BUILDING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY IN ONLINE COURSES FOR ADULTS

by

SHERRY ANN CLOUSER

(Under the Direction of Ronald M. Cervero)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members develop community in online courses. Four research questions guided the study: 1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses? 2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses? 3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses? 4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

Nine experienced faculty members in higher education from the Southeastern, Northeastern, and Midwestern United States were interviewed and shared documents from their online courses. Each participant attempted to develop a sense of community in their courses, encountered community-related challenges while teaching online, and devised strategies for addressing those challenges. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method, resulting in four themes. First, faculty members indicated that sense of community facilitates participation and supportive relationships among students in online courses. Second, faculty members experienced a variety of challenges while teaching online, including delays in communication, conflicts between students, and students who were not interested in course

community. Third, faculty members identified strategies used to address these challenges, such as designing courses to avoid challenges, active facilitation of course discussions, private communication with students involved, and leaving the matter for the students to address themselves. Finally, the findings of this study showed that online course communities are different from face-to-face communities. Communication is more difficult online, but online courses tend to allow for more thorough, reflective discussions. While many students feel more comfortable participating in online conversations than in face-to-face discussions, some make comments online they would not say directly to a classmate or instructor.

Three conclusions emerged from these findings. First, building and sustaining community is important to faculty members for successful online instruction. Second, when building and sustaining community in online courses, faculty members face technology-related, interpersonal, and emotional challenges. Finally, faculty members address challenges in their online course communities through course design and while teaching class.

INDEX WORDS: Learning community, Online learning, Distance education, Higher education, Adult education, Faculty development, Qualitative research

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Gary and Peg Clouser, whose love and support make everything possible.

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"There is no such thing as a 'self-made' man. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success."
- George Matthew Adams

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has changed the way many adults further their education. Adults returning to college to complete advanced degrees or take courses are no longer limited to institutions within driving distance from home and work. Distance education courses and degree programs, increasingly available via the Web, are offered in myriad disciplines and specialties. In addition to the institutions established specifically for the purpose of providing distance education, like Jones International University and the University of Phoenix, traditional research and teaching institutions are offering online courses and programs as well.

Distance education dates back to the 1700's when courses were taught via the mail. The University of Chicago offered the first college-level correspondence courses in 1892 (Kett, 1994). New technology changed distance education in the 1900's. Radio and television were both used for educational purposes in the classroom and to reach out to students unable to attend classroom meetings. Television dominated from the 1940's until the 1980's, and advanced as satellite and cable television options became available. With the advent of the microprocessor and the Internet, the first online courses were offered by the New Jersey Institute of Technology in 1984, followed by the University of Phoenix and Connect-Ed who offered the first online degree programs in 1989. Online delivery continues to grow today, and combined with CD-ROMs, "is poised to become the largest medium for distance learning" (PBS, n.d., ¶ 2).

Like traditional courses, online courses are taught using a variety of pedagogical strategies, with varying degrees of success. One way to determine the success of online courses is to look at persistence. Dropout rates are often very high for distance courses with as many as

50 percent of the students failing to complete the course (Carr, 2000). According to Carr, this may be more than 20 percent higher than traditional face-to-face courses. Students in online courses may feel isolated or disconnected from other students and their instructors leading them to discontinue participation in the course. According to Moller (1998), "increasing the feelings of community among isolated learners" (p. 116) may lessen the problem of dropout in online courses. In successful online courses, students report high levels of satisfaction as well as high levels of cognitive learning (Rovai, 2002c). Soong, Chan, Chua, and Loh (2001) define online courses as successful when "students use, and enjoy using the resource; students find the resource enriching and helpful; and educators find that the introduction of the resource promotes higher learning" (p. 104).

Characteristics of Well-Designed Online Courses

What does a well-designed Web-based course look like? Well-designed Web-based courses have many characteristics in common. First, because of the technology required for many courses, such as personal computers, Web browsers, word processing software, video or audio plug-ins, and course management systems, technical support is especially important for the efficient design of a course (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002a; Soong et al., 2001). When students have technical difficulties, support is available. Sometimes the instructor or the institution's help desk provides that support, but often, the students themselves provide support for their peers.

Another characteristic of a well-designed online course is a good course interface (Flottemesch, 2000; Soong et al., 2001). A good course interface is easy for students to use and navigate, and dynamic, valuable discussion is included. Also, course instructors are highly visible participants, interacting with students and ensuring equal opportunities for student

participation (Flottemesch, 2000; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002a). The students in a well-designed online course tend to be highly motivated to participate in course discussions and activities, interact with each other, support each other, and collaborate on projects (Soong et al., 2001).

Many of the above characteristics of well-designed online courses can promote "classroom community" (Hill, 2002; C. Tu & Corry, 2002). A classroom community is "a social community of learners who share knowledge, values, and goals" (Rovai, 2002c). A recent study (Rovai, 2002b) shows that it is possible to build and sustain community in online courses that is comparable to what is possible in traditional face-to-face courses. In an online course, classroom community can be fostered virtually through collaborative learning projects, group discussions related to course content, and even social chatting. On building community online, Haythornthwaite (2002) writes, "liberated from geography, community depends on creating and sustaining strong interpersonal ties, those based on multiple exchanges that include social and emotional content, intimacy, and self-disclosure" (p. 161). When students share ideas, reflections, and personal experiences with each other and with their instructor, they are likely to develop the interpersonal ties that contribute to sense of community.

Several reviews of the online learning literature (Hill, 2002; L. Moller, 1998; Rovai, 2000; C. Tu & Corry, 2002) confirm the necessity of community for the success of online courses. Students who report a sense of community in their online courses are more satisfied and motivated to participate in the course activities (Rovai, 2002c). These students also report greater engagement and less burnout. Sense of community may develop through personal communications and interpersonal rituals in courses. Personal disclosure also contributes to sense of community. These things do not just happen, however, they must be planned. "In

asynchronous learning environments, communities have to be specifically designed, developed, and implemented" (L. Moller, 1998). This is usually the responsibility of the instructor.

Faculty Roles in Online Courses

Faculty members who facilitate effective online courses share certain behaviors. They encourage engagement and structure the course activities to promote interaction and collaboration among students (Grubb & Hines, 2000; Rovai, 2000; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002a). They participate in the course activities and discussions and play a critical role in facilitating communication in the course (Flottemesch, 2000; Rovai, 2002c). Faculty members are responsible for recognizing students' needs, potentially without ever seeing them in person (Grubb & Hines, 2000). It is also important for faculty members to provide continual feedback to students throughout the online course. Although faculty members may practice some of these behaviors in their classroom teaching, facilitating an online course requires different strategies and techniques. Faculty members must make new choices when planning online courses and learn new skills for teaching online (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002a).

Faculty members have access to many resources on course design and methods for teaching online courses (Bonk & Dennen, 2003). Numerous books, magazines, journals, and Web pages are available for faculty members who want to learn on their own, and many colleges and universities have distance education specialists and instructional technology experts to assist faculty members. Workshops, personal consultation, and phone or e-mail support services are available at most institutions. Some may also encourage faculty members to collaborate with a team of experts to custom-design courses that will meet their needs as instructors as well as the needs of the students (Truman-Davis, Futch, Thompson, & Yonekura, 2000). On these collaborative teams, the faculty members are the subject matter experts and work with

instructional designers and technology specialists who know the best practices for developing courses that promote sense of community among students. The collaborative team approach is rarely discussed in the literature, however, and most faculty members are on their own when it comes to the design, development, and the delivery of their online courses.

Statement of the Problem

Online courses have become very popular in higher education distance learning. The results of the 2002 annual Campus Computing Survey show more than 60% of U.S. institutions surveyed reported offering fully online courses, up from less than 50% in 1999 (Green, 2002). Quantity does not mean quality, however. Faculty members and course participants rate only some of their online courses as successful. Research shows that sense of community is a key component in the success of online courses (Hill, 2002; L. Moller, 1998; Rovai, 2000; C. Tu & Corry, 2002). Students report that online courses with more student-to-student interaction and student-to-teacher interaction, both of which are necessary for sense of community, are more satisfying and more effective than those with less interaction (Swan et al., 2000). When asked, faculty members tend to agree that sense of community is important. As they learn the methods to foster feelings of community, faculty members adapt their praxis to include various new tools and activities. There are many guidebooks and prescriptive texts available on community building for faculty members to consult when they are teaching online, but there is very little empirical research on how faculty members actually foster a sense of community in their online courses. In addition, no research was found that examines the faculty perspective on the challenges they face when building and maintaining community in their online courses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members in higher education develop community in online courses for adults. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses?
2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses?
3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses?
4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in both theoretical and practical ways. First, while there are a variety of books and articles related to developing community in online courses, there is very little data-based research available on this topic. What research has been done has been concerned with the learner's perspective. The results of this study add the faculty perspective, including the strategies faculty members use to foster a sense of community online and address challenges faced in online course communities, as well as how the skills learned in the online classroom impact faculty members when they teach in the traditional classroom.

A number of professionals will identify with the practical significance of this study. Faculty members will find this study useful as they develop their online courses and prepare to teach in the online environment. Reading about the challenges other faculty members faced and how those challenges were resolved may help those who are new to online teaching avoid common problems and reflect on ways of addressing problems specific to their own courses.

Learning how other faculty members were affected by the experience of teaching online may be motivational to those who are not sure about the value of participating in an online learning community.

Faculty development professionals will also find the results of this study beneficial as they plan programs and help faculty members learn to teach online. Understanding the strategies faculty members use to develop online learning communities will facilitate the selection of topics and activities to include in faculty development programs. In particular, faculty development professionals will benefit from learning the strategies faculty members use to solve problems in online courses. These professionals, often individuals who have not had the opportunity to teach in online learning communities, will then be prepared to help other faculty members who may encounter similar challenges.

Instructional designers and programmers will better understand the needs of faculty members and students who participate in online course communities. By understanding the challenges faculty members identify, instructional designers and programmers who participate in online course development teams may be able to prevent the problems from occurring through design or programming solutions.

Finally, higher education administrators will find practical value in the results of this study as they set institutional policies related to online learning. Instructional vice presidents, deans, and department heads who are interested in establishing courses and degree programs on the Web will learn the challenges encountered by faculty members who are asked to teach online. As they assign faculty members to teach online, these administrators will understand faculty experiences in the online environment.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members in higher education develop community in online courses for adults. The questions guiding this study were:

1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses?
2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses?
3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses?
4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

In this chapter, I examine the existing literature relevant to these questions, found via searches of databases such as ERIC, Education Abstracts Full Text, Dissertation Abstracts International, and GALILEO Interconnected Libraries (GIL). This literature review includes four sections: theory and research on distance learning in higher education, empirical research on online teaching and learning, strategies for developing community in online courses, and strategies for teaching adults in traditional classrooms.

Distance Education

The "distance" in distance education refers to space between learners and their instructors (Saba, 2003). While the earliest forms of distance learning involved a teacher interacting asynchronously with a single student via the mail, later including radio and television programming as well, emergent technologies are now converging, "so that video, audio, and print are all coming together through the Web in support of learning" (Hanna, 2003, p. 72). How

these technologies are used differs depending on the organizational models adopted by the institutions which offer the distance programs or the instructors teaching in the programs. Some stay with the earlier model where the student interacts only with the teacher, while others adopt a more collaborative and constructivist model where students correspond not only with their teacher, but also with one another, synchronously or asynchronously, to participate in "collaborative discussions, assignments, and team projects" (Hanna, 2003, p. 72).

The bulk of current research and theory development in distance learning seems to focus on the latter model, however the body of literature on the topic is missing a solid theoretical base (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2003; Hannafin, Hill, Oliver, Glazer, & Sharma, 2003; Winiecki, 2003). Gibson (2003) explains further, "what research exists is often descriptive and/or atheoretical, uninformed by theoretical or conceptual frameworks emerging from the field of distance education or borrowed from related disciplines" (p. 156). Although much of the available research on online learning lacks a theoretical framework, the body of published work is quite large (Winiecki, 2003). Hannafin et al. agree: "The publication base related to Web-based teaching and learning is considerable, yet the knowledge base remains relatively primitive and disorganized" (pp. 256-7). Though the research is often lacking a theoretical foundation, theory generation related to online teaching and learning is growing (Gibson, 2003).

Theory in Distance Education

What do we mean by theory? Holmberg (2003) offers a very simple definition which may be appropriate for use here. He adapts the definition from an earlier work by Gage (1963). Theory, according to Holmberg, is "a systematic ordering of ideas about the phenomena of a field of inquiry" (p. 79). With regard to distance education, and online learning in particular, a few "systematic orderings of ideas" stand out, including Saba's (2003) hierarchy of interacting

subsystems, Moore's (1989) theory of transactional distance, and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) Communities of Inquiry theory.

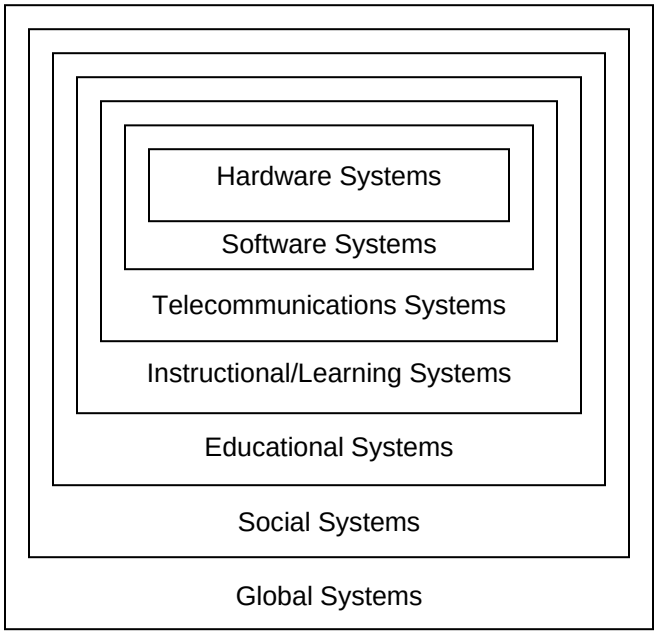

Figure 1. Saba's hierarchy of interacting subsystems that affect distance education. From *Handbook of Distance Education,* (p. 8), by M. G. Moore & W. G. Anderson (Eds.), 2003, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

In his review of distance education theory, Saba (2003) introduces his own way of organizing ideas about distance education. He defines distance education as a "complex, hierarchical, nonlinear, dynamic, self-organized, and purposeful system of learning and teaching" (p. 12). Saba helps us to visualize the hierarchy with a pyramid that includes hardware and software systems on top of a foundation of global, social, educational, instructional, and telecommunications systems (see Figure 1). All of these systems "are involved in the formation, adoption, and application of distance education," (p. 7) and each influences the other, regardless

of level. While this particular model is very general, it identifies the importance of context and attention to the big picture for online learning as well as other forms of distance education.

Some research in online learning (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Rovai, 2002a; Saba, 2003; Vandergrift, 2002) uses Michael G. Moore's (1989) theory of transactional distance as a theoretical frame, developed "to study the relationship between course design and dialogue" (Vandergrift, 2002, p. 76) in distance education. By distance, Moore refers not only to physical space, but also to the educational and psychological distance in the relationship between instructor and student when there is not a proper balance of course structure and communication (Saba, 2003). In Moore's theory, communication of expectations is critical. Not only must the instructor design the course in a way that students will understand, students must also have some degree of autonomy and ability to communicate their needs back to the instructor. While Moore's theory is satisfactory for analyzing online learning situations, there are other theories written specifically for the study of online learning which may be even more appropriate.

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2003) suggest another way of systematically ordering ideas related specifically to online learning. They write:

> What distinguishes online learning from previous paradigms of distance education is its ability to create critical communities of inquiry. That is, as distance educators we are now able to do what was previously impossible – conduct collaborative learning regardless of time and place. (p. 113)

Garrison et al. (2000) offer a model to describe how communities of inquiry function (see Figure 2). The model is composed of three overlapping elements, including social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence, all of which "are crucial prerequisites for a successful higher education experience" (p. 87). Social presence "is defined as the ability of participants in the

community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as 'real people'" (p. 89). The second component, cognitive presence, has to do with the ability of the participants, including faculty members and students, to communicate with one another to construct meaning. This involves exchanging information, connecting ideas, and developing new ideas, for example.

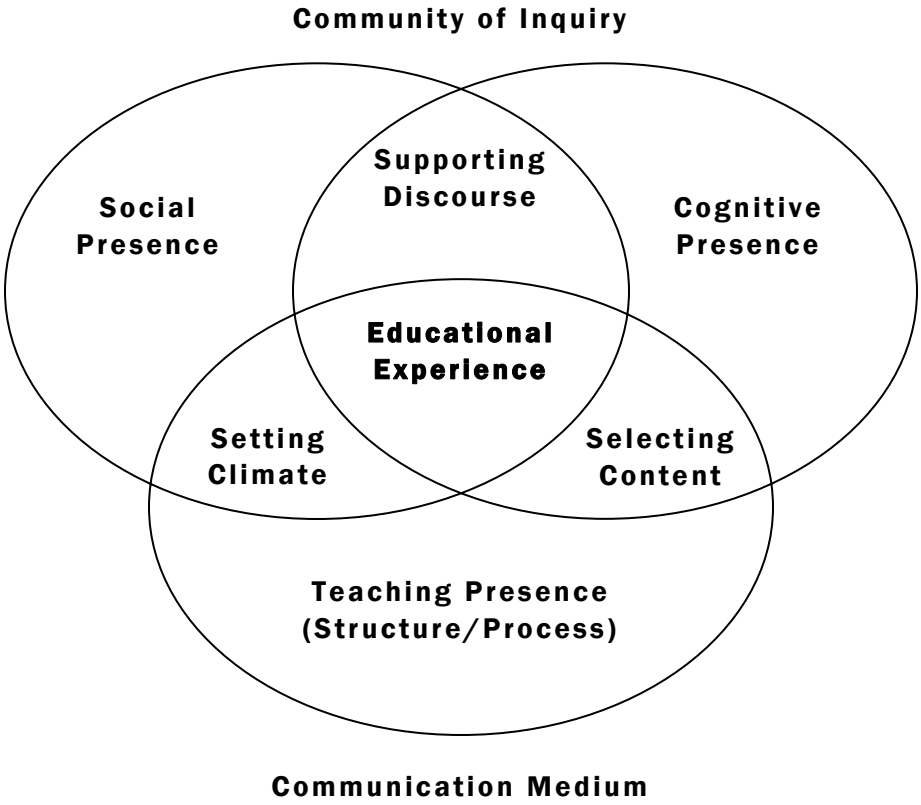

Figure 2. The Community of Inquiry model includes overlapping circles which intersect to form the educational experience. From "Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education," by D. R. Garrison, T. Anderson, & W. Archer, 2000, *The Internet and Higher Education*, *2*(2-3), p. 88.

Finally, teaching presence, usually the responsibility of the faculty, but often shared in online courses by faculty members and students, includes designing the educational experience and facilitating communication among participants. While this model is suitable for any physical environment in higher education, the authors suggest that online teaching and learning in particular can be better understood by evaluating each of these components and the areas in which they overlap. Garrison et al. (2003) also argue that this model, and others regarding online education, should be used to "guide its practical application and to fully imagine its potential and impact" (p. 124).

In addition to the Communities of Inquiry theory, other online learning theories highlight the importance of community in Web-based courses (Brown, 2001; Dede, 1996; Harasim, 2000; Hill, Raven, & Han, 2002; Rovai, 2000). Dede (1996) offers one of the earliest models for facilitating online communities. He suggests that for online courses to succeed, certain elements are necessary. These include engaging students in constructive, collaborative activities and providing a setting where students have the opportunity to share ideas and enjoy fellowship. Grubb and Hines (2000) build on his work, suggesting that three cultural commodities must be present for distance students to bond in online courses. These include knowledge capital, social network capital, and communion. Based on their own online teaching experiences, they offer suggestions for gaining these commodities. These include encouraging students to participate in class activities, ensuring that everyone has adequate support, and forming connections with the students.

One of the most elaborate theories for online learning is specifically related to how communities form in Web-based, asynchronous courses. Brown (2001) studied three online courses and interviewed twenty-one students and three instructors. Using a grounded theory

design, she identified three levels of community. At the first level, students make acquaintances or friends with others in their online class. This may happen because they have something in common such as a certain level of commitment or shared backgrounds. The next level is "community conferment." At this level, students feel that they are members of the community, usually due to participation in a "long, thoughtful, threaded discussion on a subject of importance to all" (p. 24). The third level of community, camaraderie, occurs "after long-term and/or intense association with others involving personal communication" (p. 24). Camaraderie generally results from sharing multiple online classes or common communication outside of class requirements.

In addition to the three levels of community, Brown (2001) found that students spend their time on different tasks depending on their experience in the online course environment. She calls this "Time Triangles" (p. 26). As shown in Figure 3, new students spend most of their time learning technology and understanding the teaching method, and less time on course content and community building.

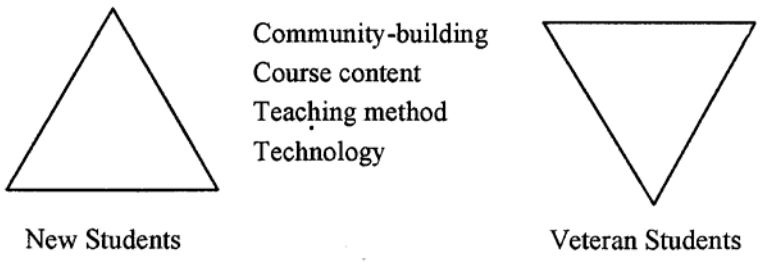

Figure 3. Time Triangles show the amount of time spent on particular tasks by new students is the inverse of the amount of time spent by veteran students in the online learning environment. From "The process of community-building in distance learning classes," by R. Brown, 2001, *JALN, 5*(2), p.26.

Amount of time spent on each task is just the opposite for veteran students. They spend most of their time community building and working with course content, and less time on technology and structure of the teaching method.

Some of the promising theory I encountered is currently in developmental stages. Harasim (2000), for instance, views online learning as a "new learning domain, characterized by a unique combination of attributes" which "enable augmented learning environments that can enhance cognitive activities" (pp. 49-50). The five attributes of this new learning domain include many-to-many group communication, place independence, time independence, text enhanced by multimedia, and computer mediated environments. These attributes each have their own set of benefits, allowing for collaborative discourse and meaning making, starting with divergent thinking, moving on to the linking of ideas, and resulting in convergent thinking.

The first attribute of Harasim's (2000) online learning domain, group communication, provides opportunities for active exchange of information. With adult learners involved, this means a variety of experiences can be shared. Another benefit is the motivation participants experience while working through problems and issues with classmates rather than alone. Along with the obvious benefits of time and place independence of asynchronous online courses, such as the ability to attend class at a convenient time in a convenient location, Harasim identifies access to resources on the Web and access to classmates as other benefits. Knowledge-building does not have to end when class time ends. Class time can be any time.

The fourth and fifth attributes of the online learning domain are directly related to the technologies used in the courses. Text-based and media-enriched messaging and content can bring clarity to ideas and help participants to focus on the message in the content and comments rather than the messenger. The computer-mediated environment facilitates the organization,

scaffolding and exchange of ideas as well as the customization of the course for each individual student. Based on these attributes of the online learning domain and her work thus far, Harasim indicates that she is in the midst of developing a taxonomy for studying online discourse.

Hill et al. (2002) have started work on a model for creating community in Web-based learning environments. The model, based on research exploring best practices in developing community in Web-based courses, concentrates on two kinds of strategies and tasks that enable community building. These include infrastructure strategies during course design (performed by the instructor) and during class (performed by all participants, including the instructor), and interaction strategies performed by all participants during class. Examples of infrastructure strategies are postings made by the instructor to keep the class on track and homepages developed by students to communicate both personal and professional information. Sample interaction strategies include encouraging one another to succeed and participating daily in discussions. All of these strategies together enable connections between and among learners and instructors. “These connections, in turn, can lead to the emergence of a community that can support a learning outcome” (Hill et al., 2002, p. 390). Hill and her colleagues identify the need for further research to determine the extent to which the strategies identified in their model enable learning to occur.

Section Summary

There are many ways of systematically organizing ideas about distance education. Saba’s (2003) hierarchical systems theory places distance education in context where each component system influences each of the others. Moore (1989) concentrates on course structure and communication between students and instructors in his Transactional Distance theory. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2003) focus on online learning in particular and the new ability

participants have to create communities of inquiry in online learning environments. In the Communities of Inquiry model, participants have the ability to get to know one another as real people, collaborate to construct meaning, and facilitate learning. Dede (1996) also highlights the importance of community in his work identifying certain elements which must be present in online learning communities: collaborative activities and fellowship among participants. In a grounded theory piece, Brown identified levels of community in online courses and linked the amount of time students spend on particular activities to their level. While theorists are beginning to identify online learning as a new learning domain and identify models for best practice in online learning environments, researchers are putting these theories, and their own, to the test via empirical research studies.

Empirical Research on Online Teaching and Learning

In my search for some way to organize my reading of existing online teaching and learning research, I came upon a review (Berge & Mrozowski, 2001) of the distance education research which employs Sherry's (1996) categories for distance education research. While "online education is not the same as distance education" (Harasim, 2000, p. 49), Sherry's categories for distance education research seem perfectly appropriate for organizing online learning research. The categories are: redefining roles of key participants, technology selection and adoption, design issues, strategies to increase interactivity and active learning, learner characteristics, learner support, operational issues, policy and management issues, equity and accessibility, and cost/benefit trade-offs. Using my research questions as a guide, I have focused my literature review on three of the ten categories, including redefining roles (particularly faculty roles), design issues, and strategies to increase interactivity and active learning. The next three sections discuss the research in each of these areas.

Faculty Roles

Palloff and Pratt (1999) identify four categories of tasks which faculty members must undertake in the online classroom - social, managerial, technical, and pedagogical. These categories are supported by data from the online learning literature and include specific activities that are confirmed in the research.

The importance of the instructor's social role is supported by Nicholson's (2002) research on "virtual hallways." Nicholson studied a graduate-level library science course in which an instant messaging (IM) tool was included in the course as an optional method of communication at a student's request. Following the completion of the course, Nicholson surveyed the students about the tool. Not all students used the tool, and those who did revealed that is was "used mainly for social communication, not only between students, but also between students and the instructor" (p. 369). One IM user noted "'it was neat to see the instructor was in and out of class just like the rest of us. Even if I didn't need to communicate with him I had the sense that we were all in it together'" (p. 369). Nicholson concludes that IM acts as a "virtual hallway" where students and instructors can socialize on a variety of topics outside the "virtual classroom" just as they would in the halls outside their traditional brick-and-mortar classrooms. It is not clear from the study, however, whether students who did not use the IM tool felt socially removed from the rest of the class or from the instructor.

A study by Hill, Raven, and Han (2002) confirms the two of the roles identified by Palloff and Pratt, including managerial and pedagogical. The researchers asked what faculty and students from two different online courses from two universities can do to facilitate the building of community in online learning environments. Data were collected using focus groups, surveys, and transcripts from online discussions. Hill and her colleagues found that learners appreciated

help from the instructors to stay on-task in their coursework. In one of the two courses, the instructor sent "CSM" messages to indicate to learners "what they *C*ould be doing, what they *S*hould be doing, and what they *M*ust be doing" (p. 388). This is a good example of the faculty member's managerial role in the course. Hill et al. also discuss the faculty member's pedagogical role in the results of their study. Several strategies are identified. These include interaction strategies like facilitating discussion, responding to student contributions, and evaluating student contributions. Also, the researchers found that instructors should establish teams of learners and assign tasks for those teams to perform.

Hill (2002) has also produced a collection of strategies and techniques for teaching online, synthesizing her teaching experience and knowledge of the literature. The strategies address three issues for teaching online: space, time, and tools. While the space and time strategies fall into the social, managerial, and pedagogical roles, the strategies related to tools mainly deal with the instructor's technical role. She suggests that it is important for both instructors and students to be flexible when it comes to technology. For instance, providing the learner with multiple means of access may help avert communication gaps when technology fails. Also, offering training for learners will help them understand how to cope with technical problems when they occur.

Design Issues

In addition to the pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical roles which faculty members take on when teaching online courses, many faculty members are also responsible for designing and developing their own courses. Design is the second of Sherry's (1996) categories relevant to my research questions. I was able to locate some research-based recommendations for faculty members to consider during the planning and development phases.

In a mixed-methods study, Schrum and Hong (2002) sought to identify strategies to facilitate student success in online courses. In the first of two study phases, the researchers located online learning institutions and analyzed the documentation provided for potential students to use in determining whether or not they might be good online learners. The result of the document analysis and a subsequent literature review was a list of seven dimensions or "critical factors that impact the success of adults who enroll in distance learning courses and degree programs" (p. 60). The dimensions include access to tools, at home or at work; technology experience, including a level of comfort with tasks like checking e-mail and solving simple problems; learning preferences compatible with online courses, or the ability to learn from visual representations of content; responsible study habits and willingness to ask questions; motivation and purpose for participating; lifestyle considerations, such as time and family support; and finally, personal traits such as self-discipline and willingness to participate.

Following the document analysis and development of the seven dimensions, Schrum and Hong selected fourteen experienced online educators to react to the dimensions and suggest strategies that would support the students in their online courses. This second phase of the study was conducted via a web-based survey including Likert items as well as open-ended items. The study resulted in several design strategies which are informed by the seven dimensions. These strategies include providing for flexibility during the delivery of the course, creating separate communication areas for support requests, content discussion, and social activity, and keeping the technical requirements to a minimum to avoid potential problems. Course designers are encouraged to build in a face-to-face meeting to help students get to know one another, or if that is not possible, then including space for students to build personal homepages is an option.

Hill (2001) directed a case study which also resulted in design suggestions for online courses. During a graduate-level instructional technology course, she conducted surveys, interviews, observations, and content analysis of discussion transcripts. The results of the study include a variety of strategies and techniques for community building in Web-based courses, and several of these are specifically related to the design of the course. She suggests not only the need for communication space, but "failure-safe" space "where open communication can occur without concern for flaming and non-constructive criticism" (Best Practices Section, ¶ 2). The interface for the course should be designed to provide an organized structure and multiple ways of sharing information and communications. Hill also mentions the importance of minimizing technical problems, but notes when there are problems, that support or training must included in the design of the course as well.

Swan and her colleagues (2000) from the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) surveyed approximately 3,800 students who were registered in SLN online courses in the Spring of 1999. In addition to some demographic questions, the online survey included "twelve questions concerned with students' satisfaction, perceived learning, and activity in the courses they were taking" (p. 365). Based on the responses of 1,406 students who returned the survey, the researchers linked the success of online courses to three factors, including "a transparent interface, an instructor who interacts frequently and constructively with students, and a valued and dynamic discussion" (p. 379). Each of these can be included to some extent in the design of the online course making these findings consistent with the research above. These findings are also consistent with research related to interactivity and active learning in online courses.

Strategies To Increase Interactivity And Active Learning

In her review of the literature, Flottemesch (2000) studied the importance of interaction in the general arena of distance education. She makes a connection between interaction and student learning, stressing the need for student-to-student interaction and teacher-to-student interaction. Based on her analysis, she recommends that instructors become familiar with the technology they use to facilitate student comfort and ability to interact, and plenty of time for students to make their comments.

Based on a review of the literature, Northrup (2002) further analyzes the concept of interaction in online courses identifying four "interaction attributes," including interaction with content, collaboration and conversation, intrapersonal/metacognitive strategies, and support. In a survey of 52 graduate students enrolled in an online masters program in instructional technology, Northrup sought to investigate student perceptions of the importance of these interaction attributes in online learning. On interacting with content, the participants tended to prefer modes of delivery that felt traditional in nature, such as narrated presentations, similar to classroom lectures, followed by discussion with peers. Discussion relates to Northrup's collaboration and conversation attribute of interaction. Survey results revealed that "participants rely on their peers and their instructor in forming and maintaining the online learning community" (p. 223). Joining in team projects and receiving feedback from the instructor were two types of collaboration and conversation mentioned by students.

The third interaction attribute Northrup discusses, intrapersonal/metacognitive skills, relates to how students interact with the course itself. Students noted the importance of study strategies, many of which involve the assistance of study guides, advance organizers, and graphical representations of assignments. Although I would not have considered this an

interaction attribute initially, I can see how these skills are required for online learners and can be included as ways of interacting with the online course.

Finally, support is the fourth interaction attribute in Northrup's study. Students reported that timeliness of response to questions, mentoring, tutorials, and tips from peers are all support components that add to the success of the online learning experience. Overall, Northrup concludes that each of these four interaction attributes should be considered by both faculty and students in online course environments.

Another study about interaction in online courses concentrates on how students in a graduate-level, online educational technology course learn to collaborate online. In their paper about the study, Murphy and Cifuentes (2001) assert "constructivist learning in an online environment depends upon both technology and collaboration among group members" (p. 289). Collaborative, constructivist activities used in the online course included small-group discussions, simulation games, projects and problem solving using e-mail, threaded discussions, and Web-based tools. Murphy and Cifuentes collected data from online discussion transcripts and focus groups with thirteen students from the course. The data revealed that many of the students felt uncomfortable in the online environment at first, but getting to know one another made the collaborative tasks easier. In addition, instructor timelines and suggestions for collaborating in groups assisted the students with the course activities.

In their suggestions for designing online courses with interaction, Murphy and Cifuentes highlight the importance of balance between structure, dialogue, and learner autonomy, a concept included in Moore's (1989) theory of transactional distance mentioned earlier. They also recommend the strategies outlined by Palloff and Pratt (1999) in their text *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace*, such as including opportunities for students to get to know one

another and holding “virtual office hours.” Though much of the work in the Palloff and Pratt text is based on the anecdotal experiences of the authors, Murphy and Cifuentes are two researchers who have tried to back up that work with empirical research.

Section Summary

Based on Sherry’s (1996) categories for classifying research in distance education, I focused on three areas of the literature, including faculty roles, design issues, and strategies to increase interactivity and active learning. Palloff and Pratt (1999) suggest there are four faculty roles in facilitating online courses, and this is supported by empirical research. Nicholson’s (2002) study on “virtual hallways” and IM tools suggests that the instructor’s social role is important and appreciated by students. Hill and her colleagues (2002) state that there are assorted managerial and technical tasks that instructors should be aware of in order to support their online learners, including using “CSM” messages and ensuring student awareness of what to do in case technical difficulties should arise. On designing online courses, three studies (Hill, 2001; Schrum & Hong, 2002; Swan et al., 2000) confirm the importance of a transparent interface and providing opportunities for discussion and collaboration. Collaborative activities are also highlighted in the studies on interaction and strategies for teaching online (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Northrup, 2002).

Developing Community in Online Courses

There are a number of texts available which advocate community building in online courses (Palloff & Pratt, 1999, 2001; Renninger & Shumar, 2002; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002; White & Weight, 2000). Much of the work in these texts is commentary with little support from empirical data. In the last three years, a number of researchers (Brown, 2001; Conrad, 2002; Hill et al., 2002; Rovai, 2002b, 2002c) have published empirical research to

support the suggestions made in those texts. In this section, I will discuss those studies and identify a gap in the literature.

Studies on Developing Community in Online Courses

Conrad (2002) distinguishes online learning communities from place-based communities, where "like-minded groups of people gather together in the spirit of shared goals or galvanizing events" (The Worlds of Community section, ¶ 2) and other virtual communities where the internet allows for individuals to come and go based on similar interests and shared sense of purpose. In her study of mid-life adults in an online undergraduate program, Conrad found that although the seven learners she interviewed valued certain aspects of the online learning community, such as safety and trust in the online environment and the option to "'take what I want from the community'" (Building and Maintaining Community section, ¶ 10), the learners had vastly different ideas about what community meant. Some felt that the community involved only those who participated in social conversations online, some thought it included those who posted daily, and others thought it was the cohort of adults working in the online program. Most definitions excluded the instructor, implicitly or outright. Conrad notes that the concept of community was addressed in a face-to-face meeting at the beginning of the program, however few students attended the program.

While the definition of community may have been elusive for the students in Conrad's study, there are many definitions of community in the literature. Hill et al. (2002) also discuss different types of community, such as communities of practice studied by Lave and Wenger for use in the corporate sector. Rovai (2002c) defines classroom community as "a social community of learners who share knowledge, values, and goals" (p. 322). Renninger and Shumar (2002) define the learning community as "a group of people who interact with each other, learn from

each others' work, and provide knowledge and information resources to the group related to certain agreed-upon topics of shared interest" (p. 96). In another study, Rovai (2002b) explores the characteristics of "sense of community," which include feelings of connectedness, cohesion, spirit, trust, and interdependence among members.

Rovai has done quite a bit of writing on sense of community. He developed an instrument called the Classroom Community Scale and tested the survey with 375 graduate student participants (Rovai, 2002a). The purpose of the survey was to explore the factors that influence students' community experiences. Based on his review of the literature, Rovai found that "members of strong classroom communities have feelings of connectedness" (p. 198), and therefore he included questions related to connectedness. Students were asked to mark strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree for items such as "I feel that students in this course care about each other," "I feel that this course is like a family," "I feel isolated in this course," and "I feel that members of this course depend on me." In addition to the connectedness subscale, Rovai included a learning subscale to represent the educational component of the community. The learning subscale included items like "I feel that I am encouraged to ask questions," "I feel reluctant to speak openly," and "I feel that my educational needs are not being met" (p. 209). Using quantitative techniques including factor analysis and reliability analyses, Rovai determined that his twenty-item scale is a valid and efficient instrument for assessing graduate students' sense of classroom community. He distributed the scale to professors of educational psychology as well, and they rated the items as "totally relevant to sense of community in a classroom setting" (p. 204).

In another study using the Classroom Community Scale, along with a question on perceived cognitive learning, Rovai (2002c) confirmed that online graduate students can feel a

sense of connectedness. He also found a significant positive relationship between sense of community and perceived learning. Three hundred fourteen students in graduate-level online courses participated in the study. In his discussion of the study's results, Rovai encourages further research in the area of design factors and teaching strategies which result in strong feelings of community among online learners.

Answering his own call for further research, a previously published study by Rovai (2001b) looks at sense of community among 38 doctoral students participating in two different distance education programs. One of the programs required an annual five-day residency, while the other required monthly nine-hour meetings. The results of the Sense of Classroom Community Index, a revision of the Classroom Community Scale, showed that sense of community was stronger for the monthly meetings group. Therefore, students who participate in regular face-to-face meetings, where possible, may experience increased perceived learning as well.

The Missing Faculty Perspective on Developing Online Community

While the literature on online course community is growing, I have not found any research that gives the faculty perspective on the importance of community building or how communities are nurtured in online courses. In their study (mentioned above), Hill et al. (2002) asked, "What can we do, as designers of, and instructors in, a Web-based learning environment to assist the learner in the effective building of community while learning in a Web-based environment?" (p. 388). The researchers studied instructor design and delivery techniques, and surveyed the learners, but they did not report talking with the instructors about this question or others. Brown (2001) reports including faculty members in her study, but her discussion focuses

entirely on the student perspective. Rovai's work (2001, 2002b, 2002c) also concentrates on the student point of view.

Much of the research that includes the instructor's point of view regarding developing community in online courses concentrates on the general attitudes about teaching and learning online, time required to teach online, technical support needs, and barriers and incentives for teaching online (Harasim, 2000; Thompson, 2002; Visser, 2000). Bonk and Dennen (2003) elaborate:

> Actual studies of faculty members teaching via distance learning marginally address the pedagogical aspects of this new teaching and learning environment, opting instead to focus on issues of satisfaction, compensation, ownership, course load, and job security. Consequently, there is a growing need for pedagogical frameworks for considering the Web in one's teaching. (p. 333)

Thompson (2002) agrees, summarizing the research on faculty satisfaction by highlighting four common concerns. First, faculty members indicate a need for technical support during all phases of the course from planning stages through the delivery of the course. Second, faculty members want control over the quality of their courses. "When institutions circumvent the faculty in decisions related to curriculum, pedagogy, and/or policies related to online programming, faculty satisfaction is compromised" (p. 6). Third, faculty members, particularly those on tenure-track, expect the time they spend teaching online to be considered when their tenure committees meet. The fourth common concern of faculty is closely related to the third: workload. Preparing an online course and teaching online requires more time, often without extra compensation. This concern is echoed in Harasim's (2000) report on "the virtual professor." While her methods (survey, interviews, focus groups, or other) are not explicit in her paper, Harasim collected data

with 250 faculty members from Virtual U, a Web-based learning environment at Simon Fraser University. Her discussion includes complaints from faculty about the increased workload. She also mentions that faculty “facilitate and engage rather than lecture” in their online courses.

Visser (2000) conducted a study to determine whether the perceptions of increased workload reflect actual time spent teaching online courses. The researcher taught a master of public administration course using a combination of Web assignments and two-way interactive television. He kept careful tally of the time spent on course content development, Web site design, training, and course delivery. He compared these times with mean time he spent delivering similar courses from previous years. While he found that he spent twice as much time on the distance course, he attributes much of that time to learning. After teaching at a distance one or more times, he feels the extra amount of time required to teach at a distance would decrease. While other studies note faculty concerns about time (Bonk, 2003; Harasim, 2000; Kanuka, 2002; McKenzie, 2000; Thompson, 2002), the Visser study is the only one found that suggests the possibility of workload decreasing with experience.

Section Summary

In this section, I reviewed several studies written about developing online learning communities. In the Conrad (2002) study, students valued the community, but could not always nail down what it meant to be a community member. Rovai developed an instrument to measure sense of community among students in online courses, established a link between sense of community and perceived cognitive learning, and offered face-to-face meetings as a strategy for increasing sense of community. All of these studies describe the student perspective on community in online learning environments. Available research from the instructor’s point-of-

view covers only career issues such as tenure and workload. No research was found which explores the instructor's perspective regarding building community in online courses.

Teaching Adults in Traditional Classrooms

Although the strategies for developing community in online courses involve emergent technologies, the strategies themselves are not new. According to Palloff and Pratt (1999), "successful online distance education is a process of taking our very best practices in the classroom and bringing them into a new arena" (p. 6). What are those best practices? General texts on adult learning theory and teaching adults suggest that although there is no method that is guaranteed to be effective with all learners, those which pay attention to learners' experiences and collaboration are particularly appropriate for adults (Galbraith, 1990; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). In this section, I will include selections from the literature on discussion, case study and collaborative learning strategies. First, I will discuss some basic concepts from the literature regarding the teaching of adults.

Andragogy

This section on teaching adults would not be complete without a reference to andragogy, "a set of assumptions and methods pertaining to the process of helping adults learn" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 14). This set of assumptions guides adult educators in planning and delivering adult education programs:

1) Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
2) Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives.
3) Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths.
4) Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know.

5) In contrast to children's and youth's subject-centered orientation to learning (at least in school), adults are life centered (or task centered or problem centered) in their orientation to learning.
6) While adults are responsive to some extrinsic motivators (better jobs, promotions, salary increases, and the like), the more potent motivators are intrinsic motivators. (Knowles, 1989, pp. 83-84)

While the origins of andragogy go back to the early 1900's, Malcolm Knowles contributed much to the evolution of the concept to its current form. In a review of Knowles' assumptions, Cyr (1999) includes a list of characteristics of adult learners, including independence, self-directedness, active learning preference, well-developed value system, variety of life experiences, and likelihood to focus learning on areas of interest. The best practices in higher education for adult learners keep the assumptions of andragogy and this list of adult traits in mind.

Attributes of High-Quality Learning Experiences

In a study that focused on intensive courses, with results that may be applied to other formats, Scott (2003) outlines the attributes of high-quality learning experiences based on student interviews and classroom observations. One finding of this study relates to classroom environment. Scott found that the students wanted a comfortable physical environment with about ten to thirty students. Also, students wanted the instructor "to foster close student-student and student-teacher relationships to increase the level of trust and participation" (p. 33). This finding supports research that sound social relationships between students and instructors and among students "increase student satisfaction and learning outcomes" (p. 33). According to Vella (1994), "nothing can diminish the importance of the relationship for learning" (p. 9).

In addition to classroom environment, instructor characteristics, and evaluation methods, Scott (2003) found that the students in her study preferred certain teaching methods. Favored methods include active learning, classroom interaction and discussion, and experiential and applied learning. Students did not want to be lectured, at least not for long periods of time. They did want to verbalize their opinions and understanding of the course topics. Students from Scott's study also wanted to apply their learning, or personalize it to make it more memorable. Activities such as "problem solving, role playing, simulation exercises, field trips, and skill-training practice" (p. 32) allowed students to experience the content in an engaged manner. Seaman and Fellenz (1989) call these types of activities action or participative strategies, and agree that they can be used to provide opportunities for students to apply and synthesize concepts they already understand at low cognitive levels, practice new skills, and develop attitude or value sets.

Case Study

One particular action strategy, case study, provides for experiential learning, which is particularly appropriate for adult learners (Knowles, 1989). Marsick (1990) describes the case study in this way:

> At its core is the concept of learning from and through experience – from the *past*, on which the case study is build; through the *present* interaction of participants who bring their own life experience to bear upon the case; and for the *future*, by building skills that are presumed useful to the learners. (p. 225)

Case studies generally include three components: the case, case analysis, and discussion. The case itself is a description of a situation, actual or hypothetical, which includes some dilemma or problem situation. The case is generally quite detailed and may include "conversations, maps,

correspondence, policy statements, organizational charts, and pictures" (p. 227). The case may also include a solution, but this is generally revealed only after the case discussion.

The second component to case study is the analysis. This phase allows the learners to begin digging in to the details of the case and clarifying their ideas about the case. Analyzing the case for its facts and various elements may be done by individuals before coming to class, or it may be done in groups. Sometimes the case includes questions that help the learners get started.

Finally, the third general feature of the case study method is discussion. While the discussion can be organized in a variety of ways, it is often divided into two parts. First, small groups work together to compare notes on the case analysis, determine the problem, discuss possible solutions, and come to a conclusion. Next, small groups share their discussions with one another. Marsick suggests that this may be done via role play or panel discussion.

Discussion

> Brookfield (2001) confirms the importance of discussion for adult learners. He writes:
>
> Discussion is usually lauded for a mix of pedagogic and political reasons. Pedagogically, it is held to engage learners in participatory learning, which helps them come to a deeper understanding of the topics considered. Politically, discussion is supposed to provide an analog of democratic process, a space where all voices are heard and respected in equal measure. (p. 206)

However, Brookfield goes on to explain a variety of ways discussion can fail, including domination by a presumptive individual in the classroom (teacher or student), miscommunication regarding the rules of the discussion, and silence. "As adult educators, we cannot avoid taking action. The adult discussion leader cannot be a laissez-faire facilitator, exercising a minimum of control" (p. 221). Rather, adult educators can employ certain strategies to "ensure some sort of

equity of participation" (p. 222). First, Brookfield recommends establishing ground rules for the discussion. They may be suggested by the discussion leader, or the participants can generate the rules together. Next, he advises facilitators to constantly assess the power dynamics in the classroom and elicit feedback from the participants regarding the assessments. This helps to avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings which lead to failed discussions or silenced individuals. Finally, Brookfield advocates exercising teacher power when necessary to increase opportunities for participation.

Based on the assumptions of andragogy, Vella (1994) has developed a series of twelve principles for nurturing dialogue with adult learners. These principles relate to the planning, delivery, content and evaluation of educational programs. Planning principles require careful needs assessment and inclusion of learners in planning processes as well as attention to the sequencing of content and reinforcement of learning. Delivery principles include ensuring a safe environment for learner participation, nurturing sound relationships in the classroom, teamwork, and respect for learners. Content principles require cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects and immediacy of the learning. Immediacy means that the content is immediately relevant to the learners, which supports another principle, encouraging engagement. Finally, accountability is a principal related to evaluation. In her book, Vella offers strategies and case studies to support each of these principles. For instance, the principle of safety "means that the design of learning tasks, the atmosphere in the room, and the very design of small groups and materials convey to the adult learners that this experience will work for them" (p. 6). She suggests that providing clear instructions, reviewing learning objectives, and asking learners to share their own expectations all contribute to feelings of safety in the learning environment.

Collaborative Learning

Another teaching strategy often used with adults is collaborative learning. Peters and Armstrong (1998) define collaboration as people working "together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators" (p. 75). While adults are accustomed to passive learning, or learning from lecture, Peters and Armstrong suggest that because collaborative learning is interactive in nature and involves constant movement of ideas from member to member, the experience becomes more than the sum of individual experiences. In a group, learners can accomplish more than they might individually. Vella (1995) agrees and describes the small group as "a place to risk, to dare, to complain, to argue , to clarify, and to question" (p. 192).

Section Summary

In summarizing a series of monographs about effective teaching of adults by adult educators, Ross-Gordon (2002) states, "there is no one right or wrong way of teaching adults. Teachers must continuously reflect on both their belief systems about teaching and learning and their teaching practices" (p. 86). In this section, I have highlighted some of the teaching practices experts in adult education recommend, supported by the tenets of andragogy and adult learning theory. These include nurturing relationships with students and between students, and encouraging active learning and engagement via case study, discussion, and collaborative learning.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature for theory and research on distance learning, with special attention to online learning, strategies for developing community in online courses,

and strategies for teaching adults in traditional classrooms. Although there are myriad books and articles which focus on the teaching of adults online and developing community in online courses, much of the research lacks a theoretical foundation and organization. More research is needed, particularly including the faculty perspective, to determine how faculty members develop online learning communities.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members in higher education settings develop community in online courses for adults. Four research questions guided the study:

1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses?
2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses?
3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses?
4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

In this chapter, I will explain my rationale for selecting a qualitative design. I will describe the sample as well as methods for data collection and analysis. Finally, I will discuss validity and reliability and reflect on the effects of researcher bias on the study.

Design of the Study

In order to understand faculty perspectives on developing community in online courses, a qualitative design was appropriate for this study. While there are advantages to quantitative research, such as measuring the reactions of many people to very specific questions and comparison of statistics, qualitative research provides more detailed information, increasing depth of understanding and allowing for rich descriptions of social phenomena (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Assembling and analyzing the details about developing community in online

communities from the faculty who do this work has led me to a better understanding of these phenomena.

According to Merriam (1998), there are five common types of qualitative research in education: case study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and the basic or generic study. While each has its own purpose and tends to compel the researcher to employ particular specialized methods, they all share the general characteristics of qualitative inquiry noted above. Case study is used to focus on a particular social unit to describe as thoroughly as possible many or all of the variables of that individual unit (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Multiple cases are sometimes examined together in comparative case studies. Ethnography uses a variety of research methods to describe “the social order and meaning a setting or situation has for the people actually participating in it” (Merriam & Simpson, 1995, p. 104). Phenomenology seeks to describe the “meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). In this type of qualitative research, the investigators follow a very precise set of steps or phases to accomplish the research goals. Grounded theory differs from other types of qualitative research in that its emphasis is the development of theory rather than thick description. While description and verification are concerns, discovery is the predominant focus.

This study was a basic study, which is used to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Patton (2002) adds, for researchers who question particular processes, how processes work, and whether the processes are the same for everyone, "a process study is especially appropriate" (p. 160). As I was interested in faculty members' perspectives on developing community in their online courses and the processes involved, a basic study was most suitable.

Sample Selection

I employed purposeful sampling for this study in order to provide data that would facilitate answering the research questions. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). I proposed the following criteria for inclusion in the study. Each participant:

1) Was an instructor in a higher education setting;
2) Taught one or more online courses with a student population of primarily nontraditional students (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000);
3) Taught the online course(s) for a complete academic term (quarter or semester, for example); and
4) Attempted to develop community in the online course(s).

I was particularly interested in faculty members in higher education who work with nontraditional students, because of the growth of online teaching in this environment, and because this is the setting and audience I am most involved with myself. I also felt that faculty members who taught courses over an academic term, such as a quarter or semester, were more likely to desire a community setting than those who taught online for just a day or a week.

To locate the participants, I used three techniques. First, I e-mailed colleagues at the University System of Georgia (USG) who consult with instructors in online programs at institutions around the state. The e-mail message asked the instructors recommended by my USG colleagues whether they met the criteria listed above and whether they were willing to provide me with access to the online course(s) they would describe in an interview. I then asked those who felt that they met the criteria to participate in the study.

The second method I used to identify participants was a sort of “cold call” approach. I searched the Web sites of institutions with distance education programs headquartered in Georgia. Then, via e-mail, I contacted the faculty members who taught in those programs. In the e-mail message, I introduced myself, explained the selection criteria, and asked if they would be interested in participating in my study.

The third method I used to identify participants for my study was the “snowball” method. Snowball sampling involves “getting new contacts from each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 45) by asking them whether know of anyone else who might be interested in participating.

Sample Size

The question of sample size is a difficult one, and the answer is generally different for each study. Patton (2002) affirms:

> There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. (p. 244)

Patton further suggests that "qualitative sampling designs specify *minimum samples* based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study and stakeholder interests. One may add to the sample as fieldwork unfolds" (p. 246). Lincoln and Guba (1985) add, “if the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units” (p. 202). In other words, it is appropriate to begin with a minimum sample and continue sampling until the data become redundant, the point of saturation. Once saturation is reached, additional interview data fails to add anything new (Martens, n.d.). Based on these guidelines, I found after interviewing nine faculty members I had

reached the saturation point and was no longer gaining new information to facilitate answering my research questions.

Participants

Nine experienced faculty members who taught online for different classifications of higher education institutions in the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest participated in this study. All were Caucasian, and all taught graduate-level courses. All of the participants except Kurt and Mary had doctoral degrees in their fields. Kurt was preparing to defend his dissertation when I met with him and planned to graduate in May 2005. Mary was also nearly finished with her dissertation. Table 1 provides specific information about each of the participant's field and institutional setting. Note that Sarah, Meredith, Anna, and Mary have all taught online for two different institutions.

Sarah teaches social work for a mixed-delivery program based in the Southeast. She taught her first online courses in social work for an institution in the Northeast, however, starting in 2001. Between the time she began teaching online and the time I met with her for an interview (February 12, 2004), she taught six online courses and three blended courses including both online and face-to-face activities. Sarah was hired at her current institution specifically because of her online teaching experience, but also teaches face-to-face classes. When Sarah and I talked, I felt her confidence about teaching online, but I also sensed that she was interested in learning more about effective practices and honing her skills. She knew that I am well-practiced with the software she uses and during the interview she asked me several questions about it, including the usability of certain tools and how to best implement various features of the software into her courses. She also mentioned that although she loved the flexibility of teaching online, she was feeling "burned out" and "ready for a break."

TABLE 1
Participants, Disciplines, and Academic Contexts

Name	Discipline	Course Level	Student Population	Location
Sarah	Social Work	Undergraduate/Graduate Graduate	Traditional/Nontraditional Nontraditional	Southeast Northeast
Meredith	Psychology & Business	Graduate Graduate	Nontraditional Nontraditional	Southeast Midwest
Jim	Healthcare Administration	Graduate	Nontraditional	Southeast
Anna	Special Education	Graduate Graduate	Nontraditional Nontraditional	Southeast Midwest
Mary	Criminal Justice	Graduate Graduate	Nontraditional Nontraditional	Southeast Midwest
Jack	Occupational Studies	Graduate	Nontraditional	Southeast
Joanne	Language Education	Graduate	Nontraditional	Southeast
Peri	Language Education	Undergraduate/Graduate	Traditional/Nontraditional	Southeast
Kurt	Special Education	Undergraduate/Graduate	Traditional/Nontraditional	Southeast

Meredith teaches psychology and business administration for two online programs – one in the Southeast and the other in the Midwest. She occasionally teaches face-to-face courses as well. When I met with her, I instantly felt her warmth and enthusiasm for teaching online courses. She stressed during our time together that in both online and face-to-face courses, her students are very special to her, and conveyed almost maternal feelings about them. Of my nine

participants, Meredith was the only faculty member who had been a student in an online course. She received her MBA in 2003, online, from one of the institutions for which she herself now teaches online. She has taught online courses since 2000.

Jim was one of two faculty members I spoke with on the telephone before we met in person; the other was Jack. When we talked on the phone, I got the impression that Jim was a kind, Southern gentleman who was genuinely interested in helping me with my study. That was confirmed when I knocked on his office door and we sat down for the interview. In a fatherly way, he asked me how the hour-long drive to his office had been for me and whether his directions were easy to follow. We chatted for about fifteen minutes before getting to the business of the interview. I learned that Jim had been in healthcare administration practice for thirty years before he started teaching at the college level full time in 2000. He began teaching online in 2002. I felt that while Jim prefers teaching face-to-face where he can launch into stories from his career, teaching Web-based courses intrigues him. He was very thoughtful in his responses to my questions and offered many examples from his teaching experiences to clarify each answer.

Anna teaches exclusively for an online certificate program designed to prepare K-12 educators to teach in special education. She taught in public schools for six years before completing her Ph.D. She then began teaching in higher education at an institution in the Midwest and incorporated online components into her face-to-face courses. She was hired at her current institution to teach in an online certificate program for teachers and career changers interested in earning an endorsement to teach in special education. Anna told me that her main concern about teaching online is ensuring her students are truly prepared to teach children.

Mary has taught six different online courses for two institutions, one in the Midwest and the other in the Southeast. I thoroughly enjoyed speaking with Mary, who told me that she has been a teacher in higher education for 26 years. I knew that I was in for a wonderful conversation when she told me that she was nearly finished with a Ph.D. including majors in three areas: Sociology, Adult and Continuing Education, and Criminal Justice. Clearly a constructivist learner and teacher, Mary also expressed sensitivity to students with different learning preferences. She stressed how important it was for her students to finish her classes having learned something about themselves as students as well as the course content.

Jack has been in teacher education for twenty years, and in education for thirty. When I arrived at Jack's office for our interview, the fluorescent lights were turned off, and the space was illuminated by a desk lamp and a table lamp, which was situated next to a well-worn but very comfortable couch. The local public radio station was on, broadcasting light classical music. We sat on the couch, and a few minutes into our conversation, Jack offered to turn the volume down to avoid overwhelming our voices on my tape recording. I learned that Jack volunteered to teach online for the experience. He told me that his department, Occupational Studies, is planning to offer an online Master's degree, and he is determined to make it a quality program. Jack is heavily influenced by social learning theory and communities of practice.

Joanne was the only participant of my study who is no longer teaching online. She taught as an adjunct in Language Education for an institution in the Southeast, but chose to stop until she might secure a full-time position. Joanne was also unique in that she was the only faculty member whose doctorate was in a field other than the one she taught. She taught two of three courses required for an endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), both online and face-to-face.

Peri taught in public schools for twelve years while working on her Master's and Doctoral degrees. She teaches three online courses and one face-to-face course each semester for an endorsement program in ESOL. Peri was quite energetic, but it was clear that her heavy teaching load is very taxing. I found Peri to be direct with her responses and quick to correct me when I made an erroneous interpretation of something she said. She seemed to be firm yet caring about her students.

Kurt gained experience teaching online while working on his doctorate in special education. He decided to return to school after three years teaching in public schools. Kurt teaches two courses in an online certificate program for teachers and career changers seeking a special education teaching endorsement. He had also taught both courses face-to-face, one of them in a large lecture setting. I found Kurt to be very reflective. He brought some notes with him to the interview and took his time answering my questions.

Data Collection

In a basic study, "data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Each method serves a slightly different purpose, and all contribute to the quality of the study and a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Mathison, 1988; Patton, 2002). In order to understand how faculty members develop community in online courses, I chose to interview faculty members and analyze documents from their online courses.

An interview provides the qualitative researcher with an opportunity to speak with an individual about her opinions and life experiences. Kvale (1996) offers one definition of the qualitative interview:

> An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. (p. 6)

First, the interview is usually a conversation between two people, the researcher and the participant. The role of the researcher includes preparing for the interview, listening carefully, asking thoughtful follow-up questions, and establishing rapport, all while maintaining neutrality (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002).

There are several types of interviews, ranging along a continuum from formal, structured interviews to semistructured formats to informal, unstructured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Kvale states that the qualitative research interview is usually semistructured; "It is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions" (p. 27). For me, the flexibility of the semistructured interview format allowed me to go in to an interview with a list of questions I hoped to have answered, but to follow new thoughts when needed to thoroughly answer the research questions.

The interviews were divided into two parts – background information and critical incidents. During the first part, I asked participants to provide some background about their education and teaching, including face-to-face and online teaching experience and details about their institutions. In the second part of each interview, I asked the participants to describe two challenges from their online teaching experiences, one at a time. I then prompted the participants for more information as needed.

About the Critical Incident Technique

The critical incident technique (CIT) offers a set of procedures for collecting data regarding observed behaviors which are reported from memory (Flanagan, 1954). The CIT was developed in the 1950's based on a set of studies in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II and has since been used to study a variety of activities, including job design and purification, operating procedures, equipment design, and motivation (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998). "The critical incident technique, rather than collecting opinions, hunches, and estimates, obtains a record of specific behaviors from those in the best position to make the necessary observations and evaluations" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 355). The CIT has been used in hundreds of research studies in a variety of disciplines to learn about what people do (Fivars, 1980), and it has been found that data collected using the CIT is generally reliable and valid (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; Bitner, Nyquist, & Booms, 1985).

There are many reasons to use the CIT in different disciplines (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998). In education, Kim (n.d.) suggests the CIT is appropriate for learning how teachers become adept at using an innovation. The innovation I am most interested in is Web-based teaching, and in this study, I would like to learn how faculty members develop community in their Web-based courses. Other benefits to using the CIT include its usefulness in determining behaviors in specific situations and the rich qualitative data resulting from the critical incident interviews (Ellinger & Watkins, 1998).

"Put simply, the critical incident interview invites the respondents to tell a story and explain why it is significant in a given context" (Kim, n.d., Components Section, ¶ 6). Flanagan (1954), though resolute regarding the potential flexibility of the CIT, provides a list of steps for conducting the CIT interview. First, it is important to offer the participant some information

about the study, including who is sponsoring the research, the purpose of the study, and who is being interviewed. In addition, Flanagan stresses the importance of assuring the participant that the data will be stored anonymously. Next, the interviewer asks the participant to recall a (preferably) recent activity related to the purpose of the research in as much detail as possible. The interviewer is not to lead the participant, but may ask additional questions as necessary. In their update to the CIT, Ellinger and Watkins (1998) suggest adding a constructivist bent to this predominantly behaviorist method. The constructivist approach "enables the researcher to look at themes among the beliefs, attributions, and filters which shape the learning as well as those elements in the context which affect what is paid attention to, what is salient, to the learner" (p. 288). This means that in addition to asking questions about *what* happened, I can ask questions about the participant's beliefs of *why* it happened and *how* it is important, or critical.

The Interview Process

I conducted each interview in person, mainly so that participants would have the opportunity to demonstrate various components of their online courses during the interview, if they wanted to do so. Only two of the faculty members, Jim and Jack, offered to demonstrate components of their courses when we met. Jack and five more participants allowed me to view their courses on my own time. While Jim and Meredith were not able to give me student access to view their course documents, I was able to locate general information from their institution's online program Web site. Mary was also unable to share access with me, but she did allow me to read her teaching philosophy.

When I met with each participant, I followed a series of steps (see Appendix A). After thanking him or her for agreeing to meet with me, I read through the consent form (see Appendix B) with the participant, answered his or her questions, and then we both signed two copies, one

for the participant and one for my own files. I began two tape recorders at this point, one as a backup measure, and made sure they both were running.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours. I started by asking the participant for some background information and then moved into the critical incident component of the interview (see Appendix C for the interview guide). I transcribed the audiotapes using a word processor, resulting in 112 single-spaced pages of data. Seven of the nine interviews were transcribed within one week of the interview, while two of the interviews were transcribed approximately six months after the interviews. Although transcribing these two interviews six months after the fact was a little more difficult than those I was able to transcribe right away, I do not feel the gap in time affected the data analysis or the accuracy of the transcription.

In addition to the interviews, I gathered documents to facilitate answering the research questions. In qualitative research, documents can include everything from newspaper articles and Web pages to photographs and report cards. This sort of material is useful to the researcher in multiple ways, including supplying information gleaned directly from the data source and stimulating new ideas to consider (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of this study, I collected documents from the online courses for six of the nine faculty members I interviewed, the teaching philosophy of the seventh, and documents from the institution Web site for the other two. I used these documents in two ways. First, I was able to use some of them to prepare for interviews. Faculty members' Web sites were especially helpful as advance organizers, aiding me to understand the structure of the online course before sitting down for the interview. Other documents were used to triangulate the interview data, validating what I found in the interviews.

In summary, the data collection procedures for this study included employing the critical incident technique to interview faculty members about the challenges they face in developing

community in their online courses as well as the strategies they use to address those challenges, and collecting relevant documents from the participants, including course materials or information from institutional Web sites.

Data Analysis

In keeping with Silverman's (2000) statement that "data analysis does not come after data gathering" (p. 121), I began analyzing data right away. Wolcott (2001) suggests that early on, analytic efforts involve "combining things, aggregating data, and discerning patterns" (p.34). I started with the interviews, transcribing them using Microsoft Word. I originally planned to use NVivo, a software package by QSR that allows for the storage, review, and coding of data and the assessment of relationships found within the data (Silverman, 2000). Rather than take the time to learn a new piece of software, I opted to use a process developed by Ruona (2005) which employs features of Microsoft Word that I was already familiar with and found easy to use. I began coding the interviews right away.

Coding the interviews involved developing numeric codes as I read through the data. At first, I established the codes ad hoc, but as I got further along, I used existing codes and only created new ones as needed. After creating new categories, I reviewed previously-coded data for possible changes or additions. This is an interpretation of the constant comparative method which was created "by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the means of developing grounded theory" (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). Although I never intended to build theory, this method helped me to see relationships within the data in a manageable way. As I finished coding each interview in Word, I copied it to a master document containing the other interview data which had been coded. This simplified the data analysis process, allowing me to sort all of the data by code numbers or search through it all for key words.

Once all of the interview data was coded, I read back through all of it and sorted by codes to find commonalities. I defined a number of categories, and then verified those categories with the documents I had collected from my participants' Web courses and institutions' Web sites.

Validity and Reliability

"Validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the findings are presented" (Merriam, 1998, pp. 199-200). I have done my best to ensure validity and reliability in my study using four methods suggested by Merriam, including the following. First, I used multiple data sources, with faculty participants from around the state of Georgia who taught for institutions up and down the east coast and in the Midwest. Second, I confirmed my interpretations of data with the study participants, a process called member checks. This involved contacting the faculty members and asking them to comment on the data analysis. According to Patton (2002), participant reviews may lead to new ideas or questions about the analysis and/or verify the findings. After e-mailing my Findings Chapter to all nine participants, I heard positive feedback from Sarah, Meredith, Anna, Kurt, Mary, and Peri. I suspect that the timing of my request was not good for receiving feedback, as I sent the e-mail just when most of the faculty members were ending their spring terms and starting their summer terms.

The third method for ensuring reliability and validity involved asking colleagues at work for their comments on emergent findings. This also offered a fresh way of looking at the data. Finally, as Merriam recommends, I reflected on my biases and subjectivities before beginning the study. This step is very important in qualitative research as the credibility and quality of the

research "hinge to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing fieldwork" (Patton, 2002, p. 14).

Researcher Bias and Assumptions

I believe that the most successful online courses make students and teachers feel that they are part of a learning community. However, with that community comes conflict and challenges that the participants must manage. Faculty members encounter conflict in their face-to-face classes all the time, and I think the strategies they use to handle those conflicts may inform how they handle similar situations, and vastly different ones, online. What I did not know before beginning this study is how similar the face-to-face challenges are to the online ones and whether similar strategies are generally effective in online learning communities.

I believe that most faculty members in higher education settings teach the way they were taught. That is, if the faculty member's own college career included lecture courses, that faculty member is likely to lecture. If, on the other hand, the faculty member attended small discussion classes and was very active in class, then that individual is more likely to conduct their own classes in a more active way.

As a faculty development professional with a focus in instructional technology, I have worked with many faculty members preparing to teach online. All seem genuinely committed to teaching the best course possible, but some apply themselves to this task more than others. The faculty members who volunteer to teach online seem to have a greater interest in instructional technology than those who are required to teach online, with exceptions of course.

I think that I have a pretty good handle on how to succeed when teaching online. I have taught online myself a limited number of times, but I am engaged in the literature and keep in close contact with faculty members who teach online on a regular basis. I attend conferences

focused on successful online teaching strategies. However, there are always unknown factors that can throw a speed bump on the information superhighway.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the qualitative design of my study and the procedures I implemented to complete the data collection and data analysis. I also described each of the participants of the study. Finally, I discussed issues of validity and reliability and reflected on my biases and assumptions going in to the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members build and sustain community in online courses for adults. The questions that guided the study were:

1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses?
2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses?
3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses?
4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

In this chapter, I present the findings for each question, summarized in Table 2.

Why Community Matters

When I spoke with each of the faculty participants for this study, I asked them to talk about community as it relates to their online teaching. Based on their responses, I found that community is important to them all for one general reason: they feel that most students need interaction with other students in order to succeed in an online course. By facilitating a sense of community in their courses, the faculty members encourage students to share in the responsibility for making meaning of the course content and to form connections with others in the class.

TABLE 2
Findings Summary

Why Community Matters
Community facilitates participation
Community facilitates supportive relationships
Challenges Faculty Face in Online Course Communities
Delays in communication
Mediating conflict
Some students are not interested in the community component
Strategies Faculty Use to Address Challenges in Online Course Communities
Avoiding and addressing challenges through course design
Facilitating course discussions
One-on-one communication with students
Allowing students to work out the problems themselves
Differences Between Face-to-Face and Online Course Communities
Communication is more difficult in online courses
Students may post comments online they would not say face-to-face
Students are more comfortable participating in online discussions
Asynchronous courses allow for more thoughtful discussions

Community Facilitates Participation

One of the reasons faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses is that when students feel they are a part of a community, they may be more likely to participate in course discussions and feel a sense of responsibility to their classmates. Mary shared her teaching philosophy with me, which included this statement:

> (Students) gather in small groups to define and discuss their individual reasons for taking the course, and identify several goals for themselves they hope to accomplish by the time

> the course ends. By sharing these with their classmates and me, students are encouraged to identify specific ways they can take responsibility for accomplishing these goals.

Anna feels the same about encouraging shared responsibility to the group, and said that one of her roles is "to facilitate that sense of community, making them feel that they're a part of something, that they have an important role to play, and that they have information and thoughts to share that are valuable to other people." On accomplishing this within the context of an online course, she added,

> While the technology can unfortunately allow people who tend to want to be isolated to stay that way, it can also be a really nice tool…to get those who normally hang back and aren't comfortable talking in class, to participate in a dialogue that they wouldn't have.

Although some students may feel just fine working in isolation and communicating only with the course instructor, the participants of this study all reported that they encourage their students to connect with other students. Meredith said, "I want the class to know that this is a community, that this is a classroom, and that we are all working together and that we do need each other." She repeated this several times during her interview with me.

To get the ball rolling, most of the faculty members included some sort of icebreaker activity on their course Web sites. One of the first assignments in Anna's class is a discussion board post. She asked students to compose a message to introduce themselves to the class, including their past experience with the online certificate program they were all enrolled in, "current job description (system, students), your career goals, and any other information you'd like your 49 classmates to know about you." Jack, Joanne, Peri, and Sarah also asked students to introduce themselves, but via personal homepages instead of discussion posts. Sarah's assignment said:

> Develop your student homepage. This is an opportunity to have your classmates get to know the real you. On the page include the following information: Name, hometown, plans for after graduation, your favorite G-rated college memory, and any other pertinent information. Also upload the picture that was taken of you on the first day of class.

Each of these assignments gave students a way to introduce themselves to the group, show pictures, and connect with classmates, much like they would on breaks or in the hallways before and after face-to-face classes.

Like Meredith, Kurt related the online community to the face-to-face classroom community, noting that "community is a critical component to distance ed, because it kind of brings students into the classroom and gives them a support structure outside of just the professor or the TAs." Peri also mentioned that she tells her students how "we need to hear from everybody" so that they will be exposed to different points-of-view, and she facilitated this by requiring both small group and whole class discussions. Each faculty member in this study included participation in class discussions in their grading schemes. For Anna, participation in discussions was weighted at 15% of the final course grade. In Peri's class, discussion counted for 40% of the final grade. Her syllabus said,

> Class participation is important in any class about teaching, but in an online course it is absolutely essential. This class is intended to be **highly interactive**. In other words, how much we learn depends on the community we form in cyberspace.

I found similar statements valuing community in course syllabi or home pages written by Sarah, Joanne, Kurt, and Jack. Jack noted that "Individual scholarship is required and participants have an obligation to other class members."

Community Facilitates Supportive Relationships

The support structure Kurt spoke about is not always related only to the course content. Several faculty members who participated in this study also felt that building and sustaining a sense of community during the course results in the formation of personal bonds between students, including some connections that continue beyond the completion of the course. Sarah mentioned that the personal relationships students form show that the students are putting more into the course than just enough "to try and get a grade out of it." Joanne felt that her class had developed a strong sense of community when she started seeing notes of a personal nature appear on the discussion board. "People would say, 'hey, I've got a surprise. I'm pregnant!'" Jim saw the same sorts of friendly comments in his class as well, and recalled notes like "Hi Holly, glad to see you're back. I hope you didn't have any problems over the summer" and "hi so and so, how's the new baby?"

Meredith felt that the support networks the students formed in her classes often continued when they were over. She told me that she played a part in that as well: "I encourage them to swap e-mail addresses with each other so that they can form relationships to help swap books, to help know which teachers they should take and which teachers they shouldn't take."

Anna also expressed a desire for her students to use the online community modeled in her class and continue communicating with their classmates after receiving their certificates in special education. She said that many of her students will be the only special education teacher in their respective schools. Whereas a history or math teacher can easily meet and consult with her colleagues, special education teachers are often isolated. She told me,

> I'd especially like to see informal support networks coming out of these classes where you've got people who have a shared experience in terms of the coursework they've had

> and the things that they believe to be true about teaching, theoretically, who could then use that to sort of support each other both in terms of strategies that you might try, or 'yeah, your principal really is a jerk, I can't believe he did that.' You know, all of those things that we need when we come to work that a lot of these people don't have.

The formation of such supportive relationships and increased likelihood that students will participate are the reasons that faculty members in this study attempted to build and sustain community in their online courses. Even with these advantages, however, faculty members faced a number of challenges in their online course communities.

Challenges in Online Course Communities

The faculty members who participated in this study identified three categories of challenges related to building and sustaining community in their online courses. First, the delay which is inherent in asynchronous communication makes it difficult to develop and sustain the online course community. Second, mediating conflict is challenging online. Finally, faculty members indicated that some students are just not interested in participating in the community.

Challenge: Communication Delays

Although one of the touted benefits of asynchronous learning is the leisure to log in to a course any time, timely participation is very important when the instructor values community. Each of the faculty members interviewed had some sort of time requirements built into their syllabus. For some, students were required to log in to the course every day or a certain number of times in a week. For others, students were required to post a minimum number of messages in a given time period. Jim and Meredith, who both taught for the same institution, included college-wide policy statements in their courses which recommended checking in on course discussions daily, and at least five of every seven days. One challenge related to delay in

communication occurred when one or more students did not follow the guidelines established in the syllabus. Meredith told her students how important it was to keep up with the class, saying "if you don't travel with the pack, we're, you're going to post the most wonderful, Nobel Peace Prize winning award assignment that no one will see, and we'll all lose out because of that." She was referring to a time when a student made a brilliant contribution in one area of the course, but because it was late, the rest of the class was no longer reading that forum.

Due to the delay in asynchronous online courses, Kurt felt that some group activities that work well in face-to-face classes fail when attempted online. He said "the level of synchronous interaction that's required for students to ask questions back and forth very quickly to get an idea of what they're supposed to do is just not always possible online." Jim mentioned this as well. He told me about including class debates in his face-to-face courses, where "over a period of about an hour, you can get a pretty good dialogue going, and you can make some pretty good points," while working on the computer "takes some of the steam out of it…I don't find the enthusiasm for the debate to be the same as it is in the classroom."

Jim went on to tell me that the delay between posts was the greatest barrier in communication and a major challenge in maintaining relationships with students as well. He told me that the delay affected the way he gave feedback to his students:

> By the time you get back to them to say, you shouldn't do this, or please don't do this, or please reduce the volume of your response, you don't know what mood they're in. You don't know how well they are to receive this type of instruction. You may insult them or you may hurt their feelings.

Joanne also felt the delay in communication was an issue, but related the problem more to the flow of content than to the sense of community. She worried that by the time she posted feedback within small group conversation areas, the groups had moved on.

Challenge: Mediating Conflict

Faculty participants in this study discussed the challenges associated with conflict and lack of respect between students in online course communities. Sarah described two students in one of her social work courses who seemed to hit it off immediately. Both women, Shannon and Beth, were in their forties and when the class discussion turned to social work with older adults, they teased each other about their ages and appeared to bond with one another. Later in the semester when the topic was hospital visitation rights for homosexual partners, Shannon made a comment that Beth, and the rest of the class for that matter, felt strongly opposed to. The women had a falling out, and Shannon began to feel attacked by Beth's comments. Sarah said, "when she felt like she wasn't being heard, and the other student was becoming defensive, that was when it sounded as if she was attacking…It's hard to interpret online what's attacking and what's just stating a fact." Beth's intent was to understand how Shannon could feel the way she did and also adhere to the guidelines and ethics of the profession of social work. Sarah talked about the challenge of mediating such a situation online and how much more difficult it is than simply taking the student aside after class when meeting face-to-face.

> "I really did try to do a lot of things online with her, like going over the values of the profession…online, we don't have the nonverbal communication, and she could have just been tuning me out…if you're in a traditional class then you know someone and you see that going on, it's a lot easier to pull them in your office and say, 'we have to have a discussion.'"

Kurt relates a similar experience with students in his special education courses who do not buy into the philosophies of the discipline in regard to including children with disabilities in class. These students "become very vocal and very opinionated about it and kind of squash conversation amongst the other students, because the other students are afraid to stand up to them." Rather than developing this conversation into one about ethics in the practice, like Sarah's students, the other students backed down.

Meredith also had an incident in her online classroom where a male student, Larry, had a habit of baiting others in the discussions. During a discussion about homosexuality in a psychology class, an older female student, Wanda, "had just found out that her son had an alternative lifestyle, and so when he picked up on that, he went after it." Wanda was a devout Christian and revealed that she was praying very hard to accept her son as he was, and Larry attacked her for that claiming she was not truly a Christian. Larry "actually went after some other students in the classroom" as well when they attempted to defend Wanda's statements.

For several faculty members interviewed, overt conflict between students was not a problem, but lack of respect between students was an issue. Jim said, "people don't respect others. They're not concerned about the dialogue or participating on time…they may not even be trying to support the group." Meredith and Joanne noted this as well and told me about comments students had made online that were either racial slurs or malicious to other community members. Although these comments did not cause arguments in class discussions, they did affect the community. Joanne told me about a discussion about second language acquisition in a Language and Culture class when "somebody said 'I don't know why those Asians in the nail salons don't speak English." In Meredith's class, a student posted several rude comments, and in response, Meredith sent him e-mail messages reminding him of the netiquette guidelines for the

class. In turn, Meredith told me that he posted a comment about her that said, "'I'd a known you were a woman, I wouldn't be here, you know, what can women teach us?'" These comments are not typical, that is not all of the faculty members I interviewed encountered such extreme disrespect.

While dealing with the students involved in these conflicts is challenging in itself, Sarah mentioned that another challenge related to these incidents is the time required for mediation. She said, "all of a sudden I had to do so much in the background that didn't involve the other students." So while Sarah worked through a situation with just one or two students, she had less time for interacting with the other members of the community.

Challenge: Students May Not Want Community

The faculty members interviewed had all attempted to facilitate community in their courses. A challenge that many of them told me about was that some students were not interested in community; rather they simply wanted to log in, get their work done, and log out. Mary, who places great value on learning community in her face-to-face and online courses, did not anticipate that her students had other priorities, almost to the exclusion of community all together.

> Yeah, my appreciation for it is very different. I made the assumption that everybody thought it was important. What I found, particularly in the first class I taught with a group of working professionals, top-notch working professionals for the most part, was that community was not an important aspect of what they were trying to do.

Mary went on to say that not only was community not important to her students, it was "a pain in the ass frankly, because they didn't have time or interest in it." Most of the other faculty members in this study found this to be true for at least some of their students as well, and Jim

estimated that in his classes, up to 70% of the students are interested in doing only as much as necessary to get their grade, nothing more. He said that those students are "usually hanging in the background somewhere and they're just wanting to get the heck out of dodge so to speak." Peri even had one student who calculated just how much she had to do to get the grade she wanted. Although this had happened months before our interview, Peri was still incredulous when she told me how her student "did the math, and she thought, 'okay, so I can really flop on my participation, but if I do okay on my other assignments, I can at least get a C. That's okay with me.'"

Jack also mentioned that some students have other priorities that interfere with the sense of community. He told me about a time when he was online one evening for virtual office hours, a synchronous component that was voluntary in his primarily asynchronous course. He was engaged in a rich discussion with one student, but the other students who were logged on would only "peck around the edges of our conversation" and then say "'I have to get offline now and feed my kids,' or 'I have to, you know, my husband just came in and I have to go do other things or go to the grocery store.'" While Jack continued the conversation with the one student, he told me how frustrating it was that he was unable to broaden the discussion and engage the others in the chat as well.

Kurt was another study participant who found that some of his students were not interested in the community component. His evidence was that some students would simply "hang back" or "lurk" during course discussions. Meredith's and Anna's experiences were more palpable, however. Meredith said in a matter-of-fact tone, "they've been blatant enough to let me know beforehand, I'm not participating in the buddy system, I don't need socialization, I go to church or I've got the synagogue and I don't need that." Anna felt that some of her students

> don't want to do the group stuff; they don't want to have a lot of interactions. They just want to show up, do their work, turn it in, and go. The only community they really want to build is a very small one between me and them.

She told me that during one of her online courses she was corresponding with a student via e-mail about participating in community-building activities and the student said, "if I wanted that, I'd come to campus."

Strategies for Addressing Challenges in Online Course Communities

The faculty members interviewed for this study identified four general methods they use to address the challenges they face related to community in their online courses. First, faculty members are proactive when they develop their courses, including guidelines and activities designed to set the appropriate tone for the course from the start. Second, faculty members participate in discussions, facilitating for the whole class and often the small groups as well. Finally, they work one-on-one with the students involved in the challenging situation, usually via e-mail. In addition to these three strategies, some faculty members noted that at times, they do not have to do anything at all; rather the students take care of the issue themselves.

Strategy: Avoiding and Addressing Challenges through Course Design

One method that faculty members identified for addressing the challenges they encounter in their online course communities was designing the course materials and activities such that potential challenging situations are less likely to occur. Specific techniques include holding a face-to-face orientation before the class begins, providing clear expectations, including netiquette guidelines, and designing a predictable, user-friendly course interface. These techniques help initiate the students into the community, encourage respect between students, and avoid lengthy delays in course discussions.

Some classes, especially those with a regional student population, began with a face-to-face orientation which allowed the faculty members to review class procedures, help students get to know one another, and set the tone for the semester. Peri required attendance at her orientation, and she told me a bit about it:

> I do have one face-to-face meeting at the beginning of the semester that they're required to attend…We're in a lab, and then they just have forty million questions just about what to do and how to do it…everything they need to know is on the site. Everything is on there, but they don't take the time to look and so there's lots of questions to field.

While Mary did not require a face-to-face orientation in her courses, she did note a similar strategy she used online, encouraging students to reflect on why they enrolled in an online course:

> There's the finer points of why they're doing what they're doing, things that I spend, usually the first week helping them get clear about. That brings an authenticity to their experience that can get conveyed in their assignments and postings that might otherwise just kind of pass us by.

Mary indicated that by including these reflective activities early on in the course, her students would get more from the class and perhaps be better community members as well, even if that was not a priority for them.

All of the participants of the study agreed that providing clear explanations of their expectations is critical in the course design as well as the course delivery. Jack said,

> Well, the course was way more structured than it would have been on-ground, but I purposely did that. I purposely put out a structure so that people would know what they were doing and when they were expected to turn things in.

Jim also felt strongly about this. He told me,

> When I haven't done my job well, and I don't make my expectations clear, and I'm kind of rushing to get all of this done, I find they get a little frustrated. They don't understand where they are, they don't understand my expectations, and of course that's a little embarrassing for me, but it's the reality of it. You can blame the students for not being sufficiently capable of getting into the text or whatever and defining their answers, but they can't read your mind when they don't know your expectations.

Each one of the faculty members interviewed had a syllabus or information page in their course where they outlined their expectations for course assignments, including community-building activities. When there were any questions about expectations, the faculty members generally used the discussions or e-mail tool for clarification. Kurt described one of his roles online "as trying to predict where things are going to go wrong and get out in front of where things are going to go wrong with warning e-mails."

Also related to setting the tone for the course and providing clear expectations, most faculty members included some sort of "netiquette" guidelines for communications with other members of the community. Students were required to read the guidelines and follow them in all communications with instructors and classmates. Here is one example of netiquette guidelines from Peri's syllabus:

- Check the discussion frequently and respond appropriately and on subject.
- Focus on one subject per message and use pertinent subject titles.
- Capitalize words only to highlight a point or for titles—Capitalizing otherwise is generally viewed as SHOUTING!
- Be professional and careful with your online interaction.

- Cite all quotes, references, and sources.
- When posting a long message, it is generally considered courteous to warn readers at the beginning of the message that it is a lengthy post.
- It is considered extremely rude to forward someone else's messages without their permission.
- It is fine to use humor, but use it carefully. The absence of face-to-face cues can cause humor to be misinterpreted as criticism or flaming (angry, antagonistic criticism). Feel free to use emoticons such as :-) or ;-) to let others know that you're being funny--or trying to! :-)

Kurt had similar guidelines and included, “You should strive for professionalism, clarity, and efficiency in your communication…Efforts at cultural sensitivity should be stressed and expected in all interactions with other students and instructors for this course.” On the importance of emphasizing such guidelines for appropriate online communication, Meredith said, “the netiquette helps at the beginning. They get to read that and understand that I’m a person, that they’re a person, that there is another person on the end of that computer that’s reading what they’re saying.” By encouraging her students to think about the other students in the class who would be reading their postings, Meredith felt they would be more likely to be respectful, at least to the extent that they would be in a face-to-face class.

An additional technique one faculty member used to address potential challenges in her online course communities was to design courses with ease of use and predictability in mind. As she spoke with me about course design, Anna said, “I’ve tried to make my courses from one to the other, fairly standard, so that the student who’s taken a course from me before probably

knows the drill in terms of how things are going to be done." This works particularly well for her because she often has students in several of her special education certificate courses.

While holding a face-to-face orientation, providing clear expectations, including netiquette guidelines, and designing a predictable, user-friendly course interface go a long way to address challenges before they occur, it was sometimes necessary for faculty members to make adjustments to the course design during the class term. Mary told me that in one class she taught where participation in online chats was originally a major part of the grade, she changed the weighting after getting to know her students. "I waffled on grading. I made it not quite so important. I feel that I had set up an unrealistic expectation for them that despite their best efforts, they couldn't be successful with." Jim explained how adjusting the course requirements to meet the needs of a community of students can be helpful, but he suggested it must be done very carefully:

> You have to stay on top of your game, you have to give instructions succinctly and clearly, and you have to be willing to live with them. Because if I change instructions for the assignment I made this week and posted yesterday, if I change that today, how am I going to be sure that the students saw that change? If I send them all e-mail, how am I going to be sure they received the e-mail on time?

Therefore, instructors must be willing to make adjustments to solve problems that arise in the course community, but they must also be careful not to cause new problems in the process.

Strategy: Facilitating Course Discussions

Although faculty members attempt to proactively avoid challenges in their online course communities, challenges come up anyway. Faculty participants in this study told me that facilitating, that is getting the discussions started, monitoring their progress, and intervening

when necessary, helps to keep the students on topic, prevent lengthy delays in the discussions, and avoid or mediate conflicts which may arise in class.

Some faculty members felt that it is their responsibility as facilitators to get the class discussions started. Meredith said, “I’m always trying to think of something, you know, that’s going to give them something to talk about, that’s going to spark the discussion.” Jack posted a weekly message called “TTTAB” or “things to think about” to get his students working at application and analysis levels of thinking. Jim agreed, saying that his role in the discussion is twofold: “Number one, define the issue. Number two, don’t give the answer to the issue, but get them to do some critical thinking in their response.”

Peri was also very active in discussion in her classes, getting them started and then making sure they are on target. She related,

> I think it’s my job to get in there in the small groups and to see what they’re talking about. This is where they’re talking about the readings and the meat of the content. It’s my chance to address things and put other things out there for them to consider and answer their questions.

Monitoring discussions can be very time-consuming, but each faculty member stressed the importance of this task. By logging on every day, or at least every other day, and reading what the students had posted, they kept their students on the right track and gave them additional information when needed. Peri felt that without faculty participation in the discussions, “it’s the blind leading the blind,” and Sarah told me that she felt her comments kept her students coming back to the discussions often. She said, “they know they really have to keep up too, because they’d better respond to me.”

Kurt told me about a unique strategy that he uses to address problems in course discussions, specifically times when one student was dominating the conversation or when the conversation was non-existent. Rather than post as the instructor, he posted messages using an alias that looked like a student. He told me his reasoning:

> I didn't want to seem like I wasn't allowing them to air their concerns, and so…I inserted a fake student into all my groups that was me, but it was a student. And my TAs had the responsibility of knowing that they had to respond to this student just as they would anybody else. That gave me the ability to, I don't want to say act as a spy, but I could go in there and I could say things, and I could play devil's advocate if I wanted to, to try to get conversation going.

In one particular class, the groups were all functioning very well, and so the student alias stopped participating. Kurt realized that the fake student had become a part of the community, however when one of his actual students asked if the alias had dropped the course!

Strategy: One-on-One Communication with Students

Although facilitation skills are critical for building and sustaining online course communities, the most common method faculty members identified for addressing challenges was directly contacting the student or students involved. If one student was disrespectful of another in a posting, the faculty member usually contacted one or both students via e-mail or the telephone. Direct contact with the student was also the strategy of choice when a student appeared not to be participating.

Meredith's motto was, "Praise in public, spank in private," meaning that whenever she wanted to commend a student's work, she would do so in the public discussion forum, but addressing inappropriate behavior was done only via private e-mail. Of the incident between

Wanda and Larry when Larry posted an offensive comment, Meredith e-mailed him immediately, saying “I explained a little bit, reiterating the syllabus, reiterating that I was not going to tolerate that behavior, that some people would find his posting offensive, and I was one of them.”

Joanne also encountered a situation where she had to contact a student privately. One of her students posted a comment that was disrespectful, so she sent that student a note via e-mail to work through the issue. She said, “I think the way I handle things is to try to see it from her perspective, then show her a different perspective and not blame her for seeing it that way.”

Sarah used e-mail as well with Shannon and Beth to help them work through their conflict and explained how difficult it was. “It was very strange for me, you know, it’s one thing to, if I had two traditional twenty-two year olds saying that, but these are two adult women, and I couldn’t believe I had to mediate that.” Both Shannon and Beth were local, and Sarah related that if a similar situation came up in the future, she would simply call them into her office, just as she would with students in her face-to-face classes. Of course this is not possible when the students are spread across the country or the world, but it is a strategy to keep in mind when students live nearby.

Finally, Anna gave me an example of how she works individually with students who have difficulty participating in online discussions. She said,

> So I’ll always let them know, you know, I see that you’re there, and I appreciate that you’re there, and if you feel comfortable saying something then fine. If not, that’s okay too. And I always make it a point to drop them an e-mail and tell them that I liked their question or their comment when they do pipe up.

Anna added that while she tends to accept that some people just prefer not to participate in community-building activities, she would "reinforce the heck out of them when they do." Joanne used this strategy as well and told me that she wrote very positive e-mail messages to her students when they contributed to the sense of community in her courses.

Strategy: Step Back and Let Students Work it Out

While faculty members consider this sort of mediation one of their roles as facilitators of online course communities, some told me that the students sometimes address the problems themselves. In Joanne's class, when one of her students posted a comment about Asians in nail salons, Joanne told me that "people just, you know, very nicely, took her on. And I just watched in the postings as it happened." This happened in one of Meredith's classes as well. One of her students posted inflammatory messages on the discussion board. "Her comments were racial slurs…'they should be in their own country' sort of thing, and she didn't want to deal with them." Meredith noticed that after the student posted those remarks, "the class just decided that, on their own, to isolate her."

Kurt noted that when his students got to know each other in the online course community, they were sometimes able to avoid conflicts that might have occurred had they not known each other very well.

> I've had students who were, I don't want to say confrontational, but they've got an opinion on everything, and they're not afraid to share that with the group. You can kind of tell that students might be moderating what they're saying based on who the individual is because they got to know them through their…community of learners.

By anticipating what could happen, the students are able to take the situation in hand and avoid altercations with one another.

In addition to these methods which most of the study participants agreed upon, there were a few other strategies noted by just one or two faculty members I interviewed. Meredith mentioned some strategies that were more extreme than the others, including ignoring a student who was out of line to "shut him down" and even reporting the student to the department for disciplinary action. Anna and Mary simply allowed their students to opt out of some activities, Mary's reasoning being "it was a shortcoming on my part to assume that we all shared the same definition of community or the same desire for it." Finally, Sarah was the only faculty member who mentioned discussing the situation with her colleagues.

Differences Between Face-to-Face and Online Course Communities

As I talked with faculty members about the challenges they face in their online course communities, I asked them how their online classrooms differ from their face-to-face classrooms. Four themes related to community, specifically communication in community, emerged from their answers. The first two themes favor face-to-face, and the others favor online. First, faculty members thought that communicating with their students online was more difficult than face-to-face. Second, and perhaps the most harmful to online community, students sometimes make comments online that they probably would not say directly to another individual in a face-to-face situation. On the other hand, students who might not speak in a face-to-face class are generally more comfortable participating in online discussions, and community members in online classrooms have more time to reflect on others' postings as well as their own.

Difference: Communicating with Students is Difficult Online

In online courses, it is easy to misunderstand what others are saying and difficult to communicate what you actually want to say. Jim summed this up well when he smiled and told me, "I know you've seen that little paragraph that says something like, 'I know that you think

you know you understand that what I said is what I meant to say and it's not really exactly what I said!'" He added,

> when you say something with a tongue-in-cheek type of intent, it comes back as a more literal interpretation…you have to be very careful that you don't insult people by anticipating their understanding of what you intended to say. There's a fine line we walk there.

Jim also said that he thinks it is more difficult to tell stories online than face-to-face and found that to be disappointing when teaching online.

Other faculty members told me how the lack of nonverbal communication in online courses makes it more difficult to communicate with students. Mary said of her face-to-face teaching, "I can move about. I can touch somebody on the shoulder. I can command the attention and focus and cooperation in ways that being removed physically from the situation makes much more challenging." Sarah agreed; she told me,

> You can't pick up nonverbals…So much of what we do in social work is getting people to talk and having things come out and having people negotiate with one another. I still think it's more challenging to do that online than in person. I'm much more skilled at doing it in person.

Jack worried that without nonverbal communication, his personality would not be evident online. He said, "I really am touchy-feely in my classes. I feel threatened by an environment that's not going to feel that way to me."

Kurt told me that when he first started teaching online, he found the large number of students in his course and the course design made communication very difficult. He had just one discussion board for everyone, and this was a mistake. He said,

> If I had a class of fifty students and I had fifty students all trying to reply to one another on a topic, it just didn't work. I couldn't follow it, they couldn't follow it, and the discussion wasn't very meaningful.

For most courses, this can be corrected by including a number of small group discussion areas. Even with small groups, however Joanne continued to have communication issues in one of her courses due to the time delay mentioned earlier.

Difference: Students May Post Comments Online They Would Not Say Face-to-Face

In face-to-face classrooms, students must look at their classmates when they take a turn to speak. In online classrooms, students are simply typing out their thoughts on the computer, perhaps without even reading them before pressing the "send" button. Faculty members in the study noted one result of being removed from the physical presence of others is that students post messages online that they would not say out loud in a face-to-face classroom. Sarah said, "people do feel more open in posting, and then it might not be appropriate." She mentioned her student Shannon as an example. Shannon had indicated that in her social work practice, she would avoid working with homosexuals for personal reasons. Sarah wondered, "in a classroom, face-to-face with people, would she have felt comfortable saying 'I'm not going to serve this population?'" She thought it more likely that Shannon would have kept that information to herself and the conflict that ensued in her online course would not have occurred.

Meredith also talked with me about students saying things online that she would never hear them say to her or other students face-to-face. In an online psychology class, one of her students posted in a response to another that his comment was "total bullshit." Meredith sent the student an e-mail to remind him of the netiquette guidelines in the class, and although she did not receive a response, his postings were more respectful and constructive after that. With regard to

the student's comment, Meredith said, "in a classroom, you probably would not have turned around and told somebody else those thoughts."

Anna told me that she too feels that students may say things to faculty members online they would not say face-to-face. She said, "I think that for some people it's far less intimidating to think about firing off an e-mail to me when they're irritated with me and they'll say things to me on e-mail that they wouldn't say at my office door."

Difference: Students are More Comfortable Participating Online

Some faculty members interviewed felt that another result of being physically removed from the presence of others is beneficial to the community. Some students who would ordinarily be uncomfortable speaking in class feel less intimidated online and are more likely to participate in class discussions. Joanne said that this is especially true of her international students.

> I had international students in both classes, and they felt a lot more comfortable in the online setting than in a regular class, even though I had broken the discussions into groups in the face-to-face…and these were all very competent students, but they're not likely to contribute on their own without being brought out. On the online course, they were very willing to write, even though you would think writing would be a more difficult skill than speaking.

Sarah agreed, adding "you get such richer discussion, and students who would not normally participate whether it's because they're shy or they don't feel heard, they're there." Anna also mentioned this, saying "I think the online forum might prompt some of those folks to actually speak up and get to know people a little more."

Difference: Asynchronous Online Courses Allow for More Thoughtful Discussion

One more difference between online and face-to-face classroom communities that faculty members shared with me is the additional time community members have to post messages to the class, read others' postings, reflect on what those posts mean in the context of the course content, and craft intelligent responses. Mary said,

> One of the things that I found is that by really facilitating a lot of writing and responses to the writing, I can create the kind of reflective experience that I think they benefit most from and that I wish we could duplicate in the classroom.

Joanne also felt that the asynchronous nature of her online courses was a major benefit. While comments made in face-to-face classrooms are gone once they are voiced, students can refer back to messages posted online. Regarding the rigor of her online courses, she said "there's a more intense theoretical, intellectual development going on, because people have a couple of days to think about a question."

Kurt told me how he can get discussions going in small groups online that he had tried unsuccessfully to facilitate in his large lecture classes. He laughed a bit when he explained,

> With the 200 person lectures, I've broken students up into groups, but it just becomes a logistical nightmare trying to get things organized in a lecture hall that's one of these sloped stadium style seating things. It's just not conducive to students conversing. You tell students to go out into the hallways and come back in fifteen minutes. They go out into the hallways and never come back!

In addition to allowing more time for students to reflect and collaborate on course content, Jim told me that the asynchronous nature of his online courses gave him extra time to

think about student comments and allowed him to be more thorough in evaluating his students' comments. He said,

> In the classroom I love the discussion and dialogue and first thing I know, four hours is gone. On the computer, I cover it all because I can take my time to do it. I take this question, I look at what they say about it, I look at what the text really says about it, what they left out, what they should include, what they didn't think about.

So while he may spend a lot of time reading and responding to student comments, which was mentioned, often with a complaint or two, by all of the study participants, Jim felt the benefit to the students was better feedback and personalized attention from the instructor.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members build and sustain community in their online courses. In this chapter, I presented the findings organized by the four research questions which guided the study.

First, I discussed why community matters to faculty who teach online. According to the participants of this study, building and sustaining community helps most students to succeed in online classes. Community facilitates participation and supportive relationships and prevents students from feeling isolated.

Next, I outlined three categories of challenges faculty encounter when attempting to build and sustain community online. The faculty members noted that the delays inherent in asynchronous online communication present a challenge for discussions between themselves and their students as well as among students. Another type of challenge was conflict among students or between students and faculty members. The last type of challenge related to community was when students only want to do their work and are not interested in the community component.

The third research question addressed the strategies faculty members use to deal with the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in their online courses. First, faculty members design their courses to avoid challenging situations and build in devices to handle them when they do occur. Second, faculty members play an active role in the course discussions, including whole class and small group conversations. Third, they contact the students involved in the situation personally, generally via e-mail, to work through the problem or coach the students as needed. Finally, faculty members sometimes see that the students work out the problem amongst themselves, and no further action is necessary.

The last research question related to the differences between face-to-face classroom communities and online classroom communities. Faculty members identified four ways these communities differ, specifically in the area of course communication. First, faculty members find it more difficult to communicate with their students online than face-to-face. Second, students often feel more comfortable participating in online discussions than in face-to-face discussions. Third, students may post comments that they would not say directly to someone's face in the traditional classroom. And finally, online courses allow for more time to reflect on the topics at hand, leading to more thoughtful, in-depth conversations.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges faculty encounter as they build and sustain community in their Web-based courses for adults. Four research questions guided the study:

1) Why do faculty members attempt to build and sustain community in their online courses?
2) What challenges do faculty members face when building and sustaining community in their online courses?
3) What strategies do faculty members use to address the challenges they face when building and sustaining community in online courses?
4) What are the differences between face-to-face and online course communities?

In this chapter, I offer a summary of the study, the conclusions, a discussion of those conclusions, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research related to community in online teaching and learning.

Summary

This study was a basic qualitative study including interviews and document analysis. Nine faculty members from colleges and universities located in the eastern United States participated in interviews and shared their course Web sites with me, when possible. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms to maintain the participants' confidentiality. After transcribing each interview and formatting it in Microsoft Word according to Ruona (2005), I used the constant comparative method to analyze the data. I developed new codes with each of the interviews until no new codes were needed, applying the new codes to

previously-coded interviews. Once the interview data were analyzed, I copied all of the interviews into one Microsoft Word document to facilitate synthesis of the codes into categories. The documents, mostly syllabi and assignment descriptions from the faculty members' course Web sites, were then compared across the categories for triangulation.

Four major categories related to community in online courses emerged from the data analysis. First, building and sustaining community in their Web-based courses was important to faculty members, because they believed community facilitates participation and supportive relationships in their courses and even after.

The second category included the challenges faculty participants in this study shared from their experiences with online course communities. First, faculty members found the delays inherent in asynchronous communication to be very challenging. These delays affected the types of activities they included in course assignments as well as how they provided feedback to their students. Second, faculty members in this study found it difficult to mediate conflict in their online course communities. Where they would otherwise call students into their offices or ask students to stay after class, these options are not available online. Finally, faculty members were challenged by the fact that some of their students were not interested in the community component of the class. For many of the faculty, this was a major conflict with their philosophies for online teaching.

The third category which emerged from the data analysis included the strategies faculty members in this study used to address the challenges they faced in their online course communities. One strategy was to avoid challenges altogether through intelligent course design. Including details such as netiquette guidelines in a course solved some problems before they occurred. Other challenges had to be addressed via skilled facilitation of course discussions or

personal communication via e-mail. Finally, faculty members noted that sometimes the students in their courses handled the challenging situations themselves.

The fourth category detailed some of the differences faculty members noted in their online course communities versus their face-to-face course communities. They noted that communication was more difficult in their online courses, and students sometimes posted comments online that they would not say directly to someone face-to-face. On the other hand, students who were less likely to participate in discussions when face-to-face often felt more comfortable participating in online conversations where they had more time to reflect on discussion questions and develop their responses. Similarly, faculty members felt that the discussions in their online courses were generally more thoughtful than those in their face-to-face courses.

Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the findings of this study, I offer the following conclusions regarding community in Web-based courses:

1. Faculty are committed to building and sustaining community in their online courses for a variety of reasons.
2. When building and sustaining community in online courses, faculty face technology-related, interpersonal, and emotional challenges.
3. Faculty address challenges in their online course communities through course design and while teaching class.

These conclusions address one gap in the body of literature on building and sustaining community in online courses by adding the faculty perspective, which up until now has primarily covered concerns about workload and intellectual property issues, and by providing empirical

evidence for the design and teaching advice found in essays and texts currently flooding the market. The following three sections include a discussion of my conclusions in relation to the literature on adult education, distance education, and online course community.

The Importance of Community in Online Courses

The notion of community is now ubiquitous in the online learning literature. Since Palloff and Pratt (1999) released one of the early books on the subject and then added several more over the past five years (2001, 2002, 2003, 2005), many articles on online learning and community cite their work (Conrad, 2002; Dringus, 2002; Johnson, 2001; Lock, 2002; Schrum & Hong, 2002; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). While all of their books counsel faculty members and course designers on strategies for incorporating community-building activities, Palloff and Pratt cite empirical research only infrequently. Is their advice sound? This study and others (Harasim, 2000; Moller, 1998; Rovai, 2001, 2002b; Swan, Shea, Frederickson, Pickett, Pelz, & Maher, 2000) begin to provide support for their recommendations and assertions that community is indeed important in online courses.

One empirical study authored by Swan and her colleagues (2000) examined student satisfaction in online courses. They found that “opportunities for frequent and engaging participation were shown to be important design features. These results, taken together with findings concerning interaction with instructors and peers, point to the importance of building scholarly communities in online courses” (p. 370). Other studies report similar findings connecting student satisfaction with sense of community (Harasim, 2000; L. Moller, 1998; Rovai, 2001a, 2002c). According to this group of studies, in courses where students feel a strong sense of community, student satisfaction and success rates are higher than when they feel isolated from their peers and/or the instructor. Adding the faculty perspective, this study

contributes the concept that faculty members recognize the importance of community in facilitating communication and relationships among students in online courses and that they deliberately include community-building activities in their courses to help ensure successful learning experiences for their students.

The participants of this study all talked about course community in terms of the connections or bonds students make with one another. This reflects the ways in which community is characterized in the literature as well (Brown, 2001; Deubel, 2003; McIsaac, Blocher, Mahes, & Vrasidas, 1999; Rovai, 2002a). For example, Rovai developed a quantitative instrument to measure student perceptions of community, and concluded from his review of the literature "that members of strong classroom communities have feelings of connectedness. They have duties and obligations to each other" (p. 198). Kurt noted that without those connections to other students, the students would only engage with the instructor. Sense of community makes the online classroom feel more like the face-to-face classroom, where the students can physically sense a responsibility to one another. Meredith, Anna, and Peri shared this sentiment and communicated it with their students as well.

Many of the faculty members in this study included opportunities for their students to share their experiences with one another, related to content as well as everyday life events. Meredith, Anna, and Peri stressed the importance of participation and how each student had important contributions to make in their respective discussions. This is consistent with one of the assumptions of andragogy: "Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from youths" (Knowles, 1989, p. 83). These three faculty members talked specifically about the value of shared experience in online discussions. Jack, Kurt, and Jim alluded to it as well, noting that their students who had little experience in teaching

(for Jack's and Kurt's classes) and healthcare management (for Jim's classes) had much to learn from the students with backgrounds in these fields.

Faculty participants in this study also recognized that sense of community in their online courses facilitated the formation of supportive relationships between their students. Some of the support identified by the faculty members was purely social in nature, such as in Joanne and Jim's classes where students asked each other how their families were faring or what they did over the weekend. Other forms of support related to learning and career issues. Meredith told me how the bonds formed in her online course communities sometimes extended beyond her classes. Students exchanged e-mail addresses and helped one another choose classes to take, share textbooks, and even help others find jobs. Anna expressed her hopes along these lines for her students who would teach special education, often as the only special education teachers in their respective schools. This finding related to the importance of community for development of supportive relationships among students is consistent with the literature on learning communities and communities of practice.

Communities of practice are "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Learning communities in higher education, on the other hand, are defined as

> classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students. A variety of approaches are used to build these learning communities, with all intended to restructure the students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community among students, between students and their teachers, and among faculty members and disciplines. (*Learning community commons*, 2005)

While these two types of communities are formed and managed differently, they have at least one purpose in common: sharing and building knowledge (Wenger, 2001). In addition, both communities of practice and learning communities can utilize the Web for interaction, publishing documents, and cultivating relationships (Wenger, White, Smith, & Rowe, 2004). Faculty members in this study identified with the importance of cultivating relationships between their students and therefore made community a priority in their courses.

Challenges

In her review of the literature on the development of learning communities in online courses, Lock (2002) asserts that "developing and sustaining learning communities within online courses is a challenge" (p. 400). According to student participants in one study, the challenge of online learning communities stems from learning to communicate with other students without the benefits of face-to-face interaction (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001). The faculty participants in this study agreed, and the study's findings expand upon that statement empirically by adding the faculty perspective. Faculty members who teach online should be prepared to encounter challenges related to the technology as well as to interpersonal and emotional issues.

Faculty participants in this study recognized that communication is different in face-to-face and online classrooms. This has also been documented in other studies as well (Heckman & Annabi, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2000; Muirhead, 2000; Yang & Cornelious, 2005; Zheng & Smaldino, 2003). Heckman and Annabi, for instance, examined the differences in face-to-face discussions and online discussions. Among their findings, they noted that in asynchronous, online discussions, "students carried a much greater share of the discourse" (Discourse Process Section, ¶ 3) They also found that in online discussions, more than face-to-face, "students

referred to each other by name, and replied directly to each other's thoughts, expressed agreement, etc." (Social Process Section, ¶ 3).

One challenge identified by Heckman and Annabi is the time delay between postings online. While face-to-face conversations take place during a fixed period of time, say an hour, online discussions may last a week or more. In their interviews with me, several of the faculty members in this study talked about the asynchronous nature of their Web-based courses and identified communication delays as challenges related to community in their online courses. Kurt, Meredith, Jim, and Joanne specifically mentioned group assignments, student discussions, and instructor feedback as areas where communication delays caused problems.

Another problem area for five of the nine faculty members was interpersonal in nature. Comments revealing a lack of respect for other students or minority groups and even out-and-out arguments were noted by Sarah, Meredith, Jim, Joanne, and Kurt. While many of the advisory texts on the topic of learning communities and online teaching counsel instructors to be prepared for potential conflicts between students (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000; Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002b; Shapiro & Levine, 1999; White & Weight, 2000), this is not widely addressed in the empirical literature. In one study (McKenzie et al., 2000), faculty members who had taught online but preferred face-to-face classrooms were asked to describe reasons for their preference. One explanation was the potential for conflicts because "some students become more assertive typing than talking in class" (Findings Section, ¶ 10). While this may be empowering for some students who have difficulty finding their voice in face-to-face classes, it can be a challenge to the community when those comments are disrespectful or hurtful. In this study, Sarah, Meredith, and Anna all reflected on times when their students made inappropriate

comments online that, in their experience teaching face-to-face, would not have been said directly to another student.

Another study on online courses (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001) reported on interpersonal conflict from the student perspective. Students noted that misunderstandings were common because they found online communication to be difficult. They also commented, however, that they felt they did not know one another or understand others' expectations, problems that may have been resolved by stronger sense of community. Faculty members in this study never used the word "misunderstanding" with regard to student conflict. The conflicts they described were more blatant than those described by the students in the Murphy and Cifuentes study.

While some faculty members in this study felt that offensive comments made online would not have come out face-to-face, the body of literature on discussions with adult learners includes myriad ways in which conflicts may arise in the face-to-face classroom, most often just under the surface of the spoken words. Brookfield (2001) writes about discussion as a teaching strategy and cautions "adult discussion groups in colleges and universities are not limpid, tranquil eddies cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life" (p. 212). Rather, these forces influence the path of conversations and contribute to the unpredictable nature of discussions (Brookfield, 1990). In their article on discussing controversial topics in higher education, Payne and Gainey (2003) warn that in classroom discussions, "a small number of students may want to voice their opinions at the expense of excluding other students" (p. 55). While the faculty in this study did not identify outright exclusion as a theme related to conflict in their online course communities, this may be a topic for further research.

Emotionally or intellectually, some students simply do not want to participate in community-building activities. This has been alluded to in the literature in one case study for

which course guidelines specified that a certain number of postings were required (Conrad, 2002) and in another piece with regard to learning styles (Mabrito, 2004). While the Conrad article is an empirical study, Mabrito's is a reflective essay based on an online course he taught. This study offers empirical evidence that his intuition about these students has been experienced by other faculty members, those who participated in this study.

Who are these students who prefer to opt out of the course communities? This is one area where the literature differs from the findings of this study. Sutton (2001) asserts that students who are shy, or "subject to communication apprehension" (p. 238) may prefer to lurk in online discussions to avoid the anxiety associated with public communication. The findings of this study show, however, that it is often the shy students who enjoy participating in online discussions due to the additional time for reflection and composition of responses. Jim, Joanne, and Sarah each mentioned this to me in their interviews. Mary, Anna, and Peri suggested that the students who lack interest in community are more often the independent, task-oriented students who simply want to do their work, learn what they've come to learn, and be done.

Strategies

Lock (2002) asserts that "there is as yet no accepted set of rules or blueprints for community building" (p. 403). The review of the literature included in this study confirms Lock's assertion, but also lists a wealth of resources including ideas and possibilities for faculty members to consider as they plan their courses to "create conditions that foster and nurture the evolution of community" (p. 401). For example, all of the faculty members in the study included guidelines for participation and netiquette to provide an online learning space where the students would feel comfortable contributing to the conversations going on there. This is consistent with

suggestions found in the literature (Hill, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; White & Weight, 2000) and supports those suggestions with empirical evidence.

Another example related to course design relates to the students who prefer not to participate in the online course community. For this population, Marbrito says "the design of the course material should accommodate different student perspectives" (2004, Student-Course Content Interaction Section, ¶ 5). Faculty members in this study agreed. In their experience, planning for a variety of student needs must happen in the course design phase, and flexibility while teaching the course may be required as well.

Other proactive measures noted in the literature include building in icebreaker type activities so the students will get to know one another as people, not just screen names; providing discussion areas, such as café rooms, for conversations about life events that would normally happen before or after face-to-face classes; and providing contact information for the instructor and technical support (Grubb & Hines, 2000; Schrum & Hong, 2002; Soong et al., 2001; Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Many of the faculty members in this study mentioned that they use some or all of these strategies when designing their online courses. Sarah noted that she had not included a café or "coffee klatsch" forum in her courses in the past, but after learning that it worked for one of her colleagues, she planned to add such a space the next time she taught online.

Needless to say, planning is not everything. Sometimes intervention is required. Kurt found that even with very specific guidelines for participation, some small group conversations took off, while others faltered. This phenomenon has been identified in the literature on face-to-face discussions as well (Payne & Gainey, 2003). Kurt's strategy for addressing an absence of discussion, inserting himself into the conversation with an alias, was not found in the literature on Web-based learning and would be impossible to implement in the face-to-face classroom. Is

this strategy even ethical? If the students learned later that they had actually been conversing with their instructor, not a fellow member of the class, would they not feel betrayed or even embarrassed?

Facilitating discussions and working one-on-one with students to resolve problems are not new strategies for teaching adult learners. These methods are also important in the face-to-face classroom. McKeachie (2002) talks about the faculty member's role as discussion facilitator and suggests that the strategies employed by the facilitator can make a "significant difference in students' learning" (p. 35). In the classroom, whether face-to-face or online, knowing how to phrase a question or provide feedback such that students will want to participate and feel they have something to contribute to the conversation is one quality of expert facilitators. It is also the facilitator's responsibility to see that all voices in the classroom may be heard.

An important topic in the field of adult education addresses power and politics in the classroom. Johnson-Bailey (2002) recommends, "often an instructor needs to negotiate classroom conversations and debates, as well as regulate student networks and small group activities, to ensure that these exchanges contribute to a democratic classroom environment" (p. 47). Little was said about this by the faculty members in my study, but it was alluded to on occasion. Meredith noted that a male student belittled her qualifications as a teacher because she was female. He told her that if he had known a woman would be teaching the class, he would not have enrolled. She sent him a private e-mail message and invited him to drop the class. Kurt talked about dominating students in his discussions. He said that in certain small groups, some students learned how to avoid conflict with these students via careful wording in their messages. Kurt also used his faux student to draw out the others who were being silenced. Joanne mentioned racism. She told me about the student who, in a discussion, wondered why "those

Asians in nail salons" didn't speak English. While she was prepared to send a personal e-mail, her students stepped up and addressed the comment. I did not find other references about students handling the situation themselves anywhere in the distance education or adult learning literature.

Implications for Practice

The findings and conclusions of this study offer an analysis of how faculty members build and sustain community in their online courses, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to address those challenges. This study may be useful to faculty members who teach Web-based courses or are preparing to do so, faculty development professionals responsible for assisting faculty who are or will teach online, instructional designers who develop Web-based courses, and finally, college and university administrators who make decisions regarding distance education on their campuses.

Myriad resources exist to assist faculty members who are teaching online or learning to teach online. While these books and articles offer advice based mainly on anecdotal evidence, this study shows, empirically, the challenges that faculty members face in their online course communities and how to address those challenges. The findings of the study include specific strategies faculty members used, including course design and communication strategies. This study also reveals that while community is important to faculty members and most students, some students are only interested in doing just as much as is necessary to get their work done. Some faculty participants in this study found that to be surprising. Now, faculty members planning to teach online can be ready for these students.

This study also reveals some of the positive and negative aspects of the time delays inherent in asynchronous online communication. Faculty members may better understand the

importance of specifying their expectations regarding communications and how often students must log in and contribute to the discussion areas. While asynchronous discussions allow time for reflection on the part of the student and the faculty member, all members of the online learning community must understand how late posts affect the community.

Faculty development professionals who work with faculty members, preparing them to teach online, may benefit from the findings of this study as well. My own practice in this area is improved because I can inform my clients of the differences between online and face-to-face communities identified by the faculty members in this study. Community has become quite the buzzword in the area of online teaching, but as the findings of this study show, building and sustaining community in online courses is different than face-to-face. Even so the challenges can be overcome with deliberate course design, skilled facilitation, and flexibility.

Instructional designers who build courses but do not teach them can also gain from the conclusions of this study. One key finding, that some students simply are not interested in community components of the course, may lead instructional designers to build in a variety of assignment options or opportunities for these students to learn how they feel they learn best. Alternatively, in notes to the faculty members who teach the courses they develop, instructional designers may provide options to the faculty members themselves to match the way they teach the course with their needs and those of their students.

Next, university and college administrators who develop policy for distance education on their campuses may benefit from the results of this study, because it clarifies what faculty members must do when they teach online. Online course communities do not simply happen. Faculty members must plan activities to build and sustain community and then follow through

daily to ensure that students are participating, working through their assignments, and sometimes working through conflicts.

Finally, I hope that those who are interested in researching online course communities will gain from this study. The next section identifies some areas ripe for investigation, and I would truly like to learn more from my colleagues in these areas: online learning in the absence of community, the relationship between online learning communities and communities of practice, allocation of time while teaching online, the ethics of teaching in online learning communities, the roles of power and gender in online learning communities, and finally, online learning communities as settings for transformational learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

While the faculty members in this study all attempted to build and sustain community in their online courses, and it was important to them for a variety of reasons, is community essential for learning to occur? The nine faculty members in this study thought so, but some students were not interested in community-building activities. Several questions can be asked in this area. For instance, if a faculty member does not include community-building activities in their classes, will the learning outcomes suffer? Will students attempt to build community without instructor involvement? If a faculty member does not want to build and sustain community and is required to by a department head or other administrator, how will his resistance affect the community?

Another area for research is how online learning communities can become online communities of practice. Anna mentioned that she is particularly interested in this possibility for her students, and it is reasonable to believe that online learning communities can provide experiences that model the processes required for sustainable online communities of practice. Motivation is one component of this research area. In online courses, many faculty members

include active participation in their grading schemes. Without this extrinsic motivator, would individuals participate at the level required to sustain an online community of practice?

In my literature review, I found that most articles written from the faculty perspective relate to concerns faculty have about online teaching, such as workload and the amount of time it takes to teach online (Bonk, 2003; Harasim, 2000; Kanuka, 2002; McKenzie, 2000; Thompson, 2002; Visser, 2000). I also included one article about how students spend their time online (Brown, 2001). Brown found that as students become experienced as online learners, the amount of time they spend on technology-related tasks decreases and the amount of time spent on community-building activities increases. It would be interesting to look at the way novice and expert faculty members spend their time and whether the time triangles Brown discusses (see page 14 of this document) apply to faculty members as well.

The ethics of teaching online is another area for further research. I mentioned briefly my question about Kurt's faux student, and I know of another faculty member at my institution who has used a similar strategy for years in online discussions which complement his face-to-face courses. I wonder what their genuine students would feel about this strategy, and have to question whether any of the instructors I had online used this method for encouraging or manipulating online discussions. Kurt included a statement about professionalism in his syllabus. Was this his idea of professional behavior? If his students had discovered his deceit, what effect would their discovery have had on the sense of community?

Also in the area of ethics, many course management systems provide methods for tracking student movement and activity in a course. Some instructors use these tools covertly, while others feel it is important to tell their students at the start of the class that their usage of the

course will be tracked. How does the tracking affect community? What other ethical considerations might we think about for teaching online?

These ethical considerations also relate to issues of power and gender in online learning communities. For instance, in many course management systems, faculty members have the power to move and even delete messages from the public and private discussion boards. How do faculty members decide when it is appropriate to do so? Why didn't Meredith delete the message from her student attacking her credibility as a teacher? Further research with faculty may reveal the answers to these questions.

In *The Politics of Positionality: Teaching for Social Change in Higher Education*, Tisdell (2001) describes an activity, demonstrated by three students in her face-to-face classroom, which was designed to provide opportunities for everyone to participate where some students had previously felt silenced. "Our task was to pass a 'talking stick' around the room and comment on what this class meant in changing our consciousness. Participants had the option of speaking or passing. The three facilitators first modeled the process" (p. 146). This activity turned into a powerful, transformational experience for many of the students as well as for Tisdell herself as they explored issues of diversity and equity. Tisdell goes on to discuss the ways in which adult educators, specifically those in higher education settings, might teach for social change and cultural relevance. How can online learning communities be settings for transformational learning and teaching for social justice? This is another area for further study.

A Concluding Note

Internet connectivity is improving every day. With wireless hotspots in downtown coffee shops, hotels, and even green spaces, access is becoming easier, especially in urban areas. Web-enabled mobile phones are also very popular. Based on this easy access to the Web, I believe that

online courses and programs will continue to fill a niche in the higher education market, especially for non-traditional learners. The flexibility of asynchronous courses in particular will continue to appeal to busy professionals, parents, and adults who live a distance from the college or university where they would like to take classes. As a faculty development professional and instructional designer, I set out in my doctoral education to learn a little more about online teaching and learning. Thanks to the faculty members who chose to share the challenges they have faced in their online courses, and the strategies they used to overcome them, I have learned more than I hoped.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Pre-Interview Procedures

Contact the faculty member via e-mail to confirm his or her participation. If the potential participant meets the sample selection criteria and is willing to participate in the study, schedule a face-to-face interview. Tell the participant that along with some background information, I will be asking him or her to describe two challenging experiences while developing community online. Ask the participant if it is possible to provide me with student access to the course or courses he or she will reference during the interview.

Two business days before the interview, send an e-mail to the participant to confirm the time and location of the interview. Remind the faculty member to think about the challenges he or she would like to share in the interview, and if not received already, ask once again for access to the course or courses to be discussed.

Review the course or courses to be discussed. Examine the course syllabus, content pages, assessments, and other non-communications documents. Note any components that may directly or indirectly affect community development in the course.

Interview Preparation Procedures

Before leaving for the interview location, have the following items in my "interview kit".

1. A file folder containing any correspondence or notes regarding the faculty member to be interviewed, including contact information and location for the interview

2. A copy of the interview guide
3. Two copies of the interview consent form
4. Recording supplies
    a. Two tape recorders
    b. AC adaptors
    c. Batteries
    d. Tapes
5. Note pad and pens
6. Bottled water

The Interview Protocol

If possible, arrive at the interview site early to set up recording equipment. Upon the participant's arrival at the interview site, greet the participant and thank him or her again for agreeing to meet with me. Ask the participant to read the consent form and if there are no questions, to sign each copy. (Make sure I have signed the forms myself, one for the participant and one for my own files.) If not already done prior to the participant's arrival, set up audiotaping equipment. Have spare tapes and batteries ready if needed. Have interview guide and notepad ready.

Establish rapport while collecting background information, including the following:

1. Name
2. Preferred Pseudonym
3. Age
4. Gender
5. Race

6. Institution
7. Institution Carnegie Classification
8. Discipline
9. What is your educational background?
10. How long have you been a teacher?
11. How many online courses have you taught?
12. Have you ever been a student in an online course?
13. Were you required to teach online, or did you volunteer?
14. What sort of support does you institution provide for online teaching?

Next, move into the critical incident component of the interview. Ask the participant: Think about a time when you were developing community in an online course, and you experienced a real challenge. Describe that situation for me in as much detail as possible. Use these prompts as needed to encourage detail:

1. What course were you teaching?
2. Had you taught the course face-to-face or online before?
3. What was the challenging part?
4. Who was involved – students, administration, colleagues, others?
5. What strategies did you use to address this situation?

   What was your rationale for doing it this way?
6. What was the result of the challenging situation?
7. What did you learn from the situation?
8. Would you or do you do things differently now?

9. Had this, or something like this, ever happened to you in a face-to-face classroom? How did you handle it F2F? Did that experience inform your behavior online?
10. Does this experience affect the way you plan, develop or teach your online or face-to-face courses?

When the participant has completely described the first challenge, ask for a second, and use the same prompts as needed.

At the end of the interview, ask the participant if he or she would provide de-identified transcripts of any communications mentioned during the interview. Ask if he or she would mind discussing my themes and findings at another time.

Thank the participant for his or her time, and gather all materials.

Post-Interview Procedures

Label tapes, notes, and documents with the participant's pseudonym. Transcribe each interview as soon as possible following the interview. Begin coding immediately.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in Research

I, _____, agree to take part in a research study titled "**Searching for a Sense of Community: Challenges and Strategies for Online Teaching**" conducted by Sherry Clouser from the Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia (542-0525) under the direction of Dr. Ronald M. Cervero, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia (542-2221). I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand the following points:

- The purpose of this study is to understand how faculty members in higher education settings develop community in online courses for adults.
- If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to participate in one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. Sherry will take notes during the interview, audiotape the interview, and later transcribe the audiotape. I will have the opportunity to provide feedback after the interview if I wish. I will also be asked to provide Sherry with student-level access to the online course(s) I discuss in the interview and de-identified communications from the course(s). Sherry may contact me up to three times via e-mail or phone within six months after the interview. Each contact will not exceed one hour of my time.
- No risks, discomforts, or stresses are expected.
- I may enjoy and learn from this opportunity to share and reflect on my own experiences developing community online.
- Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law.
- Audiotapes made during my interview will be used only by the researcher. Tapes will be stored in a secure location in her office and will be destroyed two years after the conclusion of the study. A pseudonym will be used in any publications or presentations of the research.
- The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at (706) 542-0525 or e-mail at sac@uga.edu.

Consent
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Telephone: (706) 542-0525
E-mail: sac@uga.edu

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D. Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

- Greet participant and thank him or her for agreeing to meet with me.
- Consent: briefly review the consent form and allow time for the participant to read through it. Ask the participant to sign each of the two copies, and make sure I have also signed each. Keep one, and leave one with the participant.
- Establish rapport while collecting background information, including the following:
  - Name
  - Preferred Pseudonym
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race
  - Institution
  - Institution Carnegie Classification
  - Discipline
  - What is your educational background?
  - How long have you been a teacher?
  - How many online courses have you taught?
  - Have you ever been a student in an online course?
  - Were you required to teach online, or did you volunteer?
  - What sort of support does you institution provide for online teaching?

- Critical incident component: Ask the participant, “think about a time when you were developing community in an online class and you experienced a real challenge. Describe that situation for me in as much detail as possible.”
- Use these prompts as needed to encourage detail:
  - What course were you teaching?
  - Had you taught the course face-to-face or online before?
  - What was the challenging part?
  - Who was involved – students, administration, colleagues, others?
  - What strategies did you use to address this situation?

    What was your rationale for doing it this way?
  - What was the result of the challenging situation?
  - What did you learn from the situation?
  - Would you or do you do things differently now?
  - Had this, or something like this, ever happened to you in a face-to-face classroom? How did you handle it F2F? Did that experience inform your behavior online?
  - Does this experience affect the way you plan, develop or teach your online or face-to-face courses?
- When the participant has completely described the first challenge, ask for a second, and use the same prompts as needed.
- At the end of the interview, ask the participant if he or she would provide de-identified transcripts of any communications mentioned during the interview.
- Ask if he/she would mind discussing my themes and findings at another time.
- Thank the participant for his or her time, and gather all materials.