanted to learn in the course, and she used their responses to inform her course design. This was a strategy she borrowed directly from her job as a business trainer.

Perceptions of the Asynchronous, Virtual Teaching Space

One aspect of teaching online asynchronously that multiple instructors mentioned is the ongoing, constant presence of the course. In each of the four courses I observed, there were no times when all students and the instructor gathered virtually together at the same time. Thus, students participated in class by posting or submitting assignments at any hour of the day and on any day of the week. Noah and Mona, in particular, felt the constant presence of the course, perhaps because they taught only online and participated often in ongoing class discussions. Noah, for instance, said he always sensed that he needed to check his email or log on to read discussion forums. He and Mona noted that if students have an issue or misunderstanding, addressing it as soon as possible is important so that students do not move forward with their assignments or discussions with incorrect information. For instance, a student in Noah's class misused the term *group think* in a discussion forum, and Noah intervened the next day to correct students' understanding of the term, which was a key concept in the course.

Perceptions of the LMS

Another aspect of teaching online that instructors talked about was the limitations presented by the LMS. Overall, faculty believed that the LMS structure and features did not prevent them from teaching effectively, but aspects of the LMS and virtual space limited what they could do. In particular, Quinn reflected that teaching online offers unique opportunities to use social media and incorporate existing online tools and resources into the course. She observed that teaching within the LMS, though, imposed boundaries on the degree to which she could make use of these outside resources and available tools. She remarked, "At a time when there's all this content and rich discussion [on the Internet], I'm in this box [of the LMS]." In her eyes, teaching online was confining, rather than freeing or empowering. She believed this was

due, at least in part, to having to teach the course through the LMS, which became the focus of the course rather than other online tools that were “richer” in their potential to foster learning and engagement.

Strategies to Facilitate Engagement

Facilitating engagement is an important theme for at least two reasons. First, a growing body of research on online education investigates the ways in which students engage with the people and elements of the course, such as discussions (e.g., Lowes, 2014; Savenye, 2005; Stenbom, Hrastinski, & Cleveland-Innes, 2012; Wegmann & McCauley, 2014; Wise, Speer, Marbouti, & Hsiao, 2013; York & Richardson, 2012; Zingaro & Oztok, 2012). Second, unpacking this theme underscores the importance of context in online teaching decisions, which is a key finding of this study and the rationale behind creating the ecology model of online teaching proposed in Chapter 7.

To organize the analysis that follows, I use Moore’s (1989) typology of student interactions: instructor-student, student-student, and student-content. Although all three types of interaction occurred in each course that I observed, they manifested in different ways across courses. This variation in implementation of strategies reflects different contextual factors, such as course level and instructors’ time constraints, that influence how the instructor teaches the course. In this section, I examine cases based on these categories of interaction and consider variation across courses. While the case studies and cross-case analysis rely primarily on interview data, here I incorporate to a greater extent my observations from visiting, or “sleuthing,” the online course websites.

Table 3 lists the three categories of interactions proposed by Moore (1989) and the primary ways in which each of the four instructors facilitated these interactions in her or his

course. Because I did not study all aspects of the classes, such as student work and student-to-instructor emails, this table is limited to those activities and interactions that I observed directly or that the instructor encouraged students to use. For instance, I did not read student-to-student LMS messages in Victoria's course, but I learned from interviews that she encouraged students to use this feature. As the table indicates, differences emerged by institution: MCC instructors often used similar tools or strategies for facilitating interactions, and these differed from PVU instructor' tools and strategies. Where it occurs, I suggest reasons for this pattern.

Table 3. Strategies Used to Facilitate Student Engagement

Instructor-Student Interactions				Student-Student Interactions				Student-Content Interactions			
Mona	Noah	Victoria	Quinn	Mona	Noah	Victoria	Quinn	Mona	Noah	Victoria	Quinn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums • Email and LMS messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums • Email and LMS messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcements • Face-to-face meetings (rare) • LMS messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcements • Face-to-face meetings (rare) • Email and LMS messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums • Student team discussion boards • Group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums • Student team discussion boards • Group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums • LMS messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook and other selected reading • Class discussion forums • Group work (research paper) • Quizzes • Internet research • Written papers • Videos (external content) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook and other selected reading • Class discussion forums • Group work (case studies) • Written papers • Videos (external content) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected reading • Class discussion forums • Journal writing • Quizzes and exams • Videos (instructor-created and external content) • Final exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook and other selected reading • Class discussion forums • YouLearn & Integrate • Quizzes • Videos (instructor-created and external content) • Final career poster assignment

Instructor-student interaction can be further subdivided into *instructor-individual student interaction* and *instructor-whole class interaction*. Instructor-individual student interaction occurred typically through private emails, messages sent through the LMS, or written feedback to students about assignments. Except for feedback to students, these interactions were typically initiated by students, such as requests for deadline extensions. For Mona and Noah, discussion forums were also an avenue for instructor-individual student interactions. Although all students in the class could view these written interactions, occasionally posts were messages between the instructor and an individual student. At times, for instance, students opened their posts with “Dear Professor.” The following post by Noah responds to a student comment about organizational structure:

There is a disconnect in your write-up that I don't follow. Why does the boundaryless organization structure lead to higher prices? What does this do to the traditional cost structure of the organization?

In his response, Noah addressed this particular student's comment and challenged her to clarify her question and examine her claims. While other students may have benefited from reading this interaction, only one student and Noah participated in the exchange. This is similar to the experience that students would have had in a face-to-face classroom discussion in which they observed an interaction between one student and the instructor, so in this sense the virtual environment was treated like an on-ground class environment.

Instructor-whole class interaction generally occurred either in announcements sent from the instructor or in the discussion forums. Noah and Mona frequently posted discussion forum messages directed toward all students in the course. For example, in a discussion of FedEx managers' leadership, Mona wrote,

Hi all, I think we're mostly on the same page concerning Question 3. In the example of the Memphis Hub, senior managers represent the guideline of providing modeling and training. A good manager leads by example. If followers see the manager doing things in an effective manner, they will tend to model the manager's behavior. As mentioned in the case, FedEx managers perceive their role as facilitators—and sometimes as players.

As is typical of Mona and Noah's discussion posts, this message addresses the specific points discussed by students in previous discussion posts, instead of offering a general comment.

In Victoria and Quinn's courses, on the other hand, instructor-whole class interactions primarily occurred through announcements, which is a feature of the LMS that allows the instructor to send messages to all members of the course and maintain a record of those announcements. Both Victoria and Quinn sent regular announcements (about one or two per week) that reiterated important points in the course material, commended students, summarized content, or reminded students about upcoming deadlines. For instance, midway through her course, Victoria wrote to the class in an announcement,

Hi everyone! This was the most interesting discussion! Some of you pointed out that the challenges to creating an experience culture are different depending on whether the customer comes to you or you go to the customer. Of all the challenges, I think the one that stands out most for me (personal opinion) is clearly defining what the intended experience should be since everything else depends on clearly understanding what is to be achieved. But you pointed out so many challenges that were insightful and absolutely perceptive and astute! Thanks for all the great effort on this discussion. Use the information as you continue to face the challenges of creating positive and memorable customer experiences.

Victoria used this announcement to synthesize student comments and to applaud and motivate students. Around the same time, Quinn sent an announcement reminding students to post on discussion boards and offering additional resources for learning the course content. She wrote,

I know you guys are digging into the finance chapters. You have a bit more time to post to the discussion board but don't wait until the last minute. This discussion board is personal and should make you think. Financial management has never been more important in society than it is today. Below are two links to some really cool videos that will help you tackle this section a little bit more.

In this announcement, Quinn reminded students of a required task and provided links to optional external video content. This message shows Quinn's commitment to supporting and motivating students; she often provides reminders and resources intended to motivate and even excite students about the course. As these examples suggest, Quinn tended to use a less formal tone with students, compared to Victoria. However, both MCC instructors used announcements as their primary way for communicating with the class as a whole. Student-student interaction was less extensive, and the instructor was the focal point of course interactivity. In Mona and Noah's courses at PVU, on the other hand, the "hub" of the course was the discussion forums in which students and the instructor actively participated.

Why did instructors differ in how they facilitated instructor-student interaction, and why did practices tend to vary according to institution? Teaching load might mediate the amount and type of instructor-student interaction. Compared with Mona and Noah, Victoria and Quinn taught many more courses, taught face-to-face courses in addition to online courses, and had more students enrolled in each course (about 30, compared with PVU's 20 students per course).

Perhaps because of high teaching loads and time limitations, to engage students they relied more on occasional announcements to the entire class instead of responses to individual student posts.

Other factors accounting for variation in instructor-student interaction may be student characteristics, course level and objectives, or institutional cultures and classroom norms.

Victoria noted that, in her experience teaching online at MCC, instructor posts in discussion forums actually seemed to suppress student participation in that thread, rather than facilitate it.

Mona and Noah did not appear to encounter this problem in the courses I observed, even though they frequently posted responses and challenges to students in forums. One explanation could be that students in 100- or 200-level courses, such as Victoria and Quinn's, are less comfortable with the subject matter or with expanding or challenging a point posted by an instructor, compared with students in upper-level courses. Alternatively, it may be that PVU and MCC students are accustomed to different roles of instructor and student; the teaching-learning cultures at the institutions may differ in the extent to which critical dialogue is encouraged between the instructor and students. There may be other differences in student populations; PVU students may be on average more advanced in their careers, perhaps bringing deeper knowledge of the field and being more accustomed to debating business-related issues. Without separating these influences, it is difficult to isolate the influence of one versus another, and it is possible that these various factors interact to shape student and instructor decisions and behavior.

Student-student interaction was typically facilitated through discussion forums in each of the four classes. Each class had forums in which all students responded to instructor-written prompts and then commented on one another's posts. Mona and Noah's courses included additional forums where student teams communicated about their collaborative assignments. Mona and Noah emphasized that student teams should communicate only through the team

forums—as opposed to emailing or calling one another, for instance—so that the instructor could observe team interactions and be aware of progress on team assignments. In all courses, instructors were able to observe all, or nearly all, student-student interaction, since these interactions were written and captured within the LMS. However, Victoria encouraged students to use a function in the LMS allowing them to exchange messages with one another, although the LMS offered her no way to learn the frequency or content of these student-to-student exchanges.

In Noah and Mona’s discussion forums that I observed, students were expected to carefully read all previous posts in a discussion thread before posting their own in a way that furthered the conversation. For Noah, a student’s comments were graded in part based on how well the student engaged others who posted previously, and Mona emphasized interactivity as a main purpose of the discussion forums. She commented,

I try to create discussions that are interactive. My saying is “discussions rule.” That’s the most important part of what happens in the online class, because that’s going to make it closer to an on-ground class.

Mona supported this goal with her grading criteria. She stated in her grading rubric that discussion forum comments “should add significantly to the discussion.”

In Victoria and Quinn’s courses, student-student interaction was more limited. As in the PVU courses, the primary means of student-student interaction was discussion boards, but student-to-student posts were typically brief statements of agreement or disagreement that did not necessarily engage or challenge the initial post or prompt further interaction among students. For the initial posts, Victoria purposefully limited students’ ability to view peers’ posts until after the deadline for the initial response to the prompt written by Victoria. She reasoned that the opportunity for independent thinking is reduced when students can view peers’ posts before

contributing their own. The quality of posts, she observed, improved after she used this new approach of hiding students' initial posts from view until after the deadline. Previously, many student posts—especially those who posted at the last minute—simply paraphrased or mirrored other students' comments, which indicated to Victoria that they were not doing the work of thinking and reflecting independently. I did not notice patterns in the ways prompts or assignment instructions were worded that accounted for differences in how students responded. Variation in the type of student posts across courses may have had more to do with course level or student expectations based on institutional norms than on prompting from instructors.

While Victoria's discussion forums required structured responses that met specific grading criteria, Quinn's discussion forums were meant to provide "a hang out place" for students to express and discuss opinions related to course topics. The location within the LMS where the discussions took place is called the Watercooler, a name that conveys the low-stakes, informal nature of the conversations here. She explains,

I don't treat the discussions like the "meat" of this class. In some of my classes, in the discussion boards I'm actually introducing new concepts. But in the [Introduction to Business] class, I don't need to do that because I've got these other rich tools to do those kinds of things. [In] the discussion boards, I'm always saying, "Here's a fun example, there's a fun example," to tease stuff out [and] give them something to work with.

For Quinn's course, the publisher-created online tools are meant to facilitate engagement with course material in ways that discussion boards are designed to do for the PVU instructors. The goal for both strategies is student interaction with the material, rather than passive reading or watching. In YouLearn and Integrate, students engage with material by completing activities that require them to recall or apply knowledge, such as drag-and-drop matching or fill-in-the-blank

exercises. In PVU discussion forums, students engage with material by answering a discussion prompt from the instructor and responding to other students' posts, usually by agreeing or disagreeing and stating why. Although these ways of engaging with material differ, they are both meant to require students to interact with content or other members of the course.

Looking across the four courses, the different approaches for facilitating student-student interaction led to different results: the discussion threads in Mona and Noah's classes were long and included many back-and-forth exchanges between students. The threads of discussion in Victoria's class forums started with posts that were fairly polished, but the student responses to initial posts were brief and few in number. Again, these differences in approach may be due to course level. Mona and Noah's courses were upper-level classes in which students may be better prepared to exchange and challenge ideas in a discussion forum, compared with students in entry-level courses. Another influence may be course objectives, which are related to course level. Mona and Noah's courses were designed to encourage the development of critical thinking and written communication. Quinn's course—and to a lesser extent Victoria's course—prioritized memorization of content and development of knowledge over honing critical thinking and communication skills. These different goals manifested in different ways of using the technology to facilitate engagement: Quinn used Integrate, a tool promoting memorization (e.g., fill-in-the-blank and matching exercises) while Mona and Noah relied heavily on discussion forums requiring written contributions to an ongoing discussion or debate.

Student-content interaction occurred in a variety of ways in each course. In all courses, though, students read content organized into weekly or unit-based segments, called modules (at MCC) or lectures (at PVU). These modules or lectures were pages of content written by the instructor that the student clicked through within the LMS. The content was typically summative

and brief and often linked to relevant external sites or videos on the Internet. Instructors created these modules or lectures for the first iteration of the courses and revised them to varying degrees for subsequent offerings. Quinn could not immediately recall whether she wrote the modules in her Introduction to Business course because it had been so long since she had composed them or made substantial revisions. She explained that since the course began, Integrate and YouLearn have become the primary ways in which students interact with course content, instead of the modules. She reflected that as she has created different versions of the course over the years, “sometimes you add and add and add and you forget to take away.” With the addition of Integrate and YouLearn, which present content in interactive ways, the modules have become a less important way of delivering content and she is considering revising or removing them. Similarly, in our follow-up conversation, Victoria explained that she is also considering removing the modules in an upcoming redesign of her customer experience course. Instead, students will view similar content (i.e., instructor-written summaries of key points) in a single, easily printable document, which allows them to have a “takeaway” after the course concludes.

Students in each class were also expected to engage with content by reading and watching materials chosen, but not written or created by, the instructor. Three courses used a textbook as the primary source for course readings, and Victoria relied on videos, modules, and Internet content instead of a textbook. She commented on the limitations of a textbook:

I think it’s important especially if you’re teaching business classes to come with experience because the textbooks only go so far. Articles only go so far. After 35 years in the corporate world, when I read articles and things, I walk away with something totally different than somebody who’s 20 who doesn’t have 35 years of experience. I catch

things that I know that they would not, and so relating your personal experiences is one way to help bring the concept from ten thousand feet down to a relatable [level].

Victoria emphasized personal experience as a foundation for learning course material. She reasoned that textbooks and articles are somewhat limiting because students may not yet have the experience needed to grasp a concept.

Victoria's resistance to using a textbook may be a reflection of the entrepreneurial approach that she brings to her work. Instead of choosing to use a textbook with a pre-designed way of organizing and presenting material, Victoria collected material from a variety of sources—articles, webpages, videos, her business colleagues—and organized these materials into units. She described the process of designing the course:

I had to start from scratch... I had flip charts everywhere in our basement. And Post-It notes everywhere. At first I had all these articles and videos and things. Each individual thing was on a Post-It note and I started trying to group like things together. "Okay, this article is organized like this, that makes sense. This article is organized like this." I started looking at some of these things, and eventually that is the organization that came out... There are five units, each unit has five modules, each module has five pages.

Victoria is consistent in all of her classes with her design: she includes the same number of units, modules, and pages, whether it is five (as in this course), or four or six. She explained that this is purposeful because "I try to get some type of a rhythm in every class that I design." The consistent and predictable structure, Victoria reasoned, adds to the "rhythm" of the class, which helps students stay on track with the course. Victoria later mentioned that "it takes a lot of self-discipline and commitment to take an online class, and procrastination is really easy... So, the more structure that you can give to students, for some of them, it is the only way that they can

keep it straight.” In addition to a textbook or, in Victoria’s case, instructor-developed content, all courses incorporated external video content, such as PBS documentaries. Victoria and Quinn also required students to view videos created for the course, such as lectures presented by the instructor or interviews of business professionals speaking about a course topic.

Besides reading materials and videos, instructors utilized other ways to facilitate student-content interactions. Mona, Victoria, and Quinn gave online multiple-choice quizzes or exams. Students in Noah’s and Victoria’s courses engaged with content through group papers written with other students, and Mona’s students were required to find additional sources beyond the course material for written papers. Students in the MCC courses, however, engaged with content only individually, not in teams, and coursework tended to require students to reflect on and articulate their own experiences and opinions rather than analyze written texts or resources. Quinn’s course was unique among the four because of the central role that YouLearn played in providing student-content interaction.

Course level certainly may influence instructors’ decisions about how students engage with course content. For instance, YouLearn is meant to facilitate memorization and basic knowledge acquisition, as opposed to synthesis and analysis, so Quinn believes this tool is a good fit for her introductory course. Mona and Noah’s upper-level courses required students to work in teams, which may better suit the skills of advanced students than beginning college students. Also, instructor workload may have influenced instructors’ choices of teaching methods. Quinn had a very heavy teaching load, and YouLearn’s capacity to automate some teaching tasks reduced the amount of time she needed to spend on the course. Mona and Noah, on the other hand, had lighter teaching loads and lower enrollment, so they may have had more time to spend supervising student teams and grading written work.

What Are the Constraints and Affordances of Teaching Online?

The participants described constraints and affordances of the online teaching environment, oftentimes by comparing online and face-to-face teaching. For example, Quinn was frustrated about not being able to lead spontaneous discussions about current events because of a lack of face-to-face time with students. In this section, I describe instructors' views of the constraints and affordances of online teaching and examine the equivalency framing commonly used by researchers, administrators, and online instructors themselves.

Agency, structure, and flexibility were frequent topics in comments about constraints and affordances of online teaching. Participants explained that when teaching online, they design and set up the entire course before it begins, as opposed to weekly course preparation. This involves uploading all reading and study materials, posting discussion prompts, and preparing quizzes and exams. Typically, these materials are displayed to students at the appropriate time in the course, either manually by the instructor or automatically by the LMS. Quinn noted, "You really have to have everything organized and thought through up front." This preparation requires instructors to have in mind the "big picture" of the course and facilitates a course plan that acts as a road map for students. Quinn remarked,

[The instructor's] preparation in setting up the class has to be extremely well thought-out and it has to have a consistency and a flow to it that you may or may not need in an on-ground class. There's a lot more flexibility in an on-ground class than you can't really afford to have in an online class. So early on I learned from students that classes make sense when they have a rhythm to them. If things are going to be due, they're going to be due Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, for example.

The consistent, predictable schedule created a “flow” or “rhythm” to the class that helped students navigate through the course. In some instructors’ eyes, it reduced student anxiety and the risk of students feeling disconnected from the course. Without regularized class meetings, instructors felt that students might easily feel lost and, therefore, frustrated and perhaps even lose confidence in their academic ability. Mona has observed that, even with a course calendar and announcements, “there’s still a lot of room for people to just not get that message [of course changes]” and feel “like a failure,” which Mona said can be “very emotional” for students. One person described the clear and predictable course structure as being an “anchor” for students. This anchor may be more important for online students because of the absence of regular in-person class sessions that act as footing for on-ground students to feel connected and engaged.

Faculty also reported that, while the virtual course environment required a course plan with a high degree of structure, it was also flexible in helpful ways. Students could complete work or discussion posts from anywhere and at any time, within an allotted time window, as long as students had Internet and computer access. Victoria theorized that allowing some flexibility in completing tasks balances the rigid structure of an online class that is entirely planned out from the start. She explained,

We all like to have *some* control. We [in the online class] have a schedule, and things have got to be done by specified dates. Here’s the structure, here’s what needs to be done in each unit... these are the requirements, and here are the due dates for each. But they [students] have flexibility—it’s *by* this date, it’s not *on*.

Noah noted that many of his students were “midcareer adults with families and mortgages and jobs,” and “it helps these folks if things can be flexible.”

Victoria designed her course to capitalize on this aspect of the asynchronous online environment. She allowed students to work ahead any amount so that students control the pace with which they complete the course. Once the course began, students could access and complete all assignments, reading materials, quizzes, and exams any time before the due date. However, they needed to return to discussion forums in order to respond to peers' posts, which are required, graded tasks. Few students chose to work ahead, but Victoria believed that giving this option facilitates course completion for some students. Victoria speculated,

I really think that it [whether they choose to work ahead] depends on what's going on in students' lives. They may all of a sudden have time and be able to move quickly through one unit, and the next unit there are things going on in their lives and they're barely meeting the deadline. It's allowing them some flexibility to balance their lives.

Victoria recalled one student who was laid off from his job and chose to work ahead because he did not know when he would be called back to work.

The drawback of a highly structured and predictable course plan is that mid-course revisions and spontaneous discussion are difficult. When students became dependent on the course structure and a predictable schedule to remain engaged, it reduced opportunity to revise or add discussion prompts to reflect relevant current events, for instance. When asked whether she makes changes to the course after it begins, Mona replied,

As it goes, not many. A lot of times I'll say, "Oh for next time I teach..." It's a lot easier to make changes on ground... You never know if somebody's checking all the right places [to see the change]... But there's a lot of room for people to not get that message [about the change], so if you change it, they may... get really upset... It's very emotional when something like that happens for the students, so I don't like to make changes. I

mean, I'd love to, but I think it's just not [worth it], even if it would improve the current course.

Because of the difficulty and risk involved in making changes, instructors generally waited until the next offering of the course to revise it, even if they thought that the adjustment would improve the course.

Quinn found that the structure made it difficult to discuss current events that may enrich students' learning by connecting course content to real world events. The benefits of altering the course to improve it while it is underway, she noted, are generally outweighed by the potential for students to feel lost or frustrated by the departure from the initial course schedule. She said,

The flexibility is just not there [online], with regard to keeping the class interesting because... you can't really add stuff because the students are usually very focused on the structure and how things are going to be done. Even in an on-ground class you don't want to be changing the whole syllabus every week, but you always have that one-on-one interaction with the class. In an online class, you don't have that. It's a [pre-defined] process: This is where we are going to go, and this is how we're going to get there. You don't want to confuse people by adding a whole bunch of stuff during the semester.

The feeling of being constrained or limited by the virtual environment was particularly strong for Quinn, an avid user of social media and online tools for gathering and reading news. In our conversation about spontaneous, in-the-moment changes to the course, Quinn recalled,

Last week Amazon announced, "We're going to deliver books with drones." What?! I sent an announcement to students saying, "Hey, this is interesting, you should look at this link." And I don't know if students looked at it or not.

Although the course itself is housed online, the LMS and inflexible course plan prevented Quinn from utilizing online tools and resources that, she believed, may have supported learning. Within the wider virtual space, Quinn saw herself as occupying a “box” with hard-to-permeate boundaries separating her course from the wider Internet and virtual environment.

Of course, face-to-face teaching also presents structure and agency for the instructor. For instance, face-to-face interactions provide more opportunity for back-and-forth discussion but present restrictions on how often students interact with faculty. Adapting to teaching in the online environment, with different limitations and affordances than the face-to-face environment, seemed to prompt reflection on teaching online. In these reflections, their face-to-face teaching was oftentimes the “elephant in the room.” Although my study was not designed to examine transitions to teaching online from face-to-face settings, instructors seemed to view their online teaching experiences through the lenses of face-to-face teaching experiences.

These comparisons or analogies to face-to-face teaching experiences revealed both discomfort with and support for treating online and face-to-face teaching as equivalent or interchangeable. Mona, on one hand, emphasized that she does not view online teaching as very different from face-to-face teaching. She explained, “My goal all along is to try to emulate a face-to-face classroom as much as possible.” For the MCC instructors, the message that online classes should match face-to-face course outcomes and pedagogies came, at least in part, from the institution. Quinn explained,

How we define instruction here is not supposed to be separate [between online and face-to-face]. So, my Introduction to Business class online and on ground has the exact same objectives. ... It’s not supposed to be different. If I say I’m going to assess Introduction to Business with a cumulative exam, that online class has to be able to be assessed the exact

same way. You cannot treat curriculum differently. So, how it's taught online or on ground is the *how*, but the objectives are consistent and assessment is consistent.

It seemed clear to Quinn that the administration's message was that online and face-to-face courses must be equivalent in as many ways as possible.

Noah and Victoria expressed views that were, in a way, opposite to Mona's. They viewed online and face-to-face teaching as very different and described these as "two completely different animals." Noah explained with an analogy:

I think people who teach face-to-face ... envision online as kind of, "Oh, I'm going to do this stuff I've done, it just has to be online." But it's very different. It really is like: I've got a car and I've got a boat, and both of them have internal combustion engines, and both of them are used to get from here to there. But it's a very different way of operation. In a car, you have to follow the rules. In a boat you can go anywhere you want to go. In a car it doesn't matter if you get up and ... you walk from one side to the other. In a boat, it matters. The boat's going to be less stable. We [online instructors] are kind of doing the same thing [as face-to-face instructors], but it's very different, the way you do it. Pulling a boat into the dock, you have to pay attention to the wind and a whole bunch of other things. But with a car, you know, it's a different sort of way of doing it.

Victoria echoed Noah's point, noting that each mode of teaching presents particular strengths and drawbacks that the instructor needs to take into account:

I think that, based upon modality, you need to work within the strengths and the drawbacks of each. The drawback of on campus is that students will not watch the lectures and read the text before they come to class. They expect you to tell them. Because that's their expectation: they come to class and they're told what they need to

know. So you need to recognize that as well... How [the courses] are delivered and how they're realized: two different modalities.

In this comment, Victoria raised the point that the expectations that students bring differ between face-to-face classes, and this may be a key factor shaping teaching and learning experiences.

On one hand, instructors strove to make their courses “equivalent” to a face-to-face version of the course (which may or may not exist). The MCC faculty members received institutional messages that their online courses should provide student experiences that are equivalent to the experience students would receive on ground in terms of outcomes and learning tasks. However, they also acknowledged ways in which the modes differ that can affect teaching. Of course, online and face-to-face teaching can be both the same and different simultaneously. This is true for many things: playing the piano is both the same as, and different from, playing the organ, for example. The notable aspect for the four instructors is that the question of “are they the same or different?” was an ongoing undercurrent in how they experienced and conveyed online teaching. This was particularly true for the MCC instructors who also taught face-to-face courses while teaching online ones.

As I wrote in my literature review, studies comparing face-to-face and online learning typically rely either implicitly or explicitly on *equivalency theory* (Simonson, Schlosser, & Hanson, 1999) that suggests the goal of online instructors is to, as much as possible, replicate a face-to-face learning experience online. To reiterate, Simonson, Schlosser, and Hanson (1999) describe equivalency theory:

The more equivalent the learning experiences of distant learners are to those of local learners, the more equivalent will be the outcomes of the educational experiences for all learners. (p. 68)

This theory appears reasonable and perhaps even admirable, but from the perspectives of instructors, it may be out of touch with the realities of teaching online. Through hearing their comparisons of online and face-to-face teaching, I observed tensions between wanting—or being expected—to replicate a face-to-face experience in an online course and the belief that these modes differ in important ways that affect teaching and learning.

By pointing out paradoxes in what the instructors said, my aim is not to “call out” instructors for being inconsistent, within or across cases (i.e., the environment is both flexible and structured; online teaching is entirely different but also the same as face-to-face teaching). Rather, these inconsistencies highlight a tenet of activity theory: As social beings, we experience “contradictions,” which “manifest themselves in disturbances and breakdowns in work processes as well as workers’ innovative attempts to solve them” (Hasu & Engstrom, 2000). Peruski (2003), who used an activity theoretical framework to examine online course design, wrote that contradictions can actually “be openings for learning, and transformations in thinking, work processes and systemic change” (p. 16).

The case studies revealed contradictions spurred by environmental circumstances and gave support to the idea that these contradictions stimulate reflection and learning. Instructors at MCC, for instance, agreed to teach their online courses using the same course objectives and grading criteria as the same course offered face-to-face, but they acknowledged that the tools and student interactions in their online courses differed in important ways. Instructors wrestled with the questions: How is the course the same across formats? How is my teaching the same? In what ways is my role as instructor the same or different? The experience of contradictions presented by environmental changes in teaching underscores that identities and behavior are

inextricably linked to environment. This also raises the need to consider environmental and contextual influences when studying online teaching.

Summary

Oftentimes, faculty viewed their online teaching through the lens of their face-to-face teaching, and they compared the affordances and constraints of each. This resonates with Moore's assertion about distance education made in 1973, "To understand the teaching system [of distance education] we must modify traditional concepts of teaching according to *both the restraints and opportunities that are consequences of distance and autonomy*" (p. 663, italics added). As Moore suggests, understanding the challenges and affordances presented online is important for supporting the growing number of online teachers. The case studies highlight that the experience of online teaching in a higher education environment in which face-to-face teaching is the norm means making sense of contradictions. These contradictions result from faculty engaging in ongoing comparisons of teaching modes in order to understand how the modes are similar and different and what this means for their teaching.

Chapter 7: Toward an Ecology Model of Online Teaching

The cross-case analysis and case studies highlighted the contextual factors, such as course type and level, LMS features, and instructor background, that can affect online teaching decisions and experiences. For instance, teaching decisions depended on the particular course topic, level, and learning objectives as well as instructor views about learning. A focal point of Mona's leadership course was the use of student teams. She used teams because of her socioconstructivist view of learning and because of the course topic: she wanted students to have experience *leading* within their groups. Quinn relied heavily on publisher-developed online learning tools. She valued these automated tools for two reasons: learning aims in the course focused on knowledge acquisition, a goal supported by Integrate, and her heavy teaching load did not permit her to provide much personalized instruction or feedback. Institutional policy and practical considerations contributed to the availability of these tools. Only recently, she was able to incorporate Integrate into the course because of an upgrade to the LMS that enabled seamlessly linking Integrate with the LMS.

Clearly, context matters in face-to-face teaching as well. However, an assumption of the equivalency claim is that these contextual factors matter in the same way, regardless of teaching mode. If an instructor has a socioconstructivist view of learning, for instance, this perspective shapes her teaching decisions in both online and face-to-face environments. However, differences in the environments affect what she is able to do. Mona, for example, must understand constraints and affordances of the online environment in order to teach in a way that facilitates peer learning. Because her course was asynchronous and fully online, Mona could not

meet with all members of a student team at the same time (which she could do in a face-to-face course), but she could stay informed of teams' progress through the ongoing student interactions all captured in online forums (which she could not do in a face-to-face course). This affordance actually allowed Mona to identify and intervene in a team conflict that was interfering with the team's productivity and learning.

Much of the research about online teaching focuses on the individual instructor separate from his or her context (e.g., institution or course) or background (e.g., professional experiences or education). A fuller picture of online teaching should consider course context (e.g., content, level) and the interaction of the instructor with the broader campus environment. For instance, studies often investigate the effectiveness of online teaching by comparing learning outcomes between face-to-face and online courses and assume all other conditions (besides instruction mode) across groups are consistent, or even equivalent. However, contextual factors may, in fact, differ in important ways. These factors could include instructor preparation to teach in a particular mode, institutional support for teaching and course design, and rate of uptake of instructional support services. Thus, a framework for studying online teaching should acknowledge the multiple contexts within which it is embedded so that researchers can start to understand the many interrelated variables shaping it. An ecological view of teaching may provide a useful lens for explaining and respecting differences that appear across cases.

An Ecology Model of Online Teaching

As I analyzed data for this study and developed the four cases, the importance of contextual factors shaping online teaching experiences became evident. This is not surprising given that the case study method is designed to reveal the importance of context, with its emphasis on thick description. The compelling finding is not *that* context matters but *what*

matters, and *how*. The cases help answer this question. For instance, contextual influences varied across institutions as well as by individual: some influences were at the institution level, such as the presence of a centralized office for online education, and some were at the level of the individual, such as teaching values. Others still were at the societal level, such as the influence of proprietary companies pressuring the use of their particular LMSs and learning tools. For Quinn and Victoria, a centralized campus office determined the LMS and regulated aspects of their online teaching and course design. Because of their individual values, dispositions, and professional backgrounds, Quinn and Victoria experienced this influence differently. As the first dean of Online MCC, Victoria had a high degree of buy-in to the master course system. However, Quinn was slower to embrace the master course system that conflicted with her view of teaching as highly personal.

I abstracted contextual influences identified through the case studies and arranged them into a framework for understanding teaching online from an ecological perspective. To do this, I used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model of the ecology of human development as a starting point for the framework. Bronfenbrenner contends that human development, which is the focus of his model, *is affected by relations between settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded*. Similarly, I argue that the experience of teaching online, similar to human development, is affected by interconnections among settings (e.g., LMS, academic department, course, offices for supporting online education) and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (e.g., institutional structures and policies, economic and sociocultural context related to acceptance and availability of Internet-based technology).

Bronfenbrenner's model is a particularly useful framework from which to draw for two reasons. First, the model emphasizes the importance of setting and accounts for influences from

multiple settings. To understand online teaching and how best to support and train instructors, we need to understand the “multiperson system” that instructors inhabit (e.g., with whom do instructors interact? On whom do they rely for teaching and course design support?).

Bronfenbrenner reminds us that this system is “not limited to a single setting” (p. 21). The online teaching environment is, for many online instructors, coupled with face-to-face interactions with faculty colleagues, staff, and sometimes students. A framework that takes setting into account gives rise to questions such as: How do instructors navigate within and between virtual and face-to-face environments, and how do these interactions shape how they conceive of the online environment as a space for teaching and learning?

Second, the model assumes that components act on one another. In other words, their environments influence instructors, but instructors also shape these environments.

Bronfenbrenner defines the ecology of human development as

the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

Instead of *human development*, which is the focus of Bronfenbrenner’s model, my proposed model’s focus is one’s experience of teaching in an online environment. While Bronfenbrenner writes about *progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives*, I aim to model the progressive, mutual accommodation between active, developing online instructors and the changing properties of the immediate settings (e.g., LMS, academic department, course) in which the person teaches. By *mutual accommodation*, Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to

interactions between person and environment as “two-directional” and “characterized by reciprocity” (p. 22). In online teaching, this means that instructors are simultaneously acting on their environment and being acted upon by the environment and the people in it. For instance, an instructor may use a “hands off” approach to teaching, but a conflict among students can require the instructor to take a more active role.

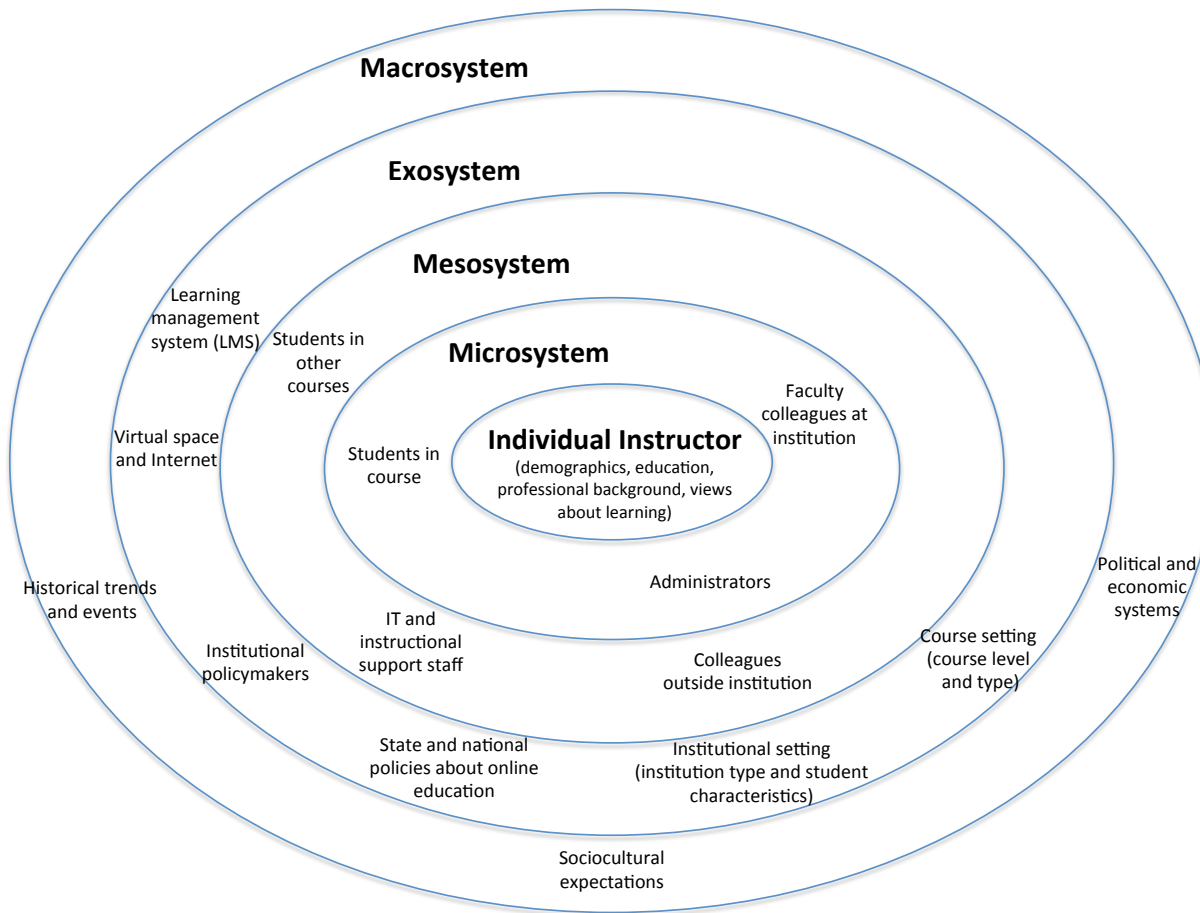
Bronfenbrenner’s framework is a model of the *ecology* of human development. It is not a model of development itself, but rather is a model of the environment and its interconnected parts in which human development occurs. Bronfenbrenner calls the components in his model and the relationships among them “the structure of the ecological environment” (Bronfenbrenner, p. 26). Similarly, I do not wish to represent online instructors’ development as teachers; indeed, my study design and data do not permit me to make claims about development, change, or the process of learning to teach online. My study did, however, provide a semester-long snapshot of the experience of four instructors teaching online courses, so my data can point to important aspects of the “structure of the ecological environment” of online teaching.

For instance, when instructors at MCC first started teaching online, the centralized online education office on their campus dictated aspects of their course design: Victoria talked about the requirement of demonstrating to course reviewers that the course plan incorporated three types of student interaction (student-instructor, student-student, and student-content). Quinn talked about being asked to change her course home page from displaying the course plan diagram to displaying the MCC logo. In contrast, Mona and Noah had less oversight from administrators on their online course design and teaching. Of course, instructors using an LMS necessarily relinquish some control of their course design because of the standardized LMS interface and features. Even so, some instructors received more frequent external guidance (or intrusion,

depending on point of view) regarding course design and teaching. These examples and comparisons suggest larger contextual factors accounting for differences between face-to-face and online teaching, such as level of instructor autonomy and institutional support.

Although Bronfenbrenner's framework was developed with a focus on child development, scholars have applied it to higher education research, particularly in the study of college student development. Renn and Arnold (2003) adapted Bronfenbrenner's framework to model the influence of peer culture in postsecondary environments, and Renn (2003) applied the framework in a study of identity development of mixed-race students. In the study of online teaching support, which is closer to the topic of my dissertation, Baran and Correia (2014) proposed a framework using an ecological perspective but not directly based on Bronfenbrenner's work. Their framework of professional development for online instructors considers the role of community (e.g., peer support and mentoring) and organization (e.g., rewards and recognition, organizational culture). In contrast with Baran and Correia's work, my framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of components across levels and accounts for environmental influences beyond the organization, such as sociocultural expectations and historical trends and events (i.e., the macrosystem). The proposed framework of an ecology model of online teaching is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. An Ecology Model of Online Teaching at the Course Level



Individual Instructor

The individual instructor sits at the center of the model and refers to several aspects of the person: demographics, views about learning and teaching, and education and professional background. *Demographics* include characteristics such as age, sex, race and ethnicity, and nationality. It may at first seem unlikely that these aspects influence an instructor’s experience teaching online given the absence of face-to-face contact. However, Mona recounted a time when a student accused her of punishing the student with a poor grade because of the student’s race. Even though they had no synchronous face-to-face contact, Mona and the student both posted photos of themselves in a course discussion forum in which class members introduced

themselves with a brief biography and photo. From this, the student and Mona were able to ascertain each other's race. In another case, age played a role in an instructor's decision to teach online. Noah wanted a flexible lifestyle that would allow him to pursue his out-of-work interests as he neared retirement, and teaching fully online enabled this.

A second aspect of the individual instructor component of the model is views of teaching and learning. This includes perceptions of self and motivation to teach online, views about the virtual environment and LMS, and perceptions of the instructor's role in online courses. For example, Mona assumed that her students should equip themselves with the skills they needed to navigate and succeed in the course. This contrasted with Quinn's belief that she was personally responsible for making sure students succeeded in her course. These two different views of the instructor's role affected how these two individuals experienced teaching online in practical ways, such as how they spent their time, and in other ways, such as how they interacted with students. Mona took a "hands off" approach to teaching online that emphasized self-directed learning while Quinn offered to assist students with all aspects of her course, even the resolution of technical difficulties for which her institution staffed a help desk.

A third individual instructor component of the model encompasses education and professional background. This includes education or training to teach online, which can influence a person's comfort and ability with either online or face-to-face instruction. In Victoria's case, her professional background as a businesswoman and business trainer heavily influenced her choice of pedagogical approaches and course content. It also shaped her teaching goals that emphasized practical skills for the workplace. In other cases, Mona and Noah's graduate degree program in education primed them for thinking about learning through the lenses of learning theorists.

Microsystem and Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines *microsystem* as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (p. 22). In the online class, the microsystem includes the virtual space of the class, primarily the LMS. Bronfenbrenner makes the point that the “pattern of *activities, roles, and interpersonal experiences* of the microsystem” (italics added) are from the perspective of the individual. For online instructors teaching a particular course, this refers to interactions with people close to the instructor as he or she teaches the course. For the four study participants, this included students in the course, faculty colleagues at the institution, and administrators (e.g., deans and department chairs) who evaluated performance. Within the microsystem, the relationships and interactions between the instructor and these groups of individuals are shaped by the characteristics and expectations of the individuals, such as students’ expectations of online courses and their motivation to learn.

Bronfenbrenner stresses the importance of going beyond the microsystem when trying to understand behavior: “Seldom is attention paid to the person’s behavior in more than one setting or to the way in which relations between settings can affect what happens within them” (p. 18). Thus, the framework includes several outer “rings” beyond the microsystem. A mesosystem, Bronfenbrenner writes, “comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)” (1979, p. 25). In the proposed ecology model of online teaching based on the four case studies, the mesosystem includes students in courses other than the one that is the focus of investigation, faculty

colleagues and professional associates outside the institution, and IT and instructional support staff.

Just as in face-to-face teaching, online teaching occurs in complex, dynamic environments, and the model accounts for this. Reward systems, for instance, are an important aspect of faculty life (Blackburn & Lawrence, 2002) that are represented in multiple systems. They are reflected in the microsystem by the administrators who evaluate performance and in the exosystem by the institutional policymakers who determine evaluation criteria. These are two separate but related variables. Both colleges in this study had institution-wide systems for evaluating teaching that were tied (loosely) to promotion and rewards. However, department- and dean-level administrators overseeing the MCC instructors seemed to weigh pedagogical approaches and student evaluations more heavily in their assessment of teaching. PVU administrators, Noah said, tended to stress user-friendliness and clarity of the course website.

Further, components may be represented in different systems for different people. For example, when considering the experiences of faculty besides the four participants, elements of the mesosystem may actually be part of their microsystem, or vice versa. The instructors who were the focus of the case studies consulted rarely, if at all, with IT and instructional support staff during the term I observed their courses. However, an instructor who is new to teaching online may interact frequently with instructional designers who may heavily influence course design and teaching. This would place the instructional designer in that person's microsystem, rather than mesosystem, since the microsystem is comprised of people with whom the instructor has close contact.

Exosystem

An exosystem is “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). For the online instructor, elements of the exosystem include the learning management system (LMS), the virtual space and Internet, institutional policymakers, state and national policies about online education, institutional setting (institution type and student characteristics), and course setting (course level and type). Institutional policymakers, for instance, may dictate how online courses are designed and who teaches them, as is the case at MCC where a centralized office manages and, to some degree, standardizes online education at the institution. Course level and type may inform the choice of course objectives and assignments used to achieve those objectives, as it did for Mona and Quinn. In Mona’s upper-level course on leadership, students worked in self-managed teams to learn and apply leadership skills and were assessed on their team interactions. Quinn’s introductory course, on the other hand, was meant to support knowledge acquisition, as opposed to knowledge application or synthesis, and the interactive activities of Integrate supported this by aiding in the memorization of key concepts.

The LMS is an important element of the exosystem for online instructors. The LMS is a critical aspect of the virtual classroom that presents a way of organizing class materials and a place for interacting with students. Some instructors may have input into which LMS their institution uses, which would mean that the LMS may fit better in this person’s mesosystem rather than exosystem. However, many others, including the four participants of this study, had little or no say in the selection of their campus’ LMS. Within a particular LMS, the instructor has some control over which components are used and how the course site is organized, but for the

most part the design of this setting is pre-determined by the LMS designers. The instructor is affected by the design of the LMS because of the limitations or capabilities it presents. Further, the LMS in the exosystem interacts with components represented in other systems. For example, student access to appropriate technology and their ability to use it affects the experience of teaching with an LMS.

The virtual space and Internet play an important role in shaping the online teaching experience. These belong in the exosystem because they are spaces in which “events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens,” but they “do not involve the developing person as an active participant.” The Internet contains a plethora of resources that faculty can draw from to design their courses and select content, but these materials are already created and the instructor does not play an active role in designing them. All of the four participants in this study drew heavily from resources available online, from videos to grading rubrics to news articles. The availability of these resources influenced their pedagogical decisions (e.g., grading criteria in rubrics) as well as their decisions about content (e.g., supplemental readings and videos). Of course, these resources are available to instructors in face-to-face settings, too. However, it may be that the online format of the course allows instructors to weave these resources into their courses more easily. For one thing, the course itself is “housed” online, essentially in the same virtual space as the resources. For another, students are already online whenever they engage with the course, making it easy for instructors to link students to these resources.

Macrosystem

The macrosystem “refers to consistencies, in the form of content of lower-order systems (micro-, micro-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies”

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). Elements of the macrosystem in the proposed ecology model of online teaching include historical trends and events, sociocultural expectations, and political and economic systems. Quinn, for example, talked about her institution embracing online education because, in her view, that is the trend with community colleges. This trend may be due to political and economic systems pressuring colleges and universities to serve more students with fewer resources. Quinn questioned whether the institution was moving ahead too quickly with the transition to offering online classes without fully understanding limitations of the mode or whether particular subgroups of students are differentially affected. Political and economic forces may also influence an institution's choice of LMS; some vendors may even offer financial or other incentives for using their products. The choice of LMS determines the features and user-friendliness of the online "classroom" and technical support available.

Advantages of the Proposed Framework

One useful aspect of the proposed framework is its capacity to help identify and understand what Bronfenbrenner calls "instances of ecological transition" (p. 26). He explains, "An ecological transition occurs whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered as the result of a change in role, setting, or both" (p. 26). In an ecological model of online teaching, these instances may include the transition from teaching entirely face-to-face to entirely online, or the transition from teaching entirely face-to-face to teaching both online and face-to-face courses. More and more instructors are being asked to make these transitions, and institutions are not yet equipped to support these transitions in meaningful, effective ways. These transitions require instructors to develop technical expertise or develop new ways of designing and teaching courses. However, developing this knowledge or these skills does not occur in a vacuum; environmental and contextual influences shape these transitions. For example, the case

studies suggest that institutional policies can serve to support or hinder teaching, and an instructor's professional background and training may or may not equip her with foundational skills and knowledge for teaching online.

A second advantage of the framework over other conceptualizations is the representation of multiple settings, including the broad macrosystem not included in Baran and Corriea's (2014) model of online teaching professional development. The macrosystem is comprised of political, economic, societal, and historical influences that may seem invisible but shape decisions and policies affecting teaching. For instance, administrators may decide to require all instructors to teach hybrid or online courses in order to accommodate a surge in enrollment, perhaps due to an economic recession or an agreement with a corporation to offer its employees discounted classes, such as the agreement between Starbucks and Arizona State University (Blumenstyk, 2014). This may result in changes to both the student population that the instructor is used to teaching as well as an expansion of the instructional modes she must learn to use.

The concentric rings of the framework graphically show that some settings and their components are more immediate and direct influences on the instructor, such as faculty colleagues, while others are more distal and play a background role, such as historical trends and events. The strength of influence of particular components, though, may vary by individual. An instructor who also directs the distance learning office may be directly affected by economic and political influences (e.g., vendors incentivizing the use of particular LMSs). On the other hand, an adjunct instructor teaching one online course while working as an accountant may experience these economic or political influences on teaching only distantly. While these forces shape both instructors' teaching experiences (i.e., the vendor may convince administrators to select its product for all online courses), the director may feel more invested in the decision and have more

buy-in to the outcome than the adjunct instructor. Thus, the influence of the macrosystem is mediated by individual-level factors.

A third advantage of the framework is the reciprocal nature of interactions among the components: environments influence instructors' thinking and decisions but instructors also shape their environments. For example, instructors at MCC spoke about being influenced by how their colleagues taught and designed courses but also about colleagues who altered their courses because of conversations with the study participants. This aspect of the framework presents an advantage over conceptualizations that emphasize internal processes without accounting for contextual factors that shape and are shaped by these processes, such as the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK) framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) proposing interrelated types of knowledge required for teaching with technology. The case studies indicate that the knowledge and assumptions about teaching online change frequently based on the instructor's encounters with colleagues, vendors, and instructional consultants. The proposed framework accounts for the dynamic nature of influences across settings shaping teaching experiences.

Summary

As the case studies highlight, understanding context is important for explaining variation in experiences, decisions, and assumptions of online teachers. The ecology model of online teaching presented in this chapter offers a general framework for studying online teaching that takes into account factors influencing teaching. However, the framework is not a complete or comprehensive model. It is meant as a starting point for creating a rich but concise representation of the primary interrelated factors that shape and define the experience of teaching online. Future research should examine the components and their relationships to refine the framework.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Implications

This exploratory study builds on a small body of research on postsecondary online teaching. Extant research tends to investigate questions about workload, satisfaction, and receptivity to online education (e.g., Bender, Wood, & Vredevoogd, 2004; Bollinger & Wasilik, 2009; Kim & Bonk, 2006; Larson, 2005; Lee, 2001) and rarely examines experiences and assumptions of online instructors themselves. To address this gap, I researched the question *how do instructors experience teaching in asynchronous online courses?* Using a grounded approach to analysis of interviews and course websites, I assembled within-case meta-themes into four case narratives of instructors teaching online business courses. I identified cross-case themes that highlighted constraints and affordances of online teaching and challenged common ways of framing and characterizing online education.

Implications for Research

Qualitative research has the potential to uncover causal mechanisms that can generate hypotheses for future research (Lin, 1998) and illuminate ways to create or extend conceptual frameworks. In Chapter 7, I proposed one such reconceptualization, an ecology model of online teaching. The framework draws from the work of Uri Bronfenbrenner whose ecological model of human development emphasizes the importance of accounting for multiple settings in which the phenomenon occurs and the reciprocal nature of interactions. Online teaching, for instance, occurs in the virtual setting but intersects with the physical setting of the instructor's work life. In these various settings, instructors interact with colleagues, students in other courses,

administrators, and IT professionals who influence instructors' experiences and decisions but also may be influenced by instructors.

The proposed reconceptualization of online teaching raises several questions for future research. For instance, the case studies highlighted the important relationship between online and face-to-face teaching in terms of how instructors think about their online teaching. In the ecology model, this can be represented by the relationship between “students in course” in the microsystem and “students in other courses” in the mesosystem. Faculty participants noted that teaching students in a particular online course (including designing and preparing all components of the online course up front) helped them to understand the “big picture” of the course and how it fits together to meet learning objectives. They reported that this actually changed their teaching and interactions with students in their face-to-face courses, too. Recent research has affirmed this connection between online teaching and increased reflection on teaching in general (e.g., Baran et al., 2013; McShane, 2004; Peruski & Mishra, 2004). Future research could investigate the conditions under which reflection is most likely to occur, how it might be guided, and the durability of changes in thinking and decision-making that result from reflection.

In the mesosystem, instructional support staff help faculty design their courses, but it remains unclear how to best provide this assistance. For instance, should administrators leave it to faculty to request the support or should all faculty be required to meet with instructional consultants? The case studies suggest that instructor characteristics and background, such as years teaching and receptivity to outside help, mediate the effectiveness of the relationship between instructor and consultant. Institutional culture and leadership can play a role, too. Institutions that prioritize centralization and standardization over faculty autonomy—and that demonstrate strong leadership to gain faculty buy-in to this approach—may have more success

with using instructional support staff to improve courses and student learning outcomes. Future inquiry could investigate who is most likely to seek out and utilize instructional support staff when designing online courses and what affects this decision.

The question of how to utilize instructional consultants to support online teaching leads to another potential inquiry related to the exosystem: When and how should faculty be involved in curriculum and course design, particularly at an institution that standardizes online education? On one hand, a master course system such as MCC's increases efficiency and may improve the consistency of teaching across multiple offerings of the same course, whether it is offered online, face-to-face, or in a hybrid format. However, if instructors feel that their professional autonomy is minimized or undervalued, faculty may become frustrated or even leave the institution. To prevent low morale or faculty attrition, instructors should be involved at least to some degree in curriculum and course design. Future research could examine different models and levels of faculty involvement to identify the optimal balance among standardization, centralization, and faculty autonomy, as well as how this balance may vary based on institution type or culture.

The LMS also sits in the exosystem and prompts questions for research. Noah raised the point that, in his view, LMS designers do not have the instructor or learner in mind when they design the space and its features. Learning would be best supported if LMS designers' conceptions of learning matched those of instructors, but we know little about the principles or assumptions about learning used by LMS designers. How do faculty conceptions of online teaching differ from, or resemble, those of individuals who design LMSs? What are the implications of not involving faculty in decisions about LMS design? Are there (better) ways to allow faculty opportunities to provide feedback that informs changes in LMS design?

Researchers could examine these questions to understand the most favorable and effective relationship between LMS designers or vendors and the faculty who use the end product.

Characteristics of the virtual space and the Internet, which are part of the exosystem, raise additional questions. For instance, virtual space and the Internet allow for all class communication and resources to be collected and maintained as artifacts. Because of this, Noah was able to review class discussions across terms and reflect on his teaching. In this way, the permanent aspect of classes was beneficial. However, what are other implications or consequences of having all aspects of a course recorded and saved for anyone with access to the course site? Do administrators use these records to evaluate instructor performance? Do faculty filter what they write because of the permanent record generated? Faculty in my study did not appear to feel watched or worried that the course record would be used for performance evaluation, but because of the nature of the environment these issues may arise in the future.

In the macrosystem, sociocultural expectations and historical trends shape instructors' teaching decisions and give rise to further questions for inquiry. First, fast-paced changes in technology—including LMS capabilities and online learning tools—require faculty to frequently update their knowledge and technological skills. At the same time, though, instructors need to stay current with substantive changes in their fields. How do instructors manage to do both, and how can institutions support faculty in this challenge? It may be useful to examine the outcomes and relative costs of offering on-campus workshops, starting faculty discussion groups, or providing more time and funds for attending conferences, for example. Second, faculty members are socialized to teach using strategies common in face-to-face teaching, such as lecturing. Victoria described this phenomenon when she recounted lecturing in the first class she taught because that was how she herself was taught. She later changed to a more interactive approach

but lecturing was her initial strategy. Since online instructors' have all been students in face-to-face settings, and many have themselves taught face-to-face, they draw from these experiences when deciding how to teach online. Future inquiry could examine this socialization influence more closely. A similar question could also be asked about students by comparing learning experiences of students with experience taking online courses with students who are new to online learning.

Implications for Practice

This study can provide meaningful insights for practice as well. At an institutional level, knowing how online instructors approach online course design and make decisions in the online teaching-learning environment can inform the work of faculty development staff and instructional designers or consultants. These staff members need deep knowledge of teaching in college because they train and support instructors and shape institutional culture related to teaching (Cook & Kaplan, 2011; Schroeder et al., 2010). For example, staff members who support faculty in their online teaching should understand the role of a centralized online education office, if there is one, in shaping design or pedagogical aspects of the online course. They should also be aware of instructors' backgrounds teaching online or face-to-face and whether they do both at the same time. This helps faculty development staff understand the contradictions and challenges instructors experience when trying to do both simultaneously or transition from face-to-face to online. While a plethora of online tools exists to support online education, a novice teacher at an institution where online education is highly standardized may not be ready to incorporate these tools, or institutional policies or LMS limitations may prohibit the use of these tools.

The study can also inform administrative and policy decisions in higher education. For instance, perhaps an administrator proposes hiring more instructional designers to assist faculty with creating and teaching their courses. The case studies suggest that the effectiveness of the relationship between an instructor and an instructional designer depends on several factors, including the instructor's degree of online teaching experience, the openness of the faculty member to receiving help, and the type of help offered by the instructional designer. To elaborate, all faculty members in this study were experienced online teachers and did not use the help of instructional designers that were available. Hiring more instructional designers probably would not have improved their teaching because they would not have consulted with them. Mona was very independent in her job and valued the autonomy she had for designing and revising her courses, and this was likely another reason she did not call on help from instructional designers. Victoria, on the other hand, hired the instructional designers at the institution when she was Dean of Online MCC, so she believed in the value they could add to her courses and was very receptive to their ideas. The type of help offered by the instructional designer (as perceived by the instructor) also seemed to mediate the relationship between instructor and instructional designer. Noah reported that support provided by the instructional designers at PVU focused on making sure the online course materials and format were accessible and user-friendly. As a veteran online instructor, Noah did not feel he needed help with this aspect of his teaching.

At the individual class level, the case studies suggest implications for teaching practice, based on features of the virtual environment that were underscored by study participants. These features relate to fundamental aspects of teaching such as pacing of the course, communication with students, and the teaching space. Table 4 summarizes the main features of the online

teaching environment that emerged from the case studies and lists consequences and suggestions for practice.

Table 4: Features of the Asynchronous Online Teaching Environment and Practical Implications for Instructors

	Consequences	Suggestions for Practice
All communication is in writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know students' thinking processes • Have archive of discussions • Cannot see nonverbal communication • Hard to identify at-risk students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record videos of lecture or class announcements using free tools such as Jing • Ask students to record themselves giving presentations to practice speaking skills • Post links on the course site home page to campus services, such as a counseling or writing center
Class is always "on"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor always feels compelled to check email and respond to students immediately • Quick turnaround for student feedback and email responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear policies regarding when to expect feedback or email responses (e.g., within two weekdays) • Require students to use LMS messaging system instead of email to minimize number of places to check for new messages
Course is fully designed and created up front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for giving feedback and reflecting on teaching during the course • Students can work ahead • Difficult to make changes to course or have spontaneous discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave one discussion forum or set of readings unplanned and to be used for reviewing material students are struggling or discussing current events that occur after the class has started
Classroom is the virtual space of the LMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central location for class business, such as posting announcements and submitting assignments • Flexibility to teach from anywhere • Can feel constrained by features of the LMS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to resources outside the LMS (i.e., links to video content, articles, etc.) to supplement course content • Offer suggestions to LMS representatives of ways to improve features and capabilities of LMS to support teaching

First, in asynchronous online courses, all communication between students and the instructor is done in writing. This produced positive and negative consequences for study participants: instructors felt that they better glimpsed students' thinking processes and all class discussions were maintained in an archive of the course site. However, an absence of nonverbal

communication cues limited communication in some ways, such as making it hard or impossible to convey sarcasm and humor. This may have also prevented instructors from being able to identify at-risk students whom the instructor could have advised or referred to campus services. To address this limitation, instructors could record videos of themselves making announcements or giving lectures or require students to record themselves giving presentations. Technology freely available on the Internet, such as Jing, makes this a possibility for all online students. This would also give students the opportunity to practice speaking and presentation skills, which can be difficult to teach in an online course. To support at-risk students, instructors could post links on the course site home page to campus services, such as a counseling center or writing center.

Second, in asynchronous online courses the class never meets at a particular time during the week. Instead, students complete work and participate in discussions at any time during the day or week. As a result, instructors do the work of teaching, facilitating, grading, and giving feedback throughout the day and week, too. Noah said he always feels compelled to check email because he may have received a message at any moment that needs a response, and all participants emphasized the quick turnaround time for providing student feedback. One benefit of the fast-paced, ongoing nature of online teaching is that it enables students to move forward in their work for the course when they receive quick feedback and timely responses to inquiries. In practice, though, the constant presence of the course and pull of teaching responsibilities could be stifling or overwhelming for some instructors, especially those teaching multiple courses. In this case, having clear policies regarding feedback or email response times can help. For example, an instructor may specify that students should expect feedback or email responses within two weekdays. Additionally, instructors could require students to communicate with them

through the LMS messaging system, instead of through work or personal email, in order to minimize the number of places to check for new messages.

Third, all four courses in this study were fully designed and elements of the course, such as assignment descriptions and grading rubrics, were uploaded before the course started. As a result, instructors had more time for giving feedback and reflecting on teaching, and students could work ahead if their personal schedules required this. However, having the entire class planned up front made at least one person question where the teaching happens during the course and made midcourse revisions or spontaneous discussions difficult. To address this drawback, instructors could leave one discussion board or set of readings unplanned so that it covers current events related to the course or reviews material that students struggled with up to that point. This allows the instructor designated time to address questions or relevant events that arise after the course begins, without having to redesign the course to accommodate changes.

Fourth, the classroom of an online course is a virtual space, usually a course site within the LMS. This provides instructors a central place for posting resources, announcements, and student grades and feedback, and it allows faculty to teach from any place, including at home or on vacation. Students also benefit from a one-stop location for viewing, downloading, and submitting course materials and assignments. However, at least one instructor felt constrained by using the LMS because it was disconnected from social media and other online tools that may provide richer and more interactive learning experiences. Social media and online learning tools cannot always be seamlessly linked to the LMS course site. In practice, instructors could offer feedback and suggestions to their LMS representatives, who typically seek ways to improve their product for the next upgrade. Instructors could also consider using the LMS course site for only

the practical aspects of course administration, such as submitting assignments and posting grades, and use an external site or tool for interactive discussions or activities like simulations.

Limitations

Although the case study approach offered benefits such as the opportunity to investigate teaching experiences in depth, it also presented limitations. I was able to study only a small number of instructors and courses and, because I wanted some consistency across cases, I limited cases to only instructors who taught business and had several years of experience teaching online. As the cases and the proposed framework indicate, teaching experiences are shaped by contextual factors such as course topic and instructors' teaching experience. Because I intentionally did not vary these aspects, the cases cannot provide evidence explaining how subject matter or instructors' level of teaching experience affects teaching. Novice instructors, for instance, may rely more on instructional support or may spend more time navigating the technical aspects of teaching online. Additionally, I included only two institutions, both serving similar student populations. Future studies could examine how teaching experience shapes online teaching and how teaching experiences vary at other institution types serving different student populations, such as four-year research universities or proprietary institutions.

Conclusion

Within the higher education literature, the evolving body of work on online teaching represents a small slice. Yet instructors are increasingly being asked to teach online and design online courses and programs. What accounts for the limited research on a topic so prevalent today? One reason is the rapid pace of change in the tools and players in the online education marketplace, which makes advancing a knowledgebase and collective research agenda challenging. As Doug Lederman, an editor of *Inside Higher Ed*, wrote, "The discipline of

research on online learning is nascent enough, and the body of long-term studies thin enough at this point, that keeping tabs on the state of thinking is a bit like watching a table tennis match” (Lederman, 2013). Because online education is a relatively small and rapidly changing area of research, understanding which questions to ask—and then to research—can be difficult.

The rich, detailed instructor perspectives presented in this dissertation highlighted important aspects to consider in the study of online teaching, such as how structure, agency, and flexibility present different constraints and affordances online. They also challenged the equivalency claim that online education can and should replicate face-to-face education as much as possible. This equivalency framing oversimplifies the debate about online education and precludes us from understanding the unique aspects of the online environment and how these affect teaching. Instead, we should research online education without the goal of a summative answer to whether it is better or worse than face-to-face education and instead ask what are the particular constraints and affordances of online teaching. This study reveals examples of these and their implications for practice, but future research could further examine how these aspects vary by course level, instructor experience, and institutional setting, for instance. The proposed ecological framework suggests key factors to consider in pursuing this line of inquiry and is meant to advance the conversation and collective research agenda about online teaching.

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview 1 Protocol: Setting Context

Context and background influences

1. To start, please tell me about your teaching experiences.

Probes:

- a. Which levels of courses have you taught?
- b. Were these courses primarily lecture courses, or seminar courses, or something else?
- c. How did you become involved in online teaching?
 - i. Which courses have you taught online?
 - ii. Did you design these courses?
 - iii. How many students were enrolled in these courses?
 - iv. Did you receive any sort of training or professional development to teach online?
 - v. How did you come to design this particular course?
 - vi. Have you taught this course in a regular face-to-face class?
 - vii. What do you know so far about your students in this course?
 1. How did you get this this information, and how do you use it?
 - viii. How would you describe your level of skill or comfort with the technologies you'll use for this course?

2. I'd like to learn a little more about your department and institution with respect to their involvement in online education.

Probes:

- a. About what portion of the faculty in your department teach online?

- b. About what portion of the faculty at your institution teach online?
 - c. Are faculty generally expected to teach online?
 - d. Is your institution/department supportive of online teaching?
3. What are some resources that you use as a teacher in this virtual space?
- Probe:
- a. Like workshops, conversations with other faculty, literature or guidebooks about teaching online...

Technology and pedagogy

4. Can you describe your process for planning and designing this course?
- Probes:
- a. Why did you choose that particular [assignment/activity/organization of online content]?
 - b. How might you have designed the course differently if it were a face-to-face course?
5. What was it like to prepare to teach in this virtual space, as opposed to a face-to-face class?

- Probes:
- a. Have you developed different ways of teaching, or thinking about your teaching?
 - b. Have you developed different ways of thinking about a “class” or “classroom” or a “learning community”?
6. Can you walk me through a specific activity or assignment that you have planned for this course, particularly if there is one that is done synchronously?

Probes:

- a. What do you want students to learn from this activity/assignment?
- b. Do you think the online environment somehow enhances this activity/assignment or makes it more effective in some way? Or does the online environment make it harder for students to learn through this activity/assignment?

Instructor role and identity in online course

7. How do you see your role in the course?

Probe:

- i. Some people teaching online have said they feel like a ‘robot’ because they spend most of their time managing the course and don’t interact much with students. Others say they see themselves as a facilitator of the learning process, as opposed to a teacher or mentor. How would you describe yourself in this course?
- b. In what ways will you primarily interact with students?
- c. How do you think students will perceive you in this virtual space?
- d. How do think you will “read” students in this virtual space?

Appendix B. Interviews 2 and 3 Protocol: Lived Experience

For this interview, I'd like to focus on a particular [learning activities/assignment/events] that recently occurred in the course.

(I will ask if there were any learning activities or events that were particularly memorable in the course so far. I will then suggest at least one activity to discuss based on an interaction or event that occurred that seems related my inquiry. I will use the following set of questions as a guide for discussing each teaching activity/assignment/event.)

1. What worked well in this activity?
 - a. What was it about that activity/experience that made it go well?
 - b. When you planned the [activity/assignment/discussion], what did you envision happening?
 - c. How would you describe your role in this activity?
 - d. Where did the idea for this [activity/assignment/discussion] come from?
 - i. What resources or support services did you use to design or carry out this activity?
 - ii. Why did you decide to use those resources?
 - e. Do you think your experiences teaching online, or more practice or training with the technology, would have changed how this [activity/assignment/discussion] went? In what ways?
2. What didn't work so well?
 - a. What was it about that activity/experience that made it go not-so-well?

- b. When you planned the [activity/assignment/discussion], what did you envision happening?
- c. Where did the idea for this [activity/assignment/discussion] come from?
- d. Was there anything else, such as external factors like other demands on your time, that might have made contributed to how this activity went?

Appendix C. Interview 4 Protocol: Reflection

I'd like to ask you to think about the course overall this term.

Context and background influences

1. Looking back, what knowledge or experiences did you draw from to teach this course?
2. What resources or support services did you use?

Technology and pedagogy

1. Was there learning or content in the course that was *difficult* to facilitate online?
2. Was there learning or content that might have actually been *enhanced* through the online environment?
3. When you think about a face-to-face course, there's a group of students and you sitting in a room. But when you teach online, you don't have that. How have your ideas about "community" or "classroom" changed from teaching online?
 - a. How would you describe the online "classroom," if there is one?
 - b. Have you developed different ways of teaching, or thinking about your teaching?
4. How do you think the online environment affected how you taught the material? In other words, how might you have taught this course differently if it were face-to-face?

Instructor role and identity in online course

5. How do you see your role in the course?
 - i. Some people teaching online have said they feel like a 'robot' because they spend most of their time managing the course and don't interact much with students. Others say they see themselves as a facilitator of the learning process, as opposed to a teacher or mentor. How would you describe yourself in this course?

- b. What sorts of interactions did you have with students most often?
 - a. How do you think students perceived you in this virtual space?
 - b. How did you “read” students in this virtual space?
- 6. What was it like to teach in this virtual space, as opposed to in a face-to-face class?
 - a. Have you developed different ways of communicating with students?
 - b. Have you developed different ways of presenting yourself?

Appendix D. Informed Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

ONLINE TEACHING AND COURSE DESIGN: -- INTERVIEWS

Principal Investigator: Inger Bergom, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary
Education, University of Michigan

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Jan Lawrence, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary
Education, University of Michigan

You are invited to be a part of a research study exploring online course design and instruction in college courses. If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in four face-to-face or online interviews at the location of your choice. Each interview should take about one hour, and you'll be given \$90 for completing the interviews. I would like to audiotape the interviews to make sure that our conversations are recorded accurately. I would also ask that you create for me a "guest account" for your course. This will be only for me to observe the course; I will not participate in the course in any way.

You may choose not to answer any interview question and you can stop your participation in the research at any time.

I plan to publish the results of this study, but I will not include any information that would identify you. To keep your information safe, the audio file of your interview will be placed in a locked file cabinet until a written word-for-word copy of the discussion has been created. As soon as this process is complete, the files will be deleted. I will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected and uses special coding of the data to protect the information. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. I plan to keep this study data indefinitely for future research.

There are some reasons why people other than me may need to see information you provided as part of the study. This includes my dissertation committee chair and other members.

If you have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me: Inger Bergom, University of Michigan, Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education, 2117 School of Education Building, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, (317) 432-8335, inbe@umich.edu.

The University of Michigan Institutional Review Board has determined that this study is exempt from IRB oversight.

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

I agree to be audiotaped as part of the study.

Signature

Date

Appendix E. U-M IRB Notice of Exemption

From: eresearch@umich.edu

Subject: eResearch Notification: Notice of Exemption

Date: May 29, 2013 11:30:00 AM EDT

To: Inger Bergom <inbe@umich.edu>

Reply-To: eresearch@umich.edu



Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board • 540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210 • phone (734) 936-0933 • fax (734) 998-9171 •

irbhsbs@umich.edu

To: Inger Bergom

Donald

Freeman

Inger

Bergom

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00072784]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION: Title: Exploring instructors' understanding of online courses as teaching-learning environments Full Study Title (if applicable): Study eResearch ID: [HUM00072784](#) Date of this Notification from IRB: 5/29/2013 Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 5/29/2013 UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the [UM HRPP Webpage](#)) OHRP IRB Registration Number(s):

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS: The IRB HSBS has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION #1 of the 45 CFR 46.101.(b): Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

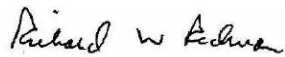
Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope

of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH: You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

APVUESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH: Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard W. Redman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

Richard Redman

Chair, IRB HSBS

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