12-2010

Faculty Creativity in Distance Learning: A Phenomenological Study to Understand How the Online Learning Environment Impacts Faculty Creativity

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FACULTY CREATIVITY IN DISTANCE LEARNING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS FACULTY CREATIVITY

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Administration

(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Richard Torraco

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 2010

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

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University of Nebraska, 2010

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What is the experience of expressing creativity for creative faculty teaching in the online environment? The literature regarding online learning covers topics relating to faculty and student satisfaction with distance learning, and faculty frustrations with the increased time required of online classes versus on-ground classes. Although the impact to creativity could be inferred in some cases, there is a void in studies focused specifically on understanding the experience of creative faculty expressing their creativity in the online environment. This study is intended to gain a deeper understanding of how teaching in the online environment affects the expression of faculty creativity for faculty who are otherwise recognized as creative.

A sample of 10 online faculty, nominated as creative by their colleagues, were interviewed multiple times, and reviews of their online class environments were conducted. The themes that emerged from the data were as follows:

1. Technology is an enabler (but has challenges).
2. Students are important.
3. Course organization is key to expressing creativity online.
4. Administrators, take note of issues important to creative online faculty.

As a phenomenological study, the goal of the research was to find the essence, or core, of participants' experiences related to the phenomenon of expressing creativity while teaching online. The essence of the experience for these participants was that creative online instructors experience a freedom related to creativity expression, and practice purposeful creativity. The term *purposeful creativity* was coined to indicate that

these participants were not being creative only because they had the ability or inclination to do so. They were evaluating several factors (i.e., learning curve, technology need, cost, implementation time, student skill level) to determine the value of each creative action or element in their online classes.

Copyright

Dedication

This is dedicated to my best friend, strongest cheerleader, and husband – Michael. It is also dedicated to my children, Preston and Mason. May you both also reach your highest goals.

Acknowledgements

Sometimes it is only through the eyes of those around us that we see what we can become. My deepest gratitude goes to those who have loved and supported me throughout this process, and encouraged me to achieve what they saw for me. My husband, Michael, encouraged me and served as an insightful and intelligent sounding board for my ideas. His support at home and with our family also allowed me the time to focus on this process. My sons, Preston and Mason, sacrificed many family dinner and book times so that I could continue this journey; their understanding was appreciated.

To my dear friends and mentors, Donna Simmons (the best big sister), Shannon Freeney Nesbit, Dr. Sharon Sass (fellow UNL alumnae), Mike Bussell – thank you for continuing to push me forward; your regular inquiries and interest meant so much to me. To my previous professor, colleague, mentor, personal *dissertation shrink*, and dear friend, Dr. Bill Haney – thank you for giving your time to both share your experiences and to offer insights into this process, and for reminding me to laugh about all of this from time to time! To Dr. Heather Hartman and Jill Fitzgerald – thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to share your expertise with me. To my advisor, Dr. Richard Torraco, thank you for offering advice and support through this process. To Dr. Torraco and my additional committee members, Dr. Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, Dr. Jim King, and Dr. Richard Hoover, your constructive comments and enthusiastic acceptance of my research helped fuel my persistence. And finally to my mother, Brenda, thank you for being an excellent example of what a dedicated woman can accomplish.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Why is the experience of taking a course with one faculty member so different than with another? Let us begin with a scenario (fictitious and extreme, of course).

Scenario

Jane and John are friends, both taking an Introduction to Business course online at the same institution, but with different instructors.

Jane's Experience: Jane's instructor has presented streaming video guest-speaker lectures, incorporates Web conferencing for group project discussion, and has created a *Business in Practice* section of the class environment - for budding entrepreneurs to post their actual business plans and pictures of their products/services. The instructor also facilitates weekly "Ask the Question" Web seminars where students can ask questions related to their class and business plans, to try to help bring the topics of the class into a more real-world application.

John's Experience: John's instructor requires weekly textbook readings, and completes each unit with a unit exam.

Their Discussion: Jane feels she is really learning how to put her course information to use in a business plan. Although she's not one of the students who has a business plan yet, this class has motivated her to create one, and has given her the confidence that she would know how to get started. John understands the

course material, but does not feel motivated to create a business plan, or study Business further. He's just glad he's going to pass.

Scenario Reflection: Assuming that Jane and John were similarly motivated (and skilled) to learn the topics in the Introduction to Business course, what was the drastic difference between Jane and John's experiences? One could point to the use of technology in Jane's class, but technology is just a tool for the important difference – creativity. Jane's instructor moved beyond the textbook to find ways to bring the curriculum to life, and motivate students to engage in further research or classes.

In higher education, faculty members have the freedom to experiment with instructional strategies. Regarding online courses, faculty might experiment with different ways to engage students, and creative ways to provide more meaningful learning experiences. Distance learning (DL) provides students greater access to education, but is the education as creative as received in a class taught another way? What is the definition of creative expression in the online environment by a faculty member recognized as creative? The definition of creativity, that the researcher developed for this study, will be as follows: creativity is the ability to foster an engaging and supportive environment for students, where learning is unhindered by the mechanics, but is freed due to exemplary and creative teaching practices and class management. What is the experience of creativity expression teaching online? Do faculty feel this enhances or diminishes their ability to express creativity? The interest for linking creativity and education, beyond personal experiences, came from the writings of Maslow (1965; 1998), related to creative managers fostering creativity around them,

Greenleaf (1977), related to the theory of *servant leadership*, and Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996), related to the theory of *flow*. Following is a more in-depth review of research on creativity and instructors.

Creativity and Instructors

Maslow (1965; 1998) wrote what was originally to be a personal reflection journal, during the summer of 1962, while visiting a California plant as a visiting fellow. While there, however, Maslow became interested in management theory and research, conducted some personal research, and published *Eupsychian Management* in 1965. (Note: Because the newer version is a full reprint that includes comments from some of America's greatest leaders, the more current *Maslow on Maslow* [1998] will often be solely referenced from here forward.) Maslow spent an entire summer performing in-depth qualitative interviews and testing plant workers, which led him to theorize that a creative manager (also called a eupsychian, or self-actualized, leader) would, by his very nature, create an environment where creativity is valued and nurtured.

Although Maslow (1998) focused on meeting one's *self* needs first in order to create a freeing or creative environment for others, Greenleaf (1977) theorized that by focusing on supporting the needs of others first one would create a freeing environment. Greenleaf's servant leadership theory focused on leading in a way that brings out the best in those around them – defining the goals to include fostering healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous individuals. Leading in this manner often involves finding new ways to engage others, or present new information in creative ways, but creativity is not without some potential challenge. "Creativity involves risk, experiment, and perseverance in the face of failure, somewhat the opposite of prudence" (p. 212).

Maslow (1965) and Greenleaf's (1977) theories were expanded further by Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996) and his theory of flow. Flow is defined as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (1990, p.4). Echoing both the notion of eupsychian leadership (Maslow) and servant leadership (Greenleaf), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) stated that creative individuals were often "people who, regardless of their material conditions, have been able to improve the quality of their lives, who are satisfied, and who have a way of making those around them also a bit more happy" (p.11).

Bowman (2005) took the theory of servant leadership and applied it to education to consider teachers as servant leaders. "Operationally, the developmental commitment of the teacher as serving leader is no longer that of controlling or managing energy in others but rather inspiring creative energy in one's students and colleagues" (p. 257). Perhaps Bowman would agree with Sawyer (2004), who re-titled creative teaching an "improvisational performance . . . [that] emphasizes the interactional and responsive creativity of a teacher working together with a unique group of students" (p. 12).

Maslow (1998), Greenleaf (1977), and Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996) were not alone in their theories that creative individuals naturally foster creativity in those around them. Greenleaf stated, "I have said that it is not hard for truly creative persons to be creative, providing they are given support, resources, and freedom from the restraints of convention" (p. 213). Muirhead (2007) agreed with the need for freedom to allow for creativity expression, and focused on the online classroom specifically. He recognized that while it is important to support creativity, defining it might be more challenging,

because many "do not want to undermine or diminish the positive aspects that are often associated with the word" (p. 1).

In addition to agreeing that creativity is a very subjective definition, most reviewed literature on creativity focused on this ability for creative people to bring out the most creative in others (Albert, 1983; Amabile, 1996; Bowman, 2005; MacKinnon, 1983; Ritchhart, 2004; Savery, 2005; Sawyer, 2004). Even though they foster creativity in others, do naturally creative faculty members feel hindered by the online medium? To explore this question, further literature review was conducted regarding online and faculty creativity research.

The literature from Maslow (1998), Greenleaf (1977), Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996), and Amabile (1996) provided the most influence for the researcher to reflect on the experiences of online faculty and their experiences related to expressing creativity online. The following sections provide definition and scope for the researcher's study on this topic, and include important questions and considerations for this study.

Central Phenomenon

The central phenomenon focus for this study is distance learning faculty creativity.

Statement of Intent

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand how online faculty members perceive the impact to their creativity expression when teaching in the online environment.

Central Question

How does teaching in the online environment affect the expression of faculty creativity?

Guiding Research Questions

1. What is the essence of the experience for creative instructors expressing creativity in the online environment?
2. What are some of the challenges creative instructors face expressing creativity in the online environment?
3. How does technology enable or hinder creativity expression for creative instructors?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were created by the researcher to provide clarity of the researcher's intent when using the terms throughout this study.

Creative online environment – An engaging and supportive environment for students, where learning is unhindered by the mechanics, but is freed due to exemplary and creative teaching practices and class management.

Creative online faculty – One who has been recognized as creative by his or her students, colleagues, and/or distance learning administrators. One who has the ability to foster an engaging and supportive environment, where learning is unhindered by mechanics, but is freed due to exemplary teaching practices and class management. (Based on the concepts of Greenleaf, 1977; Amabile, 1996; Maslow, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)

Distance learning or *Online learning* – Web-based instruction that is primarily asynchronous.

On-ground class – A class conducted in a physical classroom setting, regardless of being offered on-campus or at another facility; this term is often used interchangeably with face-to-face learning experience.

Delimitations

1. All participants were nominated to the researcher by a previous or current student, colleague, or distance learning administrator – based on recognizing the faculty member as creative in the online environment. Note: A distance learning administrator, defined for the purpose of this study, would be a person at an undefined level (perhaps Department Chair, Dean, etc.) who is responsible for hiring, training, and/or monitoring online faculty.
2. Participants must have online teaching experience, and currently teaching an undergraduate course online (or, the previous semester, if not currently teaching).
3. Participants were sought from institutions where the primary mission is undergraduate education, and the primary teaching environment is on-ground.
4. Participants will be sought from male and female participants of various ages.

Limitations

1. Creativity evaluation is subjective. Those nominating online faculty as creative will have had varied and subjective criteria.
2. Some creative faculty might have been overlooked because they are so effective their practices are not even recognized as creative.
3. Some great faculty might have been excluded because of the online teaching experience requirements for participants.

4. Those nominating potential participants (DL administrators, colleagues, students) might view faculty creativity differently than others but, again, evaluation was subjective.

Target Audience

This study is intended for online faculty, administrators, and researchers. The intended outcome is to both fill a void in current research focusing on faculty creativity in online learning, and to provide information to spark discussion among DL professionals.

Significance of the Study

In order to examine where this study fits into the body of distance learning research, it is important to understand what has already been studied. Learning from a distance has been a practice for decades, with one of the most significant examples of distributed learning emerging as early as the 1960s with the State University of Nebraska (SUN), later becoming the University of Middle America (UMA) (McBride, 1977; McNeil, 1993; Van Kekerix, 1986). The growth of the internet and online learning has pushed DL into the spotlight. New technology is growing exponentially, and students are becoming more technologically savvy. Online faculty members teaching in this sterile environment are faced with questions regarding how to engage students effectively, and how to use technology as a vehicle for engagement and success. The learning outcomes for an online class should be the same as their on-ground counterparts, but the teaching techniques must be drastically different.

How do these differences influence the faculty member's experiences in expressing creativity? Do online faculty members have to make sacrifices to what they would like to present because they feel constrained by the environment? While the term

creativity is not often used in DL research, studies focusing on challenges for online faculty often discover several factors that could impact creativity. Many researchers (Bruner, 2007; J. Cavanaugh, 2005; Haber, 2005; Lo, 2005; Nkonge, 2004; Ryan, Carlton, & Ali, 1999; Schrum & Hong, 2002) have identified challenges for online faculty, some of which are time requirements to teach online versus on-ground, and lack of technological training or support. In addition to trying to engage students in new ways, these challenges also erode time for faculty to insert creative elements in their class.

What are creative elements? Although the concept of creativity is fairly nebulous, and certainly subjective in definition, researchers agree that creativity does exist and is important. Maslow (1998), Greenleaf (1977), Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996), and others (Albert, 1983; Amabile, 1996; Ario, 2006; Greenleaf, 1977; MacKinnon, 1983; Ritchhart, 2004; Sawyer, 2004) found that creative management sparks creativity in those around them. "Creative teaching results in deeper understanding among learners" (Sawyer, 2004, p. 18). Corporate America is calling for more creativity from their workforce and leaders, our students and graduates (Buchanan, 2008; Hildebrand, 2007; Sternberg, 2006). "Receiving less attention is the need [for educators] to also feed and nurture the creative side of those who would become professionals, as creative approaches will be a central and necessary aspect of their work and thought" (Merrill, 2007, p.148). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) made a similar statement about business as follows:

> American corporations spend a great deal of money and time trying to increase the originality of their employees, hoping thereby to get a competitive edge in the marketplace. But such programs make no

> difference unless management also learns to recognize the valuable ideas among the many novel ones, and then finds way of implementing them. (p. 31)

Helping students learn about that competitive edge (i.e., originality) begins in the classroom. Creative online faculty facilitate in such a way that students are free to be as creative and productive as possible. This freedom for creativity and productivity fosters maximum creative growth within students during their educational experience, and prepares them for maximum productivity in a model environment. "A teacher's understanding of a passion for ideas reveals itself in a curriculum in which the subject matter is organized in a way that facilitates connections, encourages excitement, and makes a powerful learning endeavor" (Ritchhart, 2004, p.38). This elevates education to a new level, not only to educate students on the basics of the curricula they study, but to be a model environment for learning, creativity, and productivity – from the inside-out.

> A starting point would be to say that a society is "better" than another if a greater number of its people have access to experiences that are in line with their goals. A second essential criterion would specify that these experiences should lead to the growth of the self on an individual level, by allowing as many people as possible to develop increasingly complex skills. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.78)

In order to encourage more online faculty to use creative elements, and become more creative in this environment, we must understand what faculty are currently doing and the challenges to more innovation. This study will bring that information together to create a deeper understanding of online faculty perception of the elements of creativity in

distance learning, the challenges to expressing creativity in this environment, and identify potential areas for future change.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Following is an analysis of literature and studies related to the topics of creativity, distance learning (DL), and issues related to both topics such as time requirements, teaching excellence, framework and mentoring, best practice, and adult learners.

Literature Research Process

Literature for the last decade was reviewed for research relating to distance learning (DL), creativity, and creativity in education. Keyword searches were conducted on a variety of electronic research databases, including *ERIC, OmniQuest, ProQuest Digital Dissertations, PsycINFO, WilsonWeb,* and *WorldCat Digital Dissertations.* Lists of meta-analysis and narrative syntheses (Bernard, Abrami, & Lou, 2004; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004; Johnson, 2008; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006; Zirkle, 2003) were reviewed for analysis and possible inclusion. Federal research was reviewed for discussion of distance learning and higher education. (Lee & NEA, 2001; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009; Miller et al., 2006) All article topics in leading professional journals (i.e., *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, T.H.E. Journal, MERLOT Journal of Online Teaching and Learning*) for the past decade were also reviewed to identify literature that might have been missed in macro searches. The review of DL literature revealed insufficient research joining the topics of faculty creativity with online or distance learning. Given the minimal availability of studies specifically related to creativity in online learning, the author reviewed DL literature to determine what issues have been researched that might have an impact on faculty creativity in this environment. The broadest topic (creativity) will be reviewed first, followed by more education-focused literature analysis.

Creativity

Definitions of creativity are as numbered and varied as creativity researchers, but on one point nearly all agree: creativity is subjective. Much like the concept that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the existence of creativity is determined by the person evaluating the work. It is often easier for one to know creativity when one sees it, intuitively, than to define it (Merrill, 2007). There are, however, some guiding principles that help provide a framework for defining the concept of creativity.

- Creativity is generally thought of as a product (i.e., a piece of art, literature, classroom environment) from a creative person or process.
- Observers objectively determine if the product is creative, based on their expectations, expertise, and previous experiences.

One of the most notable definitions of creativity is as follows:

> A product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative. Appropriate observers are those familiar with the domain in which the product was created or the response articulated. Thus, creativity can be regarded as the quality of products or responses judged to be creative by appropriate observers, and it can also be regarded as the process by which something so judged is produced. (Amabile, 1996, p.33)

Merrill (2007) stated that "the act of creation brings into being (into the real world) that which was not previously present in the world" (p.150).

Those in the "act of creation" also seem to foster creativity from those around them. Researchers have consistently found that those who are either creating creative products/works, or who use creative management or communication techniques, bring out the most creative elements in those around them. (Albert, 1983; Amabile, 1996; Bowman, 2005; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; MacKinnon, 1983; Maslow, 1998; Sawyer, 2004) It is like creativity stimulates those around them to think of concepts, issues, and solutions in different ways. This goes beyond the traditional views of creativity, as a vehicle for art or music, but the more generic sense of creativity permeating through our everyday issues and, certainly, education.

Creativity in Education

The concept of creativity in education is not limited to elementary or postsecondary learning. It happens any time a teacher takes the standard curriculum and enhances it, evolves it, brings it to life, to help students understand the curriculum in a different way. Ritchhart (2004) explained creativity in education as that which "involves looking at what one is asked to teach with an eye towards shaping it in new and more productive ways" (p.34). Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) definitions were similar to Ritchhart's; however, Csikszentmihalyi stressed that that there must be an audience (i.e., students) for a faculty member to be creative. "Just as the sound of a tree crashing in the forest is unheard if nobody is there to hear it, so creative ideas vanish unless there is a receptive audience to record and implement them" (p.6). Several terms could be used in place of creativity, (e.g. innovation, excellence, perhaps even quality); however, creativity has a connotation that one has gone beyond those who are just innovators or excellent in their field to have more ownership. It is for that reason that *creativity,* or

creative elements (perhaps where innovation comes in) remains the focus. So, one might instinctively recognize creativity, but can it be measured?

Amabile (1996) identified several standards by which one could measure creativity (i.e., standardized assessments, defined rules or parameters), and determine its value; however, several researchers (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Gardner, 1993; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Ritchhart, 2004) warned against quantitative measurement when that measurement might stifle creativity all together.

> While the end goal, to ensure quality education for all, is worthwhile, we need to be careful that our efforts to ensure across-the-board quality in the educational experience don't diminish the very excellence we prize, that in our efforts to raise the floor, we don't revert to lowering the ceiling instead. (Ritchhart, p.35)

Hirsh-Pasek and Colinkoff took Amabile's concept a step further and found evidence against stressing academic achievement over social engagement and creative experiences. Ritchhart cited four benefits to students when their instructors approach curriculum creatively: motivation to engage in curriculum, enhanced sense of community, self-confidence in own learning ability, and increased performance regarding demonstration of learning.

While not focusing on creativity in particular, several researchers have studied instructors approaching their curriculum in more creative ways. Instructors cited various reasons for teaching with new methods, but the essence was that they wanted to reach students in new ways. For example, gaming has become an important influence in the

free time of many young people. Connolly and Stanfield (2006) tapped into that interest to teach information technology concepts with a games-based approach. Their approach is not new. Connolly and Stanfield cited other programs, such as Virtual U, using a games-based approach to train university administrators or KM Quest to train business leaders. Merrill (2007) encouraged Science and Math instructors to find ways to engage students in more creative ways, help students remember the imagination they had as children, and bring in real-world problem-solving scenarios for which students care deeply (i.e., pollution, public health). "Once they are stored in memory…this feeling of ownership – or better, of connectedness with the content recalled – becomes even more intense" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.124). While some of the concepts about creativity and education might pertain to DL instruction, the following reviewed literature shows additional considerations and challenges when teaching in the online environment.

Creativity as it Relates to Distance Learning

Related to distance learning, or online learning specifically, very little research was found focusing on how the learning environment affects faculty creativity; however, some research alluded to the possibility. For example, Bruner (2007) surveyed 63 faculty, with Likert scale questionnaire responses. Although the participants had fairly limited experience teaching in the online environment, the common theme identified by Bruner was that the majority viewed teaching online as "a lot of work" (p. 14), and many considered the "hassle factor" of workload, time requirements, and technological issues a major inhibitor. Technological issues, workload, and significant time requirement challenges for online courses were also themes identified in other studies (Bennett, Priest, & Macpherson, 1999; Bower, 2001; Mortera-Gutierrez & Beatty, 2000; Ng, 2007). A

question that emerged from this literature for this researcher is that in order to cut down on some of the time spent, might faculty become more regimented (express less creativity) in their distance learning classes?

Ryan, Carlton, and Ali (1999) moved away from faculty perceptions of distance learning to study student perceptions of classroom teaching methods versus online teaching methods. A sample of 96 Ball State University Nursing program students, who had a mixture of both on-ground and online courses, was selected to participate in a Likert scale questionnaire. The study used a mixed method approach; although the bulk of the questionnaire was quantitative, participants had the freedom to elaborate on their answers and offer personal examples. Ryan et al. evaluated the data in a primarily quantitative fashion using t-tests from a test-retest study, then correlated data from the two tests to evaluate results. The qualitative examples and quotes were also presented in tables and discussed in more depth during the analysis portion. The results of the study were that the participants rated classroom methods (identified as content, interaction, participation, faculty preparation, and communication) above DL methods for all except technical skills. These findings suggest online faculty might be hindered in the way they engage students or present information, which could affect instructor's ability to express creativity.

Kanuka, Collett, and Caswell (2002) might have gotten closest to researching how creativity in online learning is impacted. The researchers conducted a qualitative study of twelve instructors, spanning a 2-year period, to understand faculty perceptions about how DL has impacted their teaching. Question and interview topics included new technology skills, classroom management techniques, student interaction, and previous teaching

experience compared to online teaching experience. One of the most common complaints of participants was the hindrance to spontaneity.

Participants in the study by Shrum and Hong (2002) warned against trying to insert spontaneity in online courses or planning. In fact, in studying strategies for success through the eyes of experienced online faculty members, organization and preparation were some of the highest-rated suggestions for faculty entering the online teaching environment. Fourteen participants, chosen by snowball model, completed a Likert scale questionnaire containing quantitative and qualitative elements (open-ended questions providing the qualitative portion). Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics and constant comparative methods. The researchers identified seven dimensions as critical to faculty creating online classes (and students taking online courses). Dimension themes (experienced as challenges by many participants) ranged from technology tools to learning styles and motivation.

Keeton (2004) moved beyond motivation to report best online instructional practices as determined in an ongoing study of more than 20 years. Keeton reported on the completion of Phase 1, a quantitative survey of interviews with eight experienced distance learning faculty. Participants echoed previous study findings citing significant time differences between online and on-ground courses, and also noted that student expectations of faculty availability were significantly increased for online courses. The issues of additional workload and time expectations for online courses were also found to be significant factors in Oliver's (2004) research of online faculty.

Although the challenges for DL seem to be greater than their on-ground counterparts, many faculty still find teaching in this environment rewarding and

stimulating, and continue to strive for new ways to engage students with the curriculum. Podcasting, while not synchronous, is increasing in popularity for its ability to allow students to hear recorded instructor lectures and notes (McGarr, 2009). Even face-to-face instructors are increasingly recording podcasts to allow students to review class lectures or provide additional study aids. The way students access learning tools (i.e., podcasts) has also become more technical, with many students accessing course and supplemental materials through their mobile phone (Cheung & Hew, 2009). Wikis, a term for online asynchronous collaboration tools that has no real acronym meaning, are growing in popularity as instructors search for ways to capture students' collaboration in centralized locations (Cheng, 2009). However effective instructors determine wikis to be, they cannot be used for synchronous collaboration.

Schullo (2005) conducted five case studies to determine the impact of synchronous web-based course systems (SWBCS) supplementing DL courses. Tools such as voice-over internet protocol (VOIP), live text chats, interactive white-boarding, and web-enabled breakout rooms were reviewed. Although the time commitment was much greater for instructor management and oversight, Schullo concluded that SWBCS played a positive role in helping instructors engage students and build meaningful connections with courses. The benefit of adding multimedia-enhanced instruction was also supported by Schroeder's (2006) research, finding that supplementing written or lecture material with multimedia can enhance a learner's understanding of concepts. In order for faculty to incorporate multimedia or other new technologies into their online courses, they must have appropriate training – which can often require prior technical knowledge or expertise (Fender, 2001; Lee & NEA, 2001).

Literature reflects increasing use of synchronous technologies, enabling instructors to interact in real-time with students. Beyond static podcasts or even conference calls, faculty are using Web conferencing more often as a tool to be able to both see and hear students as they communicate (Descy, 2005; Foote, 2008; Litterst, 2007; Pan & Sullivan, 2005). Kuo (2005) conducted a mixed method study of seven faculty members, six university administrators, and 311 students to understand the experiences of students and faculty where web-based course management and videoconference-based delivery methods were utilized. The study used mixed methods, but the results focused on the qualitative understanding of participants' experiences in these environments. Positive student experiences related to positive faculty experiences and vice versa. Although somewhat inconclusive, this study does elude to how the training of the faculty member can directly impact students' learning experience.

Kuo's (2005) findings were similar to Kupczynski (2006), who studied how online instructor behaviors and methodologies affected student retention and success. Following a quantitative data analysis of 219 participants, Kupczynski concluded that there was sufficient evidence to support the statement that teaching methodology, clarity of instruction, and timely and effective feedback were directly correlated to student success (grades of A, B, or C).

Although the literature reviewed in this section generally related to creativity in education, or distance learning in particular, none of the studies specifically linked the concepts of creativity in online teaching. In fact, very few of the studies used the term *creativity*, often focusing on faculty skills, techniques, effectiveness, or teaching methodologies. There were also no studies focusing on understanding instructors'

experiences relating to expressing creativity (regardless of if they were teaching online). Perhaps some of the factors discussed in literature impact this experience? To understand any factors that might enhance or diminish online faculty member's ability to express their creativity online, it was important to also review literature related to other distance learning issues.

Other Topics Related to Distance Learning

There were several additional recurring themes found in literature related to DL. Although most did not directly discuss creativity, one could find a connection between these issues and their impact on faculty creativity.

Time requirements.

Reviewing article topics for the past decade from several distance learning journals, discussions often focused on faculty load, distance learning technologies, distance learning student engagement, and faculty perceptions and stress. Literature reflected studies related to the additional time online faculty spend compared to on-ground faculty (Haber, 2005; Ryan et al., 1999; Samarawickrema & Stacey, 2008). For example, Cavanaugh (2005) found that faculty spent more than twice the amount of time to facilitate an online class compared to the same faculty teaching an on-ground class. Considerations included preparation, teaching, office hours, and final tasks. Although faculty reported spending more individualized time with students, there was an underlying level of frustration with the amount of time spent (job satisfaction) during the process.

Although not directly related to time requirements, Schutt (2007) found that instructor availability (immediacy) can directly impact students' learning outcomes. Two

sections of undergraduate psychology students at San Diego State University were separated into four groups to participate in a randomized two-factor design study to determine the effects of instructor immediacy behaviors on students' perceptions of instructor immediacy, social presence, and learning outcomes. As an aside, an immediate post test indicated more positive effects than delayed post-tests, demonstrating that the results were fairly inconclusive, but does offer potential for future research on how instructors' availability affects their students.

Does the increased time requirements and immediacy expectations affect online faculty member's ability to express creativity? If faculty feel overcommitted, creativity could be impacted. Would an above-average teacher (a teacher recognized as *excellent*) sacrifice creative elements based on time challenges? It is important to review the literature on best practices, or teaching excellence.

Teaching excellence.

Several researchers have touched on the notion of creativity impacted in DL by studying how online teaching excellence seems to emerge once certain basic good teaching elements have been met (sort of like once Maslow's *hierarchy of needs* have been met). A common theme that emerged in literature was for researchers to focus on foundational teaching techniques such as Chickering and Gamson's, *Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education* (1987). Chickering himself recognized the impact technology has had on teaching techniques, and updated his principles in later writing (1996).

Arbaugh and Hornik (2006) collected student learning and satisfaction survey data from MBA students to determine if Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven

principles were applicable in the online environment. Using Alavi's six-item scale and factor analysis, Arbaugh and Hornik concluded that the principles are a good foundation to teaching in general – with no exception for online learning specifically, although several enhancements were suggested to recognize unique challenges of engaging students remotely. Arbaugh and Hornik's research supported previous findings by Chizmar and Walker (1999) and Parker and Hankins (2002).

Batts, Colaric, and McFadden (2006) also focused on Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles in the online learning environment, studying both faculty and students' perception of the principles' use. After surveying two groups of 538 students and 31 instructors, and using descriptive statistics and correlated t-tests, Batts et al. concluded that even though the original seven principles were created for face-to-face use, their use in online classes was perceived as a positive impact by both faculty and students.

Although not data-driven, Savery (2005) took one of the most creative approaches, moving beyond the Chickering and Gamson's (1987) foundation to create a theory for a new set of online teaching excellence principles. Savery's V-O-C-A-L approach encourages online faculty to be **V**isible to students, remain **O**rganized, remembering to be **C**ompassionate to students (especially considering the large adult learner population in most online classes), being **A**nalytical in preparing an organized approach to classroom management and grading, and finally to be a **L**eader-by-example modeling desired behavior to students. Savery offered strategies for implementing each of his principles, and would be a good model for beginning online faculty.

The literature reviewed in this section describes techniques faculty can use to be more effective with their students. However, merely being effective does not mean that

one is creative, and understanding that distinction is important for this study. In addition to using effective teaching techniques, several researchers have studied models for preparing distance learning faculty to teach in the environment. Could the way a faculty member is taught to teach online affect his experience of expressing creativity online? Following is a review of literature relating to the way online faculty are taught to teach in the environment.

Framework and mentoring.

Faculty who are new to teaching online would benefit from some kind of framework such as Savery's (2005), especially as they struggle to learn new technologies. (Blundell, 1997; Fender, 2001; Milheim, 2001; Morris, Xu, & Finnegan, 2005) Another helpful program for new online faculty could be a mentoring program. Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ, formerly Florida Community College at Jacksonville, FCCJ) has established an awarding-winning virtual mentoring program for online faculty. Experienced online instructors are paired with new faculty, usually adjuncts, to discuss some challenges unique to teaching in the online environment and to help guide new faculty through the technological and instructional learning curve of their first year. FSCJ found that approximately 70 percent of their online adjuncts teach for other universities or colleges; this program has proven to be a good way to connect the adjuncts with FSCJ. Virtual mentees rated this program very successful, and it continues to evolve.

The benefit of formalized training and peer mentoring prior to beginning teaching online was also found by Puzziferro-Schnitzer (2005) and Clay (2006). Clay conducted a Web-based survey of 235 faculty, where more than half of the participants reported

having to self-prepare prior to teaching online the first time. A case study phase also followed several participants through a formalized training process. While the study did not identify a best approach to preparing online faculty (i.e., group training, individual instruction, mentoring), the results clearly show the importance of formalized training to support and prepare online instructors. Lowry (2007) concluded that online training can be as effective as face-to-face learning, if organized and presented properly. This research supports the notion that administrators can provide beneficial training via distance, without incurring travel costs to bring faculty on-site.

The importance of DL faculty training should not be considered for college credit faculty only. A *National Research Center for Career and Technical Education* survey (Bruening, Scanlon, & NRCCTE, 2001) of program leaders from 164 institutions found that more than 60 percent of continuing education programs offering online courses as part of their programs. Given this statistic, the researchers stressed the importance for institution administrators to consider training an institution-wide initiative.

Searching for a common strategy or foundation theory for online instructors, Cercone (2006) studied if a constructivist learning theory would be effective in online courses. Using a quantitative approach and correlational research methodology, Cercone studied community college faculty members' online teaching practices. While finding the constructivist learning theory beneficial to students, study results indicated that most faculty were not regularly employing constructivist pedagogy into their classes. The results of this study indicated a clear need for a more widely recognized pedagogy in online learning.

These studies reflect findings supporting the importance for training faculty before allowing them to teach online, and to provide them with mentoring or other support systems. However, these studies did not review how the training impacts the faculty member's ability to express their creativity online, as related to the focus for this study. Regardless of how online faculty are trained, some instructors will rise above others. The following literature focused on best practices in distance learning, to review if these studies found any correlation between best practice and the experience of expressing creativity.

Best practice.

As DL has become a more widely used teaching style, more research has been devoted to studying 'best practice' in online instruction. Nkonge (2004) conducted case studies of eight instructors to determine the most effective online teaching practices. Common patterns among participants focused on constructivism, frequent and effective communication, relevant and timely feedback, effective collaboration with students, academic rigor and expectations of quality excellence, an organized structure with a sense of flexibility in the curriculum and environment, and unwavering support of students' learning goals from the faculty.

Samarawickrema and Stacey (2008) also researched best practices as institutions begin adopting web-based learning and online course management systems. Through interviews, examination of artifacts, and field notes observing 22 participants, Samarawickrema and Stacey identified several challenges to implementation; however, all participants voiced the importance of utilizing technology to enable new ways of engaging students through the fairly sterile online environment. The importance of

training faculty to use new technologies was also identified as an important implementation factor.

As institutions consider new technologies, it is important to research how these technologies might impact students' learning experiences and achievement (Carter, 2001). Skylar, Higgins, Boone, Jones, Pierce, and Gelfer (2005) studied sixty-seven students over a three-term period to determine the effectiveness of traditional learning environments versus more interactive WebCT and less interactive course-in-a-box classes. Following ANCOVA analysis, Skylar et al. concluded there was no significant different on students' perception of their learning experience, and no difference on achievement. They did, however, note that the technology-based classes had significant differences in student perceptions (negative) if they experienced technology challenges (i.e., internet speed, computer skill).

The literature in this discussion included studies related to the best practices for online teaching, but did not strive to understand faculty experiences related to teaching online or their experience of expressing creativity. The focus was more focused on mastering the technological challenges of teaching in the online environment, and not as much on understanding the typical distance learning student.

Adult learners.

In addition to having to learn new technologies when teaching in the online environment, many faculty are faced with more non-traditional aged students. Studies also indicate most online students tend to be female (Halsne & Gatta, 2002; Sikora, NCES, & MPR, 2002; Tucker, 2000). Understanding the demographics of the traditional DL population is important for faculty to understand as they begin preparing their courses

and class activities, so that they can better understand how to engage their students (Donavant, 2009).

Adult learners often have different learning styles and needs than more traditional-aged learners (Donavant, 2009; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). DeNeui and Dodge (2006) conducted a review of 80 students in two Psychology courses to determine the effect a learning management system (LMS, specifically, Blackboard – http://www.Blackboard.com) has on student learning outcomes and exam scores. Testing their hypothesis with a partial correlation, the researchers found a potential positive impact on student learning. Although their focus was on the LMS, they also concluded that "differences in learning styles may influence both how students utilize online components as well as the degree to which students derive benefit from them" (p.258).

It is also important for instructors to appreciate adult learners' life experiences, and allow them to share or build on those experiences within the class environment (McCarthy, 2000).

> Their readiness to learn and orientation to learning are inexorably tied together, as both of these assumptions center on learners' life tasks and problems. Nontraditional learners have a life-centered orientation to learning, as opposed to the subject-centered orientation of traditional learners. (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001, Training Section, Para. 4)

Brown's (2000) study also supported the need for adult learners to feel part of an online community, where a supportive environment helps them be comfortable learning more

about the technology, earn faculty and student colleague respect, and become more engaged with other students and the curriculum.

These studies offer important contributions for helping online faculty understand how adult students learn when compared with traditional-aged students, so that the differences can be kept in mind when creating online courses. It is unclear if having an increased population of adult learners affects online instructors' ability to express creativity. These studies focused on understanding the learner more than understanding the faculty or their experiences when teaching adult learners.

Although the literature reviewed included several studies offering contributions towards more effective online collaboration, understanding students, engaging students, and understanding the challenges of teaching in the online environment, none of the studies tied the concepts of creativity with distance learning specifically. There were also no studies found that focused on understanding online faculty experiences related to expressing creativity. A more complete literature review summary follows.

Literature Summary.

Maslow (1998), Greenleaf (1977), and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990; 1996) theories provide a spark question regarding creativity. All theorized that creative individuals foster creativity and free-thinking in those around them. But is faculty's expression of creativity hindered in the online environment? The literature regarding distance learning covers topic relating to faculty and student satisfaction with distance learning, and faculty frustrations with the increased time required of online classes versus on-ground classes. Many of the studies were either mixed methods – using a standardized quantitative study that included qualitative elements – or were completely qualitative. The majority of the

studies were qualitative, where researchers sought to provide a deeper understanding of faculty and/or students' motivations and perceptions. Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006) also found a majority of qualitative studies, and noted that online teaching research is still a fairly young field. There is a void in studies focused specifically on understanding faculty perceptions regarding how the online environment impacts the expression of faculty creativity.

Table 2.1 highlights selections of literature, and how they relate to this study as foundational research. Many topics potentially impact faculty creativity, but fail to pull the correlations together to understand the issues in light of online faculty creativity specifically.

Table 2.1

Selected Studies Relating to Creativity in Distance Learning

Researcher(s)/Author(s)	**Topic or findings, and potential impact on Online Faculty Creativity**
Amabile (1996), Albert (1983), Bowman (2005), Chickering and Gamson's (1987), Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996), Gardner (1993), Greenleaf (1977), MacKinnon (1983), Maslow (1965; 1998), Ritchhart (2004), Sawyer (2004)	Creativity, or excellence, in education. Not focused on DL specifically.
Connolly and Stanfield (2006), Cheng (2009), Cheung & Hew (2009), McGarr (2009), Merrill (2007), Schroeder's (2006), Schullo (2005)	Technology as creative element in instruction. Mixture of DL-specific or general. None focused on how DL impacted faculty's perception of creativity with this technology.
Clay (2006), Fender (2001), Kuo (2005), Lee (2001), Puzziferro-Schnitzer (2005)	Importance of DL faculty training. None focused on how the lack of training or skill could impact faculty's ability to be creative.
Bennett, Priest, &	Several issues, such as technology training/skill,

Macpherson (1999), Bower (2001), Bruner (2007), Cavanaugh (2005) , Haber (2005), Oliver (2004), Mortera-Gutierrez & Beatty (2000), Ryan, Carlton, & Ali (1999), Samarawickrema & Stacey (2008)	workload, and significant time requirements were identified as DL Faculty issues, compared to Face-to-Face teaching. None tied to creativity specifically (although could be inferred).
Kanuka, Collett, and Caswell (2002), Shrum and Hong (2002)	How teaching online impacts faculty teaching. Touched issues related to creativity, but not specifically.
Arbaugh and Hornik (2006), Batts, Colaric, and McFadden (2006), Chickering (1996), Chizmar and Walker (1999), Keeton (2004), Muirhead (2007), Nkonge (2004), Parker and Hankins (2002), Savery (2005)	Best-practice in DL instructional. Varying degrees of direct or indirect discussion related to creativity.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

In light of the research, what was needed was a study to better understand the experiences of creative online faculty related to expressing creativity, and if (and/or how) the environment affected their ability to express creativity. The study results will create a new focus for the body of research literature, and will benefit both online faculty and administrators. For faculty, it is important to understand the experiences of other online instructors, and how they engage students within the online environment. It is also important for administrators to understand the lengths instructors go to engage students, and the challenges many instructors face. Through this type of research, administrators will get a more realistic picture of what encompasses teaching online versus face-to-face. In order to produce the most effective results, the study had to be conducted in a research tradition appropriate to yield the desired information.

Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were considered. Quantitative research focuses more on facts (quantifiable data) to present an unbiased analysis. (Creswell, 2008) Alternately, Creswell defined qualitative research as that which "relies on the view of participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words (or text); describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner" (p. 46). Because of the depth of understanding desired on the issue, qualitative was deemed most appropriate for this study. Once the qualitative research method was determined, the most appropriate type of qualitative research had to be selected. A phenomenological research tradition, a qualitative research study researching a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), was chosen as most appropriate for this study.

Phenomenology Research Tradition

Although faculty creativity in online learning might not normally be considered a *phenomenon* (some students might argue that its rarity classifies it as such when found), this approach focuses on understanding the essence of participants' experiences, and looking for outcome themes gleaned from participant responses, which was most appropriate for this study. (Creswell, 2007) Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also supported phenomenological study, as "the clearest way to examine the main facets of what happens in the mind" (p.25).

Moustakas (1994) went into great depth about phenomenology, exploring this term that was being used as early as 1765. At its foundation, the purpose of phenomenology is to understand "knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience" (p.26). As with other qualitative traditions, the researcher is not merely an observer, but recognizes his interests or biases throughout the study. Phenomenology takes the concept one step further, with experts claiming that the phenomenological researcher cannot understand participants' experiences until he has taken the time to reflect on his own experiences related to the phenomenon. Through the concept of *epoché*, the researcher examines his own beliefs and experiences then, based on his deeper internal understanding, can look at the phenomenon free from his biases and preconceptions.

> The world is placed out of action, while remaining bracketed. However, the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a

> phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a "purified" consciousness. (p.85)

As both an online student and faculty member, it would have been impossible for the researcher to detach those experiences from a study on online learning creativity. By recognizing those experiences, and examining internal biases first however, the researcher was better able to openly consider others' experiences and how they related to each other.

Research Procedures

This study examined the central question of how teaching in the online environment affects the expression of faculty creativity. The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the essence of the experience for creative instructors expressing creativity in the online environment?
2. What are some of the challenges creative instructors face expressing creativity in the online environment?
3. How does technology enable or hinder creativity expression for creative instructors?

Obtaining participants.

The researcher sent an email requesting a purposeful sample to colleagues at several institutions, where the primary mission is undergraduate education and the primary teaching environment is on-ground, requesting names of potential participants. Although a definition of creativity was not offered, since it is subjective, nominators were asked to think of faculty who are using creative elements to engage online students, or

perhaps using technology in a creative way to bring course curriculum to students in a unique way. Creative methods or technologies might include (but are not limited to): podcasts, videos, Web conferencing, interactive technology, immediate feedback mechanisms during assignments/tests, or games as learning tools. Some specific examples of creative faculty were offered as follows:

- A professor teaching anatomy online, who has created an electronic simulation of heart dissection, so that online students get to participate in 3-dimensional exercises.
- A professor teaching communication online, who uses video messaging and conferencing to create a face-to-face community where students can dialogue and present speeches.

Nominations included a statement indicating why the nominator perceived the potential participant is a creative faculty member, and a list of creative elements the nominee includes in his online classes. Some follow-up phone calls were placed to those who nominated participants to ask additional questions and further qualify potential participants.

The researcher selected the candidates with the most varied and unique methods or technologies for online instruction, based on the pool of candidates. Examples of creative methods or technologies included (but were not limited to): podcasts, videos, Web conferencing, interactive technology, immediate feedback mechanisms during assignments/tests, and games as learning tools.

An email invitation was sent to each nominated participant (Appendix A). Although follow-up phone calls were planned, all nominees responded promptly

regarding their availability or desire for participation. Email or phone calls were conducted with nominees who had additional questions prior to agreeing to participate. If the participant did not own, or have access to, a webcam, the researcher offered a loaned webcam, including a pre-paid return envelope so that the equipment could be returned for use with another participant. Only one participant required access to a loaned webcam. Multiple interviews were scheduled at participants' convenience.

Participants – delimitations.

- Twenty-two (22) nominee names were submitted to the researcher by a previous or current student, colleague, or distance learning administrator of public or private institutions, where the primary mission was undergraduate on-ground instruction.
- Nominators were asked to make nominations based on recognizing the faculty member as creative in the online environment. (Because the notion of creativity is recognized to be subjective, parameters were not dictated for creativity; however, examples were offered. Nominations were required to be accompanied by a statement indicating why the nominee was considered creative, and what creative elements the nominee employs. Those using the most unique elements, based on the nominee pool, were selected for the study.) Note: Although the request for nomination went to students, faculty, and administrators, at both nominating institutions, the distance learning administrators provided the final list.
- Participants were sought who have online undergraduate course teaching experience. No minimum-year teaching requirement.

- Participants were sought from male and female participants of various ages.
- A purposeful sample of ten (10) participants was obtained from institutions where the primary mission is undergraduate education, and the primary teaching environment is on-ground.
- Participants selected were from two (2) institutions, both in southeastern United States, have several satellite campuses, are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the primary learning environment is on-ground. Both institutions happen to use the same learning management system (LMS) for their online courses. Following are some demographics about the two institutions:
    - Institution 1 is a public state college, offering both 2-year and 4-year degree programs, but the primary mission is for 2-year programs. The institution is a commuter institution, with no on-campus housing. The total yearly enrollment is approximately 23,000 undergraduate students.
    - Institution 2 is a private non-profit university, offering 4-year and graduate programs, but the primary mission is for 4-year programs. The institution is primarily a women's residence college, with on-campus housing; however, men are allowed to take courses on campus in the evenings/weekends and online. The total yearly enrollment is approximately 2,500 undergraduate students.

Participants were almost evenly split among male and female, and scattered among business, science, social science, and liberal arts teaching disciplines. The majority of participants had more than 10 years (one with more than 30 years) experience in DL, but

none of the participants were within their first year of online teaching. Even the two participants who have only two years online teaching experience each had more than two decades experience with other facilitation and teaching experiences. All participants were white, although two participants were of Indian origin. Following is a table of participant demographic information:

Table 3.1 ***Participant Demographics***

Nomination Pool Size	*n* = 22
Participant Sample	*n* = 10
Gender of Participants*	*Male* = 6 *Female* = 4
Teaching Areas	*Business* =1 *Science* = 3 *Social Science/History* = 2 *Liberal Arts*** = 4
Years of Distance Learning Teaching Experience (including online training facilitation exp.)	*1 – 5 Years* = 2 5 – 10 *Years* = 3 *10 + Years* = 5

*All participants were white (two were from India)
**Liberal Arts encompasses Humanities, Philosophy, Communication, Art

It is notable that the majority of the participants (80%) have five or more years teaching in the distance learning environment. The remaining participants, while they are relatively new to the online teaching environment, both had more than ten years of classroom or facilitation experience, and were highly technical.

Expert panel information.

A panel of three distance learning experts was created to provide additional validation for the data collected by the researcher. The panel members were known personally and recruited by the researcher, recognizing them for their depth of distance learning expertise. The panel consisted of one DL administrator with more than ten years DL experience, one DL information technology representative with three years DL experience, and one online faculty member with more than fifteen years DL teaching experience. The composition of the panel was chosen to gain perspective from the instructional, support, and administrative points of view, even though the participant focus was on faculty. It was expected that by broadening the pool of experiences for the expert panel, additional insight and perspective would be gained versus just focusing on an online faculty expert panel. The expert panel was created to review and validate the researcher's interview and observation findings to help provide additional validation of the data, and add perspective and insight based on their experiences.

Participant limitations.

- Creativity evaluation of someone else is subjective. Those nominating online faculty as creative had varied and subjective criteria.
- Personal creativity evaluation is subjective. Even among those participating, their individual definitions of their own creativity, and their focus for creative elements, were varied.
- Some creative faculty might have been overlooked because they are so effective their practices were not even recognized as creative.

Study overview.

The study included four parts as follows:

1. One-on-one interviews between the researcher and the participating faculty member,
2. reviews of the faculty's online class environment,
3. participant self-validation of their data, related to validating individual themes, and validation of emerging study themes, and
4. data review and validation, and Expert Panel review.

Each part is further discussed below.

Study part one – initial interviews.

Participants were individually interviewed by the researcher via a Web-based video conferencing product, called ooVoo. The researcher paid for the service so that each interview could be recorded, but participants used the free service. A screen shot of an interview is included in Appendix C, with the participant's identity concealed. All interviews were recorded for researcher review and transcription. Recordings were maintained only for the purpose of researcher transcription, maintained only on the researcher's computer and backup drive, and were destroyed at the end of the study. Participants were loaned a Web camera (Webcam) to conduct the interviews if they did not already have the hardware. Interviews were arranged at participants' convenience, with follow-up interviews or questions arranged as needed.

The questions for this part of the study were pre-defined, approved by the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB), and were fairly structured (Appendix B). Questions were created considering Isaac and Michael's (1981) concept of *content validity*, which asks researchers to "logically conclude whether or not the test

content comprises an adequate definition of what it claims to measure" (p.119). The goal of the first interview was to ask the same initial set of questions to get consistent information, while offering enough flexibility to learn more about the individual experiences of each participant.

Study part two – Web environment review.

During the next part of the study, the researcher reviewed at least one of each participant's online class environments. All but one review was guided by the participant (the other one was done by the researcher alone), and focused on determining how creative elements (as defined by the participant) are infused into his or her online class environment. The audio for each interview was taped by the researcher, and several screen shots were taken of each participant's online class environment. All screen shots taken had all personally identifiable information (related to the institution, faculty member, or students) removed before they were saved onto the researcher's computer. Similarities between participants' classes, such as use of technology, type of communication, and student feedback within the environment were noted by the researcher, to try to compose a more complete picture of how faculty are infusing creativity into their online classes. Examples of online course screen shots, with personally identifiable information removed, are listed in Appendix D.

Study part three – follow-up interviews (one or more per participant).

Prior to beginning the third part of the study, the researcher transcribed all previous interviews and began to look for emerging themes, both from individual participants and for the participant group. The emerging themes were identified by reviewing transcriptions to identify one or more statements from each participant as he or

she responded to each question. Each key statement was assigned a meaning unit, as understood by the researcher. All key statements and meaning units were entered into a spreadsheet and filtered by meaning unit. As meaning units were further combined or clarified, themes began to emerge in the raw data.

Participants were then interviewed at least one additional time to follow-up on questions the researcher encountered when reviewing interview videos or transcripts, and to ask some of the same questions as in part one. Asking duplicated questions allowed participants the opportunity to expand previous responses, given reflection time. This also added a layer of validation to participants' responses, looking for self-redundancy.

The researcher then shared some of the themes she had seen emerge from the participant's previous interviews, and asked the participant to validate his or her agreement with the findings (and invited to add or comment on the themes). The researcher reviewed emerging themes from the full participant group and reviewed those with each participant. He or she was asked to validate the findings, and add any additional themes or important points missing from the list. These discussions were very interesting. In addition to validating the data, the participants often saw this process as a validation that their experiences are not unique. Many of the participants indicated that hearing about others' experiences was as interesting as sharing their own experiences.

Study part four - data review, validation procedures, & Expert Panel review.

Before data review or analysis could begin, it was important for the researcher to consider internal biases that could apply filters or unintended meanings to the data. Through the concept of epoché (Moustakas, 1995), the researcher examined her own beliefs and experiences as both a distance learning student and online instructor.

Although the experiences were acknowledged, they were bracketed so that the phenomenon of expressing creativity as a creative online faculty member could be viewed free from biases and preconceptions. To help keep subjective analysis to a minimum, spreadsheets were created to organize data so that trends could be visually identified and analyzed. Data review then began with the transcription process.

Participant Web interviews were reviewed and transcribed by the researcher, with transcription being done by aid of transcription software (that only understood the researcher's voice). The transcription software product was turned on at the beginning of each participant interview to capture the researcher's portion of the interview into a word processing software document. Each interview was also video-taped, using the ooVoo Web conferencing software. Video tapes were for transcription and researcher review purposes only, and were not shared with anyone else. Following each interview, the participant replayed each interview to speak the participant's portion into the transcription software, so that the remaining interview transcription could be captured into the word processing software document. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interviews and transcriptions at any time.

The researcher also asked participants to do a guided tour through at least one of their online class environments, where notes and screenshots were taken (student and participant confidentiality was maintained). Due to scheduling constraints, one participant could not offer a guided tour, but was available to answer questions following the researcher's review of the participant's online course environment. Each of the class environment tour interviews was video recorded, using the ooVoo video conferencing software, and the same process as in part one was followed to transcribe both the

researcher and participant portions into a word processing software document. Participants were given the opportunity to review their transcriptions, class review notes, and screenshots, providing member checking data validation (Piantanida & Garman, 1999). "In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the finds and interpretations" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

Because part one of the study involved having all participants respond to the same set of core questions, a few sentences from each participant's responses were highlighted in the transcription and then put into a spreadsheet to look for any similarity or overlap. The statements were then paired down to find the *nugget* statements that summarized each participant's response for each question; these nuggets were considered the significant interview statements. Invariant constituents were found by ignoring overlapping statements (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2008). From remaining significant statements, meaning units (summary phrases or words) were created. For example, following are participant significant statements and their original meaning units:

1. "Technology is certainly an enabler, but it has to be leveraged with a strong sense of who the students and users are." (Meaning unit = Technology enhances creativity)
2. "I invest about 175 hours in the seven weeks to do what I think is an engaged and meaningful job. I'm trying to help people. To me, it doesn't make sense to simply go to the motions." (Meaning unit = Tech-savvy)
3. "I think part of creativity is not always with technology, but creatively communicating in an e-mail. Like... this is your strength, this is your weakness, and how you help them to improve and not bring them down. Creativity can

come in different ways. Being creative in how you express their progress... how they're doing, what they're doing, and how they can improve." (Meaning unit = Trendsetter)

4. "But in my live classes over here, I can pull up YouTubes and show them funny things and we can discuss those. I just can't apply that to my online classes easily." (Meaning unit = Challenges of online teaching)

Once all significant statements had been labeled with meaning units, the spreadsheet was filtered to look for similar meaning units that could be clustered into a larger category of themes. All of the meaning units above were eventually clustered into Theme 1, "Technology is an enabler (but has challenges)." An example of this analysis appears in Appendix I.

The meaning units were clustered into themes, and validated using Isaac and Michael's (1981) concept of *content validity*, which asks researchers to "logically conclude whether or not the test content comprises an adequate definition of what it claims to measure" (p.119). Although content validity is normally utilized only to evaluate tests to be used during research, the basic questions were appropriate to create additional validation at this stage of data review.

The validation of themes was an important element of part three of the study; it involved Web-based interviews conducted in the same fashion as the part one interviews. Videoing and transcription processes were the same. During part three, however, the researcher asked for validation of specific points related to the individual participants' previous interviews – and then asked for validation of emerging themes the researcher identified for the full participant sample.

Themes were verified and validated through the process of *imaginative variation* (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007), where a description is created describing the setting where participants experience the phenomenon. This process also involves considering the phenomenon with and without the potential theme, and considering it valid if the results would be considerably different by excluding the theme.

Themes were further validated through additional member checking data validation (Creswell, 2007; Piantanida & Garman, 1999), to find the essence of online instructors' experiences regarding creativity expression. Class review and screenshots were also used as verification and supporting examples to the emergent interview themes.

Following compilation of the data, organizing the data into themes, and identifying the essence of online instructors' experiences, the expert panel was asked to review the research information. Complete transcripts were made available, in addition to all other data collected throughout the research process. Transcriptions and all data had been reviewed, so that all personally identifiable information had been removed. Video recordings were not offered to the panel automatically, as a more blind initial review was requested. If panel members had any specific questions, they were given access to unfiltered data to ensure no mistakes were made. Participants had been told that the expert panel would have access to their personally-identifiable information, but the unfiltered data was only given to resolve specific questions. Unfiltered data only contained the identity of the participant, as institutional and student information had been removed prior to saving the information in any form. (Note: the institution information was available, and could not be removed, within conversations from the raw video tape footage). Panel members were asked to review the data to validate, challenge, or add to

the themes and conclusions reached by the researcher – based on their data review and their personal experiences. Communication with panel members was conducted via several emails, phone conversations, and group Web conferencing.

To initiate the expert panel review process, an ooVoo Web conference session was conducted where the researcher shared all data gathering and evaluation steps completed for the study up to that point. The emerging themes were discussed in general to see if, based on their experiences, any of the themes seemed out of line (even prior to a data review). To add an additional layer of validation to the data review, the expert panel members chose to work independently on data review, with no further group discussion on their evaluations. Questions were addressed individually to the researcher.

Each expert panel member sent his evaluation of the data to the researcher, without input or discussion with the other panel members. Only the themes and significant statements agreed upon by two of the three panel members were retained for the final data summary. The themes presented in subsequent chapters are the result of validation from researcher review, member (participant) checking, expert panel professional experiences, and expert panel member majority input following independent data review.

Chapter 4 – Results and Analysis

Introduction

In qualitative research, phenomenological studies in particular, it is important to acknowledge the role of the researcher during data collection and analysis. Although these results will not be presented in first person, as is often the case with qualitative studies (Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2008; Moustakas, 1994; Piantanida & Garman, 1999), the personal relationship formed between the researcher and participants is acknowledged and appreciated.

This chapter includes analysis of the study data, by reviewing the identified themes. The essence of these creative faculty members' experiences is also identified and discussed. Another important aspect of qualitative research is to tell the stories of the participants; there is no better way to tell these participants' stories than to share their words. Several participant quotes will be listed to help expand on each theme. Participant quotes were chosen to succinctly and effectively explain the theme being discussed. If quotes from all participants are not included in this analysis, it should not be taken as a commentary on the participant's interview or eloquence (even though individual participants are not identified).

Data Analysis - Themes

The study data was analyzed and organized into themes, as identified in Chapter 3. The following themes emerged following validation from researcher review, member (participant) checking, expert panel professional experiences, and expert panel member majority input following independent data review:

1. Technology is an enabler (but has challenges). The majority of participants shared the feeling that technology allows them to better express their creativity (it enables their ability); however, they shared several challenges related to using technology as the vehicle for creativity.
2. Students are important. All participants discussed how focusing on their students' needs, skills, expectations, and comments, are important considerations to why they choose to express creativity in certain ways.
3. Course organization is key to expressing creativity online. Although there were varying degrees of organization techniques used from the participants, all were concerned that courses be set up in a logical fashion so that students could focus on learning rather than online course navigation.
4. Administrators, take note of issues important to creative online faculty. Although administrative issues were not a focus of the research questions, some topics were brought up by participants with such frequency and passion, this was deemed to be an important theme.

In addition to these themes, additional observations about the participants will be reviewed.

Before examining the themes, it is interesting to review selected quotes from selected participants as they defined the experience of expressing creativity online. The first string of participant quotes is offered in Table 4.1 with no analysis, to give the reader an unfiltered introduction to some of the participants' voices.

Table 4.1 - *Participant Quotes Defining Expressing Creativity Online*

You may not be able to determine exactly what it is, but you know what it's not. A

lot of the students will quickly tell you, "That wasn't a very creative class" - or "That was a very boring class." And then you say, "What would have made it more creative?" And they say, "Geez, I really don't know. But I know it wasn't." - Management Professor
"Being creative in the online environment involves leveraging a multiplicity of media." - Business Professor
"It's not really so much creativity, as it is reaching out to students." - Social Science Professor
"You gotta' do things differently in online than you do in a classroom. The delivery mechanism is being changed, but the course content is the same. I guess the creativity has to come about in the delivery." - Science Professor
". . . just simply being able to keep your class from being predictable in a negative sense." - Philosophy Professor
"I think being creative is using the technological tools to reach out to students, to try to give them a more personalized experience in the online classroom." - Accounting Professor
"The creativity comes. . . in finding ways to engage the students with each other and with you in an authentic and real way, and adjust their communication accordingly." - Communication Professor

With these general definitions and statements from Table 4.1 in mind, this chapter will now review the individual themes that were evident from the data.

Technology is an enabler (but has challenges).

The creative faculty who participated in this study were all very enthusiastic about the role technology plays for online teaching changes in the future. Either through professional conferences, reading, or personal research, participants were aware of most of the new technologies for their field – and/or for online learning in particular. The participants were at various levels of utilization of technology, but all seemed to be trendsetters at their institution.

Several participants expressed views that technology allows them to be more creative in a somewhat sterile online environment (i.e., technology is an enabler), but it is merely the vehicle and should not be the focus of the educational experience. One of the participants, a philosophy professor, discussed this process and said, "…for people who are into both creative teaching and technology - the process is that their creativity takes over first. And you figure out here's what I would like to do. Then you go rummaging through your toolbox to figure out what can help you do that, which is probably the right order." Another participant simply stated, "I do not want the technology to come between them and getting it done." These statements were summarized best by the participant who said, "Technology is certainly an enabler, but it has to be leveraged with a strong sense of who the students and users are." It was important to the participants that technology not be the focus of the learning experience, but evaluated against the desired outcome, and the learning curve required to master the technology (for faculty and students).

Many participants shared opinions on the importance of using technology to provide clarification to their online teaching, but stressed that the use of technology must have a reason for being used. Often, one of the reasons for using technology is to present material in a more engaging way. As one participant said, "I don't think it's effective in any learning environment to use technology for technology's sake. It has to be applying and leveraging technology for some specific goal or objective." Sometimes technology becomes a tool because the faculty member gets lost in the *coolness* factor. One participant, a speech professor, discussed this challenge, saying that "… the difficulty is

choosing what is just fun - for you, and what is a good learning tool. Because I think a lot of times we teachers get caught up in something that we think is really fun."

The participants did not imply that technology should only be used to make concepts more entertaining. In fact, their comments indicated that was only an ancillary benefit. One participant uses different technology to make courses varied from one semester to another. "Every semester, I try to do something different so that students, even if they're taking me for the second time, it's not the same thing that they were hearing or the same thing they are doing."

Technology use has an advantage beyond bringing the curriculum to students in new ways. It also allows online instructors to present information in ways they never have been able to in the past, even in face-to-face settings. One participant, a science professor, stated the following:

> The things I could do now … I would [previously] go on a board and draw these little tiny things. And then repeat it 100 times. Now I can do it one time and explain it and say, "Hey, you don't understand it? Here is this [in a tutorial]. What is it that you don't understand? Okay, I'll go make that [video] for you." That is just incredible.

This participant was also enthusiastic when discussing technology that enables him to creatively explain complex concepts. "This type of reading is one of the most complex type [sic] of reading … because you can't see it. So when I make this step-by-step type of animation... they see the next steps take place, and it really simplifies all that reading." It should be noted that using technology in a meaningful way often requires the online instructor to be more technologically savvy. As one participant stated, "Being creative in

an online setting…require[s] a tremendous amount of technical knowledge and technical understanding."

Using technology effectively also helps keep the curriculum fresh, for both students and faculty. Several of the participants discussed not wanting to get bored with their curriculum, because they felt that boredom is evident to students. One participant, a social science professor, discussed this point as follows:

> I think we get bored doing the same things. We're always wanting to change it, and learn something new, and put something out there to keep the students alive and excited. Just when they think they know the routine, you throw something new at them and it kind of wakes them up again.

Sometimes technology is used not only to keep things fresh, but to keep students' attention. A science instructor participant frequently discussed the challenges of conveying such complex material via a Web class. One participant uses different avatars (caricatures, or animated figures) to present course material. This is what he said about his technique:

> A lot of the times now in [the talking characters on the video], I try to make it appear as though it's somebody else talking on behalf of me but they use my name a lot. It changes the dynamic of how the class is. It doesn't sound like it's a standardized class, it makes them identify that this is a class with Dr. [name]. He is the professor, and he is the one sort of behind all of this. Before, I didn't want to use it, but now, they said it does make them feel like when they sit behind a desk and they know that they

> are in my class, hearing my name come up often during the lecture. It's tying everything together.

That is not to say that technology should only be used when the online instructor finds the perfect way to utilize it. As one participant noted, there might sometimes be some trial and error regarding new technology. "I guess the argument could be made that unless one tries to apply and deploy these technologies, you're never going to know how they are going to work out in that regard."

As much as technology can assist the online faculty member, it can also create challenges to creativity. One of the participants, a management professor, shared his frustration with the lack of spontaneity he uses in his on-ground classes, saying, "… in my live classes … I can pull up YouTubes, and show them funny things, and we can discuss those. I just can't apply that to my online classes easily." Another participant echoed this sentiment, by sharing, "… I feel somewhat hindered by this asynchronous communication sometimes." This mirrors the findings of Kanuka, Collett, and Caswell (2002) who found that faculty missed the spontaneity of an on-ground class when teaching online. It might not just be the planning required to use a new technology, but the time required to master it. As one participant stated, "What I find challenging is the time to implement a new technology."

Regardless of the technological skills of the online faculty member, one of the challenges discussed frequently by participants was the varying skills of their online students. As one participant stated, "…we have a very diverse student population with various learning levels, and various learning styles… of course it's a challenge for in-course too... but it's also a real challenge as far as online teaching, because you never

know what you have out there." One participant, an accounting professor who has been teaching online for more than ten years, also discussed the changing student population in his classes. He suggested that better advisement and information prior to registration might help students be more prepared for the technical expectations in online classes.

> When we first started online, the only students who took online classes were people who were very computer savvy. They got it. Now, we're mainstream, but one of the things that I see failing everywhere that I teach is with advising on the front end as to what the expectations are for their computer competency... You can't just let someone into an online class.

Many participants shared frustration with serving as a technology help desk for their students, indicating that several students taking online courses do not even have simple technological skills like emailing, or attaching documents to emails. One participant shared his challenges with this issue by stating,

> The biggest tackle things I found was having everybody compatible … It has never really been specified, to take this online course you need to have Excel, you need to be able to open DOCX . . . those specifications somehow just don't get to online students.

These statements help emphasize the importance of informing students of the technical expectations of online learning. They also relate to the theme that although technology is an enabler, it has some challenges.

It is not all negative though. Some of the participants have taken the issues listed above and consider them personal challenges. One participant stated, "…one of the

biggest challenges, and what I find the most interesting and kind of fun, is keep up with the new technologies."

Keeping up with new technology is important. Many participants shared that they felt strong technical skills are important to being a successful creative online instructor. One of the participants, a philosophy professor, shared his experience below.

> One thing that I see at [School] among my colleagues is that the ones who are having a great time with the online courses, the ones who are doing new stuff, and the ones who are getting the accolades from students and administration alike, are the ones who are technologically savvy.

Maybe that is one of the keys to online creative teaching success. One of the participants shared, "having talked to people who don't enjoy the challenge... who don't enjoy problem solving... they will be the ones that don't go down this path. Or, they get discouraged and they stop." It is not just having the skill that is important. Another participant noted that it is also important to know when to use skill.

> Many of us have reached a certain level of sophistication where we understand all of these things as tools more so than toys. Just like any set of tools, I've got this big toolbox with a bunch of tools in it, but I may have tools in my toolbox I haven't pulled out for years simply because I haven't had a task that required them yet.

Regarding the level of sophistication, the technical level at which some of the participants operate was astounding. It was exciting to hear some of the creative elements they have incorporated into their classes. One might think that it was just the visual arts teachers who were branching out, but actually two of the science instructor

participants were using the most interesting elements. One of the science instructor participants has a fully online science lab, where the instructor walks around on the orientation page for the class (See Appendix E for a screen shot). Another science instructor, who teaches online anatomy and physiology, and microbiology, utilizes games, videos, and animations (several screen shots are listed in Appendix F):

> This is actually me on a whiteboard describing the physiological structures and actions of a nerve impulse conduction. I make these kinds of animations too, so that anything that the students just saw they saw on that video. What I do is I make this animation that goes along with it…This weekend - [I recorded a video of] me sitting inside of a cell waiting to show you what was happening inside the cell.

One of the online photography instructor participants creates a 3D gallery of her students' photos (see Appendix G). Following is the description of her gallery in her words:

> I create a three-dimensional gallery on that canvas or homepage, where I use Photoshop to take each of their paintings or drawings or photography... mostly they send me the photos... and put it in perspective in an actual gallery photograph setting. There's a little bench and I'm sitting on the bench, and they all see their art hanging on the wall and their name is hanging on the wall beside it.

The participants highlighted above are utilizing some very creative elements, but like their colleague participants, they have often been alone in their journey. The quotes below illustrate how many of the participants were trendsetters, either in distance education or technology in general, among their peers. One of the participants was

involved with distance learning as early as 1975. These are offered in a simple quote list to give you an overall impact of the participants' experiences.

> "I really tried to figure out ways, in the early days, to make it interactive before we had tools that would help us do that."

> "It wasn't that I waited for somebody to tell me how to do something. I would just think about it, begin doing it, and implementing, and I never stopped…When I created my first class, WebCT used my class at their big conference that they have as an example."

> "I literally built a computer when I was 13 years old, and used it that far back."

> "Thirteen years ago when I taught my first online class, nobody really had much experience."

> "We didn't have course management systems when I started, and actually we didn't even have authoring tools for Web pages."

> "I was also one of the pioneers of using multimedia in the classroom."

> "…when I started we were using … basically an e-mail program. We didn't really have a learning platform."

In summary, participants expressed that they feel that technology generally enables them to more effectively express their creativity online. They recognized the learning curve and time it takes to learn new technologies, but identified several areas where technology has enabled them to connect with their students in more meaningful ways, or present information in a format that is more easily understandable. Throughout

their discussions of technology, the participants concern for the students' needs was regularly discussed.

Students are important.

One theme easy to identify from the interview data was the theme regarding students. These creative online faculty put great importance on what their students have to say about their class – both during the course of the class and after it has ended. Six of the ten participants make changes mid-semester to their online class environment, to enhance communication or navigation, or provide more tutorials. Following are selected participant quotes regarding their student relationships. The first is from a communications professor, who said,

> I guess the most important thing I think I've learned in all the years of online teaching is you have to put yourself in the shoes of that learner, and take a step back from your material, before you roll it out to them, and look at it and say-what are the questions I would have if I were a student? And then you have to redesign and re-create, and pre-think the questions that a hand would go up on in a traditional classroom.

Another participant, a social science professor, discussed her relationship with students as it relates to her creativity. She shared her experience as follows:

> …that is creativity, because you are willing to adapt. You are willing to change. You're willing to be flexible. You are being different. It's not standardized. Because if everything was standardized it would be procedural, and then we would become alienated in what we're doing. We would become disconnected. But the willingness to see how your students

> are progressing and adapt... is a way of saying I'm open... to finding a new approach.

The participants were passionate about understanding where the students are in their learning process (and skills), and adapting course content if necessary to make the experience more meaningful. These adaptations often mean that faculty take additional measures to help their students understand course concepts. Following is one of the most dramatic participant examples, from a science professor:

> I was one of those faculty who would come here on a Saturday just to spend extra hours trying to help students. I would pull a whiteboard out into the hallway and sit down for years and just talk and try to get them through. And now I see that I am actually reaching and helping them even much more, because there is much more tools online to help a student.

Students probably did not expect the level of commitment this faculty member showed, but the additional opportunity to ask questions might have helped them be more successful in the class. If students see additional commitment from faculty, this can often be reflected in their instructor evaluations.

All of the participants discussed some level of evaluation. Either they request feedback throughout the class, or they carefully review end-of-term course evaluations to make changes for future courses. One of the participants, a business professor, reads his evaluations with change in mind, sharing,

> That's one of the things that I've done over the years, is to respond to student feedback in terms of what makes sense to them. What they've benefited from. To build in different dimensions of the learning

> experience, as opposed to leaving it solely with read this page, read these chapters. Some people respond to that, others need the audio dimension, need the video dimension. Some need PowerPoint. Some need more synchronous communication.

Listening to students' requests for change means that they are also often seeing positive comments from students, thanking them for certain creative elements. "The feedback that I've gotten is that students really do appreciate that extra level of effort that you put in there." Another participant said, "I did receive direct feedback from students that they really appreciate the audio component of the learning process because some people are much more auditory learners than others. That's one of the reasons that I have done that, and continue to do that."

This theme relating to students regularly revolved around participants discussing their relationships with students, and their care and concern for their academic and professional endeavors. One of the best summary statements is from this social science professor participant, as follows:

> I believe strongly that if you are going to learn, whether or not you are in the classroom or online, has to do with building a relationship with a student. We need to build that relationship. One way of doing that is just communicating with them... giving them smiley-faces sometimes. Letting them know that they're doing a good job, and this is how they can improve... I think part of creativity is not always with technology, but creatively communicating in an e-mail.

It is important to note this participant's focus on creativity being as small as the way one communicates. She demonstrates her belief that students are important by communicating with them in meaningful, creative ways.

The participants were also are interested in understanding how students learn best, and the ways students want to learn, and then strive to give them learning tools in those formats. They are also learning that students' expectations about what is available in an online class are evolving, and the faculty are trying to meet the changing expectations. As one participant stated, "You've gotta' understand your audience to deliver content, to deliver information that's meaningful to them. At the end of the day, it could be meaningful to you, but if it's not meaningful to them you haven't accomplished your goal." Another participant discussed student expectations by saying, "Now the expectation is 'this makes the class richer and more engaging for me as a student if I see a real person who is my teacher, and I see other real people who are my classmates.'"

Sometimes it is important to understand not only student expectations, but to understand students' interests. One participant, a science professor, has found gaming to be a popular pastime for his students. He said, "I realized, wait a minute... you know what students like to do? They like games. So, what I did was I went and I took Flash, and I began creating games." Another participant shared the opinion that understanding student interests is important, but clarified that the important piece is to show their importance by listening to them. This participant stated,

> That's the key. The key is listening to them, because it is them who help me to figure out... they are the ones having the problem, right? If you listen to them, you know what you should be doing or adding.

Many participants shared examples of positive feedback they have received as a result of listening to their students to provide a better online learning experience. An accounting professor participant shared his experience as follows:

> The students love anything that you can add to the online environment that gives them the feeling that you are part of their learning experience. That's why I do the things that I do, and why I bought that tablet so that I can emulate what I do in on-ground classes in a way through Camtasia - going over exams … where I can actually write instead of trying to type things into a spreadsheet.

It should not be assumed that just because faculty are valuing the students' opinion that they stop evaluating what is in the best interest of the students – even if students don't appear to appreciate it at the time.

> We are all interested in retention, and anyone who's read the literature knows that retention is student success. Not student satisfaction, but student success. If they succeed they will, eventually, be satisfied with the class. Trying to do things for students that make them happy but that don't lead him toward success is not the way to go.

Creating all of these tools also does not relieve the student of his responsibility to utilize the tools. As one participant stated, "To some extent, I try to incorporate all these other forms of communication with them. But it's up to the student whether or not they want to take that."

Eight of the participants discussed how interested they are in student evaluations and feedback, and often the discussion centered on meeting the adult learner's needs

more than the typical age student. One participant summarized the discussions best by stating the following:

> Your typical traditional student is rating the course in terms of 'how much did it inconvenience me? How much did it bore me? How much did it meet my understandably limited expectations because of understandably limited experience?' Whereas adult learners are coming at this experience from a huge background of all kinds of life experiences and a matured… ability to evaluate a given experience-regardless of personal responses. They aren't just comparing to it from other classes they've taken. They are comparing it to all kinds of things that they've gone through. In particular, these are often people who are involved in highly efficient, highly productive business enterprises. They come to school and they see something, and they think that's a really inefficient or ineffective way of doing things. So in my teaching in the adult learning venues, I pay a special care to the evaluations.

In summary, the participants regularly shared examples of their student focus. Rather than maintaining a status quo course from semester to semester, they make changes (often mid-semester) to address student challenges and comments. They are regularly looking for ways to make their online courses more engaging, more clear, and sometimes even more entertaining for students, when those changes are deemed to make a more meaningful and effective learning environment. These changes often lead them to create more organization in their online courses.

Course organization is key to expressing creativity online.

The participants teach for one of two institutions that have different levels of flexibility within their required template for online course organizations in their course management systems. Discussion and quotes regarding templates appear mainly in the section of this chapter directed towards administrators. The Course Organization theme focuses on all of the other important online course elements to the participants. "Organization is critical for the sustainment of the class. Otherwise as a facilitator, one spends way too much time and energy trying to keep people moving at approximately the same direction. Organization and clarity are absolutely crucial." Another participant summarized this concept well, stating, "I work very hard for a sense of continuity throughout the course…I take extra pains to sort of spoon-feed the organization of the class to my students."

Participants used varying techniques to create organization in their online classes. Some of them organize everything into *weeks* so that students can stay within one area to complete current coursework. "I basically set it up so that all they have to do each week is go through the relevant week page and work their way through item by item." It should be noted that one institutional template required a *week-by-week* view and one did not. One of the most passionate about the weekly setup was from a participant where the school does not require the organization. "From an organizational structure, the first thing I do is I break my class into weeks, because I don't care what your educational background is... you went to school week by week."

Participants used different techniques to organize their online classes. One participant stated, "I color code various items and I give them that guide each week."

Another participant chooses to make everything available at the beginning of the class to help set student expectations up front.

> … I set up things like when assignments are due, when the exams start, and I give them the key things here so that they have them from the get-go… everybody knows from day one, that there no excuses as to why and to expect an exam, or how long it's going to last.

Sometimes the organizational choices are made to alert students when something is important. As one participant stated, "I try to put some of these things in to get them to stop and take a look at it rather than just skimming through it … knowing that they're going to have to do some serious work here."

Organization choices are also made to try to create an environment that mimics in-class rapport, discussion, and classroom experience, in the online classroom. Sometimes that means that students are doing the steps an on-ground faculty member would have done for them. For example, the instructor of an online science lab said, "They go to the grocery store each week and get a couple of things for most of the (science) labs." One of the other participants, an art instructor, schedules ". . . live field trips and to give them a set of times where they could meet me at the museum and go through some of the new exhibits." This gives her the opportunity to create an experience much like those who take her on-ground class, and they get to interact with her personally. Following are some other things participants do to create a similar experience as an on-ground class. One participant, an accounting professor, said, "I pull the exam up and I do it – create a teaching video - and a walk through each question and explain why this answer is right (if it's pertinent) and why the other answers are wrong."

Another participant, a social science professor, shared her process as follows:

> As part of their learning module, they have things that normally I would present in class. They have a PowerPoint presentation, and they also have miscellaneous notes, which is additional information that I may have presented in class if they were taking it in a live classroom. So, I would present this handout and we would go through it. This is one thing that I would actually do in the classroom.

In addition to mimicking a classroom experience, several participants discussed the importance of maintaining communication with students, and reaching out in a proactive manner to maintain student engagement and motivation. They build this proactive organization into their classes.

> This is when students start to fall out because they start getting tired. If I were in a face-to-face class I would do a lot of individual meetings... so I try to do that in messages embedded in course content, and in e-mail messages starting now to get them to persist.

Proactive communication was something discussed by several participants. Many shared that they feel a challenge to find ways for the students to connect to each other. As one participant wondered, "How do I create a sense of community and a community of learners in an online classroom?" They are often trying to use technology to help them make the most meaningful learning experience, analyzing the important elements. "When I went online, I try to figure out - what can I do to capture exactly what I do in the classroom and use technology to take it even that much further?" Ultimately, the choices for their online classes are based on what will work best for the students. As one

participant summarized, “Teaching online… has forced me to look at the classroom and ask myself what is it about what's going on there that's beneficial, pedagogically, because I have to identify that question before it can then figure out is there's any way to translate that to online.”

Many organizational decisions for an online class were made as a method to keep students engaged. One participant shared, “I am a huge proponent of keeping students engaged. I don't want this to be a correspondence course. That is not what it is to be. This is a lesson learned that I came for my own online learning experience...” Note that this participant reflected on his own experiences as an online student, which has had a significant impact on why he organizes his classes the way he does.

One of the techniques to mimic the in-class experience is to record on-ground class lectures and provide them for online students. As one participant noted, “it's much easier to get the dynamics of an in class lecture if I'm actually just editing an in-class lecture . . . rather than talking enthusiastically to a computer screen.” Another technique is to create animations that use different character faces and voices throughout the class. One of the participants, who teaches in the science area, is quoted as follows:

> So they can open a textbook, look at the bone structure, and listen to exactly my explanation, which I have programmed in my little character for them. So they can look at somebody if they wish and just listen, look at the screen. Or, they can download onto their iPod, and walk with it wherever they go.

Three of the ten participants use in-class environments as the testing ground for their online classes. One participant stated, “I really want to teach face-to-face and online if

I'm going to do on something online. I really get a feel for what works with students face-to-face and then I can try to translate that into the online classroom."

Regardless of how the course is organized, some of the participants said that they felt creativity involved not only the elements being used, but also the techniques. One participant shared that it's often in preparing for the unknown that makes her creative. "Sometimes it's not just creativity in the creation of the content materials; it's creativity in the terms of finding creative solutions for what could be problems or kind of bad experiences." One of the best summary quotes regarding thoughtful course organization is from the participant who stated, "The more touch points that the instructor can provide for the students, the more textured the learning opportunity is... the students that they can take advantage of, I think it's a good thing."

It might seem the antithesis of creativity to focus on organization and structure, but the participants were often very passionate when speaking about how their courses are organized. They shared that creating a logical path for students to navigate through a class makes it easier for students to focus on the learning modules and on building connections with other students. Ultimately, the participants are making organizational choices to best meet the needs of their students. It was often when speaking about their passion for helping students that several smaller themes related to administration came to light.

Administrators, take note of issues important to creative online faculty.

Although the interviews focused on the participants' individual experiences expressing creativity online, there were issues brought up by all of them that indicated a need to include a section addressed to administrators. This section will be shared in a

more linear form, letting the participants' quotes speak to the issues rather than inserting analysis in this section. Although some of the issues are positive, many of the areas focus on challenges many participants have experienced as hurdles to their online creativity expression. This theme started to become more important as one participant, who has taught via distance education for more than 15 years (and has received countless awards), indicated he would not take on any additional online classes if forced into the limitations of his institution's new requirements.

Templates are a hot topic.

Participants were intensely positive or negative regarding required institutional templates for online courses. Although all agreed that some sort of uniformity is good, the level of flexibility desired varied for participants. These quotes offer insight into some of the raw emotion the subject of templates invoked, with some participants even saying that they would not take on any new classes if forced into the rigidity of the institutional template. Four of the ten participants felt that the issue of templates was not that big a deal to them. One of them said, "I don't think it's a big deal to ask teachers to structure under a minimal template that allows the students a minimum of hassle when they're trying to negotiate the sites." Another one echoed the non-issue sentiment, saying, "Anyone who feels restricted by the [School] template either has an overblown estimation of the limits of the template, or-more likely-has a limited understanding of the possibilities of [the learning system software]."

Other participants were a bit more conflicted on the issue of templates, sometimes even changing their position within the course of the conversation. One example is from an art professor participant, who stated, "We have great flexibility to determine how we

will cover the content within our course site, what kind of curriculum materials will be used... so I think we have a tremendous amount of flexibility in terms of course design." However, this same participant went on to say "… "I think we discourage students from poking around, looking around, and being curious."

The conflicting feelings about templates often centered on a perception of inflexibility to adjust templates within parameters. One participant shared her opinion by stating, "I think that one size does not fit all. It is really important to look at the content first." Another participant echoed that sentiment, citing differences in teaching styles, saying, "We have different styles; as teachers we have different styles. I agree that yes, there has [sic] to be parameters at the same time - we are not computers."

Seven of the ten participants shared opinions that flexibility should be allowed not as much for differences in teaching style as for differences in the curriculum. A science professor participant who has served on institutional committees to define templates had the following to say:

> I just caution people who are overseeing different types of distance learning classes that they realize... different tools at different times for different subjects…Depending on our background, we want to impose what works well for our subject matter in thinking that it works well for everything. And it's not. It's just as different in a face-to-face class, subject matter wise. You would not do the same things in a chem[istry] 1 lab as you would in a statistics class. Yet in distance learning, I get the feeling that in the upper levels of administration they kind of want to put all of the pegs into the same type of holes... round, and square, and

> triangular. They need to realize that not everything is appropriate for every subject matter.

It is important for administrators to recognize online instructors' frustrations, as they could lose some of their most talented online teachers. Several participants hinted that they might not develop new courses online in an effort to bypass template restrictions, but few stated it as clearly as this participant:

> I'm grandfathered in, so as long as I stick with the [same] sections... but if I try to go forward with something new I might be rather restricted as far as how creative I can be. I think I might just stick with [this class] online and be happy that I am in this already.

It should be noted that regardless of how the participants felt about their institutions' templates, they were finding ways to be successful in the online environment (thus their nomination for this study). Discussions regarding templates often led them to discuss other elements they have inserted into their classes, often with their own time and money.

There are high costs of time and, sometimes, of money.

These participants spend a great deal of their personal time researching and learning about new technology, or new techniques that will help them better reach or teach their online students. They have also almost always paid for the new technologies themselves. Participants wanted to be sure that administrators understood the time and money commitments they are making. One participant, a business professor, said, "I invest about 175 hours in the seven weeks to do what I think is an engaged and meaningful job. I'm trying to help people. To me, it doesn't make sense to simply go through the motions." Another participant focused more on the time costs to teach

online, saying, “Whatever amount of time you think it takes to [create on online class], multiply it by about three.” This was echoed by another participant, who summarized, “It takes a lot more time to be creative and reach out to your students.”

Additional expenditures of professor time and money might seem like an ultimate benefit to the institution (i.e., the benefit was received without additional cost to the institution); however, one participant, a science professor, has experienced a negative to this issue. Although he has spent thousands of dollars of his own money creating animations and new technology, he said, “I wanted my class to be used by a lot of other faculty, but there is [sic] a lot of problems because I purchased most of these things like Captivate and other software on my own. It sort of put a drag on having other people adopt my class.” Licensing and share limitations should be considered as administrators encourage faculty to explore using new technologies.

These participants shared their experiences of spending their own time to learn about new technologies, and all seemed very proactive about getting new training. They could not say the same about some of their online teaching colleagues. Six of the participants discussed their frustration either with the lack of formalized training they received from their institution, or the lack of training their colleagues are receiving.

Extensive training should be required.

For those who discussed the importance of online faculty training, they discussed it with passion. One participant has been involved in the training process at the institution in the past, and shared his philosophy, saying,

> No one should be able to teach online unless they've been trained in the online environment. And I'm not just talking about buttons to push in [the

> learning system software]... that they understand the pedagogical and anthropological aspects to online versus on ground.

In addition to online training as a faculty member, another participant shared that one of the most beneficial training grounds for teaching online was his experience as an online student. He discussed how the experience of learning online gives the instructor a different perspective than just as a faculty member.

> The biggest thing, at least in my experience, is that the vast vault of online instructors have never been on the other side of the learning process. Therefore, they in general do not build a sense of community, do not build a sense of excitement and engagement... it's almost like taking a correspondence course as opposed to an engaged online learning experience. That's what I've tried to bring from the lessons learned from my own experiences as a student…Too many times instructors who are teaching online have not been the recipient of online learning; therefore, they don't recognize that students are learning in different ways, at different paces, and that they are instructions have to be incredibly clear... that all of the nuances that are accessible to instructor in the classroom environment are not there, in general, in the online learning world.

These two participant quotes show participants' passion for making sure that online faculty are trained appropriately. The view as a student might be an important one, so perhaps online faculty training should be conducted so that the faculty member being training becomes an online student during the training process.

This section was an unexpected theme, but the topics of templates, time, and training were discussed so regularly, and with such passion, it was important not to leave them out of the data analysis and share them with administrators. Online instructors might not have access to administrators, or the institutional culture might not lend itself to sharing these types of suggestions, but they are valid to keep in mind as one who is creating or maintaining institutional policies and practices for a DL program. Following are some additional observations made by the researcher that were not overwhelming enough to become themes, but were interesting when getting to know the participants.

Additional Observations.

In additional to learning more about participants' experiences expressing creativity online, some of the discussions also involved getting to know the participants on a more personal level. The researcher was interested in understanding if there were any overwhelming similarities between the hobbies, offices, reading lists, or personalities. These personal observations were done even in light of Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) statement, "…a personal trait of 'creativity' is not what determines whether a person will be creative. What counts is whether the novelty he or she produces is accepted for inclusion in the domain" (p.28). Some of the observations were about participants' hobbies, reading preferences, office setup, and drive.

Hobbies.

Participants' hobbies varied, from very active (working out, soccer, bike-riding) to quietly reading or studying. The only common thread between the participants was that they were passionate about their chosen hobbies. The passion trait was also found by

Amabile (1996) and Albert (1983) when studying creative people. In addition to recreational activities, the space in which participants work was reviewed.

Office Space.

Each participant was asked to either provide pictures of his office space, or to pan the camera around his office during one of the interview sessions so that screen captures could be taken. The office pictures are interesting (and listed in Appendix H), but offer no insight into the world of the participants as a group. They range from hyper-clean to very scattered, with no correlation between subject area, gender, or other factors reviewed as part of the study. In addition to reviewing participants' office space, it was interesting to also learn more about what they are reading, or have most recently read.

Reading – for passion!

Participants were asked to share the most recent book(s) they had read. For those who found time to read for pleasure, the genres varied widely with no particular pattern. The only common reading materials for all participants were textbooks in their field (and reading about new distance learning technologies). They were very interested in staying current in their field, and making sure that the most appropriate texts are being used for their classes. The following quotes help illustrate how passionately they feel about their subjects or teaching online. One participant, a science professor, became very animated when talking about his reading passion:

> I'm always thinking of chemistry. I'm thinking those lichens are growing on that tree. I wonder what's different about that tree than this tree. Then I'll go back and I'll read up on some of those things. It's amazing that we are surrounded by the chemical setup that we have in the world.

Sometimes this passion for reading sparks a new idea for changes in their online class. One participant, also a science professor, uses any down time to make changes, saying, "I don't think there's a weekend of my life... even when I'm on a cruise ship... I'm always upgrading, redoing something, because I felt it wasn't good enough."

Some participants take their passion so seriously they recognize the ability to express creativity as the primary element for why they teach. One participant best summarized this by saying, "If you took away that creativity from me right now you might as well tell me to put in my resignation paper and leave." Discussions about creativity, and the process of expressing creativity, led to quotes that exemplified Csikszentmihalyi's (1990; 1996) flow concept.

Flow.

Although not discussed with the participants directly, the researcher made note of some of the participants' discussions regarding their creative expression experiences. Some of their experiences were focused on academic activities; one experience focused on athletic activities. Having researched Csikszentmihalyi's (1990; 1996) concept of flow, the statement that "during the flow experience the sense of time bears little relation to the passage of time as measured by the absolute convention of the clock" (1990, p. 66) was a point of regular researcher reflection. The following quotes support Csikszentmihalyi's theory about creative people getting so wrapped up in their creativity they lose all sense of time.

> My past time is building animations, building games, working online until two o'clock the next morning. The reason I'm there till one or two o'clock is because I didn't realize it was that late, because I'm so carried away in

> what I'm doing...you should see one of my bedrooms at home. I removed everything from inside of it and I built a green screen wall, and now I'm making green screen movies on the side.

Another participant, an art professor, demonstrated flow by sharing, "I have to stop myself because I could just get sucked into working on designing something new, and spend two hours on the colors to make sure that they are just perfect. And yes, I would say I am creative in that regard."

Sometimes flow was exemplified not within discussions about how a participant works on his class, but in discussions about other hobbies. One participant experiences flow while running. He said,

> One of the things that I found out from running is that there's a tremendous side benefit, rather than a health benefit. It's been termed a lot of things. Your mind tends to go on some other place when you're running or when you're doing extended aerobics... you start to tap into a creative side of your brain. It's sort of a meditation type thing. I get a lot of ideas what I'm running.

It is important to note that even those who get lost in their own creativity still exhibit some self-doubt about their creativity.

Vision of their own creativity.

It was interesting that even though these participants were being interviewed following their nomination as a creative online instructor, six of the ten participants had doubts about their own creativity. These feelings of humility or self-doubt were also

reported by Amabile (1996) and Albert (1983). One participant, a philosophy professor, shared his experience as follows:

> There are times when I think that everything I'm doing is predictable, and has been done before, and my main talent is to be an imitator and improver. I will take things that people are already doing and figure out ways to make them better - or perhaps make them mine. And sometimes I think that's my only originality I have. But I think I'm being hard on myself when I say that."

Another participant, a science professor, said simply, "I don't feel I'm an artist because I'm a scientist." As one can see, the last statement was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, displaying the often-present sense of humor displayed by participants.

Sense of humor.

A common thread among all participants was their sense of humor. Either through telling funny jokes or stories, or just by dry comments, all interviews were filled with a good dose of laughter on both sides. Although it is hard to illustrate a sense of humor with a limited selection of quotes, the following quote offers an example of humor exhibited by participants.

> Am I creative? Obviously, absolutely no. But I am creative. Chemists aren't supposed to be creative. We are supposed to be rock solid... quantitative numbers… but we still do things that are sort of neat and nifty once in a while.

In summary, the additional observations offered nothing that significantly swayed the themes or findings of this study, but since the emphasis of this study was to

understand how each of the participant's experiences contributes to the whole (the phenomenon), these were interesting to note. Minimally, the participants' passion for their subject area and learning should be evident.

Essence – Free and Purposeful Creativity

Taking into account all of the themes that emerged, and all of the observations, the goal of a phenomenological study is to understand the core experience, or essence, of the phenomenon being researched (Moustakas, 1994). Although faculty creativity in online learning might not normally be considered a "phenomenon" (some students might argue that its rarity classifies it as such when found), this type of research focuses on understanding the essence of participants' experiences, and looking for outcome themes gleaned from participant responses. (Creswell, 2007) The intent of this phenomenological study was to understand the experience of expressing creativity by creative faculty teaching online, and if (and/or how) it is impacted by the environment.

The essence of the experience for these participants was that creative online instructors experience a freedom related to creativity expression, and practice purposeful creativity. The term *purposeful creativity* was coined by the researcher to indicate that these participants were not being creative only because they had the ability or inclination to do so. They were evaluating several factors (i.e., learning curve, technology need, cost, implementation time, student skill level) to determine the value of each creative action or element in their online classes. "Many creative [people] say that the difference between them and their less creative peers is the ability to separate bad ideas from good ones, so that they don't waste much time exploring blind alleys" (Csikszentmihalyi,

1996, p.116). The process of purposeful creativity is illustrated in Figure 4.1 below, created by the researcher.

Figure 4.1 – *Process Model of Purposeful Creativity*

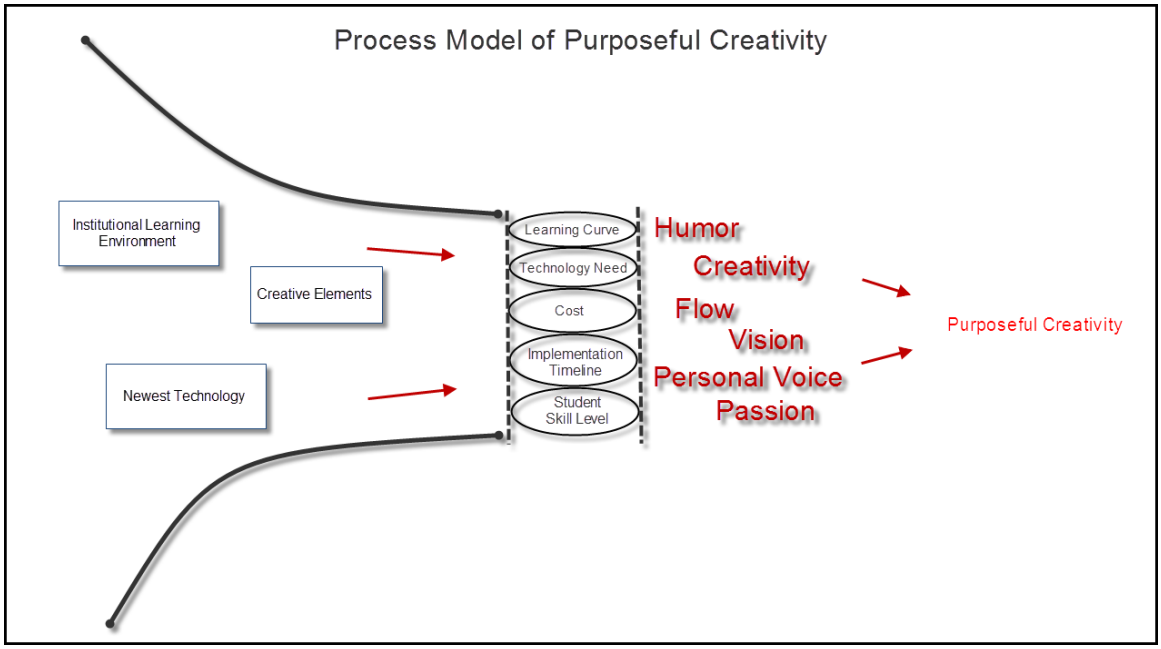

Figure 4.1 illustrates the process model for faculty using purposeful creativity to determine which elements will be used in their online classes. It is important to note that this two-dimensional model cannot accurately represent the multi-dimensional process of purposeful creativity, nor can it adequately illustrate the dynamic flow of elements in and around the process. On the left part of the illustration, there are boxes representing the institutional learning environment, all of the newest technologies, and creative elements online faculty could use. In an on-ground class, faculty might try a creative element with a class to see how it goes, without really analyzing much beyond its initial appeal (technological elements would probably be analyzed more, even for on-ground classes).

However, presenting these elements in an online class requires more analysis, represented by the ovals in the middle of the funnel. Is the learning curve to use the new

technology or creative element worth the benefit it would provide for the online class? What kind of new technology would be needed to use the new elements in an online class (i.e., new software for instructors/students, hardware requirements, download/internet speed of most students)? Is the cost of the new elements prohibitive (i.e., the instructor, students, and/or institution would have to incur unreasonable additional costs)? How long would it take to implement the new elements (ex: Would it take an instructor two weeks to create a streaming video for a module that begins next week?)? Finally, what are the technological skill levels of the students? Participants regularly expressed challenges they face with students who do not have the basic technology skills to attach their assignment documents. How difficult would it be to require these same students to record and upload a podcast?

After considering all of the questions, and filtering their choices based on the answers, the online faculty then bring their personal elements into consideration. They consider their passion for the subject matter (or the new creative element), personal passions (i.e., hobbies, reading influences), vision, flow, sense of humor, and their personal voice, that are all important elements to help faculty make choices regarding the most appropriate technological and creative elements to be used for their online classes. Rather than just using elements because the instructor has the ability and inclination, there is a more intentional and purposeful use of creativity, coined purposeful creativity by the researcher.

Chapter 5 – Study Summary and Recommendations

The data for this study fell into several themes relating to the experience of expressing creativity for creative online faculty. This chapter will summarize the data from this study, and provide recommendations for future research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of expressing creativity for faculty who are considered creative, and who teach online. A sample of 10 online faculty, nominated as creative by their colleagues, were interviewed multiple times, and reviews of their online class environments were conducted.

Following data validation from researcher review, member (participant) checking, expert panel professional experiences, and expert panel member majority input following independent data review, a list of themes was finalized. The themes that emerged from the data were as follows:

1. Technology is an enabler (but has challenges).
2. Students are important.
3. Course organization is key to expressing creativity online.
4. Administrators, take note of issues important to creative online faculty.

In addition to these themes, additional observations about the participants were shared. The observations mirrored several of the findings by Amabile (1996) and Albert (1983) regarding qualities of creative people.

Several of the themes, and participants' responses, could be used to reflect on the experiences of effective online faculty, and not necessarily *creative* faculty. It is important to note that the focus of participants throughout their interviews was on

relating their experiences of expressing their creativity. Certainly they also demonstrated how their techniques are effective, but by being effective instructors, they freed their teaching techniques enough to go beyond effectiveness to reach their students creatively. Reflecting on the theories of Maslow (1998), Greenleaf (1977), and Csikszentmihalyi (1990; 1996), it is through the faculty expressing their creativity and providing an environment that nurtures and appreciates creativity, that creativity could be fostered in the students.

Some of the most interesting observations of the study were in looking at the participants at a whole, aside from their experiences of expressing creativity. Each of the participants discussed an extraordinary commitment to students, from creating impromptu video tutorials to making mass changes in a class based on student feedback. All of the participants also shared a passion for lifelong learning. They were enthusiastic about remaining current in their curricula, but also to research new technology being used in similar areas that might have application in their field. They were passionate about their hobbies (physical, religious, academic, etc.), passionate about their subject matter, passionate about the way they teach, and passionate about their students.

As a phenomenological study, the goal of the research was to find the essence, or core, of participants' experiences related to the phenomenon of expressing creativity while teaching online. The essence of the experience for these participants was that creative online instructors experience a freedom related to creativity expression, and practice purposeful creativity. Purposeful creativity was coined by the researcher to indicate that these participants were not being creative only because they had the ability or inclination to do so. They were evaluating several factors (i.e., learning curve,

technology need, cost, implementation time, student skill level) to determine the value of each creative action or element in their online classes.

Study Limitations

Because creativity is subjective, the criteria, questions, nominators, researcher, and expert panel members all had some form of bias that could not be totally eliminated (although every effort was made to mitigate bias through data and theme validation). The subjectivity and bias are also the elements that help these findings ring a familiar tone in qualitative research.

The intentional exclusion of student evaluations related to the participants could also be seen as a limitation; however, this issue was evaluated during the study planning cycle. It was important to establish a baseline experience for faculty perceptions of their own creativity first, and then build on the concepts by correlating perceptions to student evaluations in further research.

Suggestions for Further Research

Because the researcher wanted to first understand the essence of the experience of creativity expression for creative online faculty, student perceptions were not taken into consideration for this study. Future studies could use this type of study as a foundation, and then determine if students perceive the faculty member's creativity the same way as the faculty member perceives himself. It would also be interesting to research if there is any correlation between the grades of students in classes taught by creative online faculty versus those who are not considered creative. Perhaps even more intriguing would be to research the retention and success rates for students in subsequent classes for those taught by creative online faculty versus non-creative online faculty.

Confirmation of, and extension of, research.

This study was not intended solely to validate previous research studies, but in learning about the experiences of creative online faculty, it is important to come back to validate those who have reported similar findings. Related to the literature on creativity in general, the participants for this study mirrored the findings of Amabile (1996) and Merrill (2007); the participants' definitions for creativity were subjective and hard for them to put into words. Even though they may have found it hard to define creativity, they were exhibiting several of the creative products (Amabile; Ritchhart, 2004) or creative management techniques (Greenleaf, 1997) described in literature. One of the most notable traits was that in expressing their own creativity, many participants hope to also spark creativity in their students (Albert, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maslow, 1998).

These participants have experienced many of the challenges with online teaching found in the literature, such as workload and time requirements (Bower, 2001; Bruner, 2007; Ng, 2007) and a hindrance to spontaneity when teaching online (Kanuka, Collett, & Caswell, 2002). Many of these participants' creative techniques mirror suggestions to use gaming (Connolly & Stanfield, 2006; Merrill, 2007), podcasting (Cheung & Hew, 2009; McGarr, 2009), and technological tools and synchronous communication (Cheng, 2009; Schullo, 2005). Web-conferencing was a specific synchronous communication tool suggested by Kuo (2005) that is being used by the speech instructor participant in this study with positive results. These were not only the demonstration of creative elements, but also a relationship to effective teaching.

Because the participants were nominated for this study in recognition of their online teaching excellence, the participants probably exhibit several of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles of effective teaching, but they were not specifically reviewed. Related to teaching excellence however, it is interesting to note that all of the ten participants appeared to exhibit the suggested online teaching excellence principles outlines by Savery's (2005) V-O-C-A-L approach; they were **V**isible to students, remain **O**rganized, show **C**ompassion, demonstrate **A**nalytical preparation, and strive to be **L**eaders by example.

Savery (2005) also discussed the importance of training online faculty to be effective in the online environment. Although participants for this study received varied training at their institution, many discussed their support for strong training and/or mentoring programs for online teachers as suggested in the literature (Fender, 2001; Lee & NEA, 2001). Regardless of their training, the participants for this study could have also been part of previous studies to find best practices in online instruction (Nkonge, 2004; Samarawickrema & Stacey, 2008), as these participants also discussed the importance of using technology to enable new ways of engaging students in a sterile online environment.

In summary, the reviewed literature provided a foundation to take this study in a new direction from those in the past. While considering some of the characteristics of creative individuals, and the pros and cons of teaching online, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of expressing one's creativity when teaching online. It is hoped that by understanding this experience of creativity expression, the optimum environment can be created for other online instructors to encourage and foster

creativity expression more often. In considering how instructors can be encouraged or impacted, following are the study implications for faculty.

Study Implications

This study extends the availability of research on creativity, while adding to the body of educational research a new focus combining creativity expression with teaching online. This study also resulted in themes pertinent to both online faculty and administrators. The implications to each group will be detailed in this section.

For Online Faculty.

The participants in this study have found a way to let their personal voice shine through in their classes, providing a more personal and engaging experience for students. Based on the responses they have received from their students, students have responded positively to the additional thought these faculty put into their online environments. As one participant summarized, "… being creative in your methods of outreach to students is only beneficial to them. It's the kind of thing that makes an online class more real." Faculty reading this study should be encouraged to explore more ways to infuse and share their creativity in their online classes, bringing a more textured learning experience for students. "College teachers…can ignite a person's dormant interest in a subject and provide the right intellectual challenges that leads to a lifelong vocation" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p.185).

It is also important for faculty to recognize that each student learns in a different way (McCarthy, 2000), especially adult learners (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Tennant, 1995), and finding ways to accommodate their learning style will provide a more meaningful learning experience. It is important to practice

purposeful creativity when evaluating creative elements or technology for the online environment, so that time and resources are not spent needlessly. After considering all of the issues listed in Table 4.1, and filtering the large pool of technological and creative element choices from which to choose, the online faculty should make choices regarding the most appropriate elements for their online classes. Rather than just using elements because the instructor has the ability and inclination, there is a more intentful and puposeful use of creativity, coined purposeful creativity.

Creativity expression was reported to be enhanced by technology, although participants recognized there is a learning curve for staying current and learning how to use new technology. The participants also shared additional external challenges they have faced with expressing their creativity (i.e., time, cost, need for training). These are important issues, and have been highlighted to administrators within the results of this study.

For Administrators.

The study data presented some unexpected issues relating to online administration. The issues were unexpected not because of their emergence in discussion, but because of the passion with which the participants discussed them. As the institutional body that hires, trains, and supports online faculty, it is important to listen to the challenges being experienced. The participants' issues focused on the following summary statements:

1. Templates are a hot topic. Online faculty appreciate a level of standardization across the institution; however, they encourage administrators to consider certain deviations by department or subject area.

2. There are high costs of time and, sometimes, of money. Online faculty are spending much of their own time to create meaningful online experiences for their students. Administrators are encouraged to be sure appropriate fiscal support is in place for new technology. Discussions regarding differing pay scales for online faculty are also appropriate, but outside the scope of this study.
3. Extensive training should be required. Online faculty recognize that the populations in their online classes are sometimes different than on-ground (i.e., more adult learners). Training should focus not only on creating the technical knowledge and skills to support an online class, but to understand how to better engage and create success for an online learning community of students.

Training or mentoring programs were discussed by all ten participants, with four participants supporting certification processes before being able to teach online. Formalized training is also supported by these participants' regional accreditation agency, in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Distance and Correspondence Policy Statement. "Faculty who teach in distance and correspondence education programs and courses receive appropriate training" (SACSCOC, 2010, p. 3).

Concluding Thoughts

This study provided the opportunity to have interesting conversations with those who are recognized as being creative in the online teaching community at their institutions. Some of the participants were involved with activities so exciting and creative, they could have been a case study unto themselves. As an online student and faculty member, the researcher found the process sometimes challenging to keep personal enthusiasm, experiences, or excitement from the results. Ultimately, the study provided

data that helps us understand what the essence, or core experience, is for creative faculty expressing their creativity online, and some issues for the administrators who hire and support them to keep in mind.

In closing, it is important to go back to why it is important for faculty to express their creativity and use creative elements. Creative online faculty facilitate in such a way that students are free to be as creative and productive as possible. This freedom for creativity and productivity fosters maximum creative growth within students during their educational experience, and prepares them for maximum productivity in a model environment. "A teacher's understanding of a passion for ideas reveals itself in a curriculum in which the subject matter is organized in a way that facilitates connections, encourages excitement, and makes a powerful learning endeavor" (Ritchhart, 2004, p.38). This elevates education to a new level, not only to educate students on the basics of the curricula they study, but to be a model environment for learning, creativity, and productivity – from the inside-out.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Participant Invitation Email

Dear [First Name],

Your name was shared with me by [Name and relationship to participant] as a person who might be interested in participating in, and would meet the qualifications of, the Online Faculty study I am conducting. As part of my Ph.D. dissertation for the University of Nebraska, I am interviewing undergraduate online faculty who have been recognized for their online teaching excellence and innovation (creativity), by either a colleague, student, or distance learning administrator. Congratulations on being recognized as a creative online instructor!

I am doing research to understand how teaching in the online environment affects faculty creativity expression. In addition to fulfilling my program requirements, I am hoping that these results will help us understand more about how this relatively new medium is impacting the experiences of faculty.

The Web-based interviews will be conducted utilizing ooVoo (you can get a free login at www.ooVoo.com). If you have a Webcam and headset, please plan to use that communication hardware. If you do not have a Webcam and headset, I will arrange to have a loaner set sent to you with a pre-addressed return envelope. We will speak at least three times as follows: 1. Web video interview where you can share your thoughts and experiences, 2. A session where you walk me through at least one of your online courses, and 3.One or more followup sessions to clarify questions. These sessions will be scheduled at your convenience. For each session, please allow yourself enough time to offer thoughtful, complete responses.

Your answers are completely confidential, and will be released in summary where no responses can be attributed to you. Any course screen shots will have all identifying information (to students, you, or your institution) removed. Although all interviews will be recorded, the recordings will be available only to me, and to an expert Distance Learning Panel of three experts, to assist me with data analysis. There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. Contact information is gathered only so I can contact you for follow-up questions, should they arise. Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researcher or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. If you are interested in seeing the results of this study, I would be happy to share them with you, and have included an indication question at the end. If for any reason you prefer not to participate in this study, please let me know by replying to this email with “not participating” in the Subject line.

None of the interviews are timed, but please allow yourself enough time to provide thoughtful responses. **To schedule a time for your interview, please respond directly**

to me at admorrow@huskers.unl.edu. If you are unavailable to assist at this time, or are uninterested, please just respond with "not interested" or "unavailable" to the same email address.

Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965. You have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have any questions about this study in particular, please feel free to contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or admorrow@huskers.unl.edu. Thank you very much for participating in this process!

Sincerely,

Annaleah D. Morrow
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix B – Interview Questions

Because this is a qualitative interview process, questions were created to be open-ended guides and not restrict discussion.

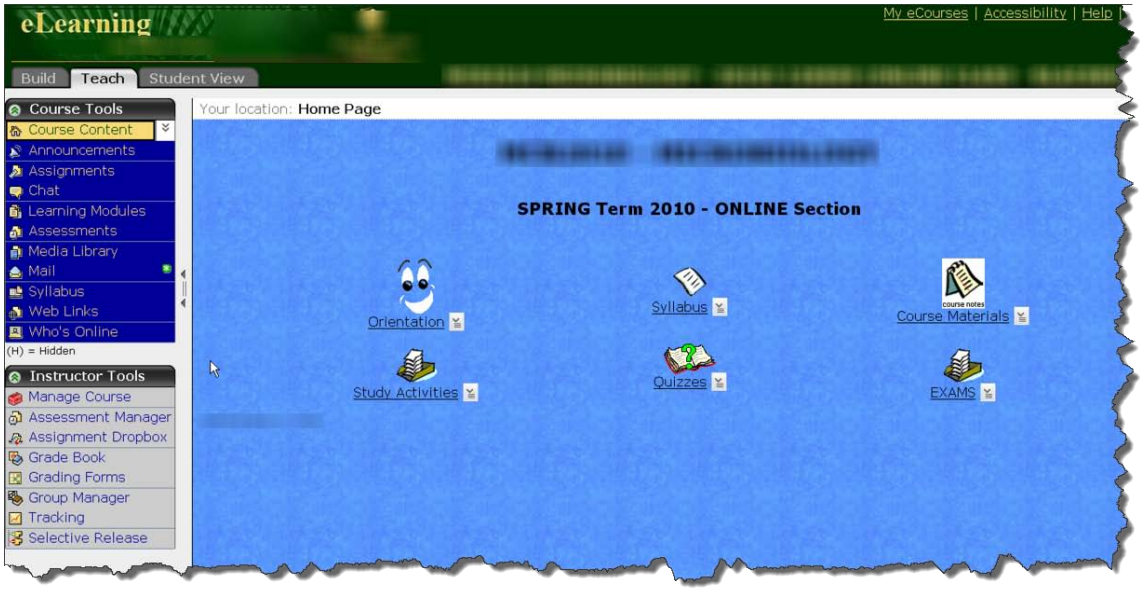
1. Please share your teaching experience.
2. What does it mean to you to be creative in the online environment?
3. Please share how you express creativity in your online classes? **Followup**: How much freedom do you have with course design at your institution?
4. Please explain your learning curve/learning experience as you first began teaching online, and how you have used any previous experiences to impact your online teaching. **Probe**: Were there any other experiences, like on-ground teaching or training, that had an impact on your learning curve?
5. Where do you feel you are now, in your learning curve? **Probe**: Do you feel you are still a beginner, continuing to learn, or are an expert? Could you explain why you ranked yourself this way?
6. Do you feel you are creative? What types of activities do you incorporate that you feel are creative? **Probe**: Could you explain why you feel you are, or are not, creative?
7. If you teach more than one undergraduate online class title, do you experience different levels of creativity for each of the classes? **Probe**: Could you give some examples of these differences?
8. Do you feel that technology enables or hinders your ability to express creativity in the DL environment? **Probe**: Could you give some examples of feeling more enabled or hindered?

9. What creative activities have you not yet incorporated into your online class environment, and why have you waited?
10. I would like to understand a bit more about you personally. What book(s) are you currently reading, or did you most recently read? What are some of your hobbies or recreational activities?

Appendix C – Web Interview Screen Shot Example

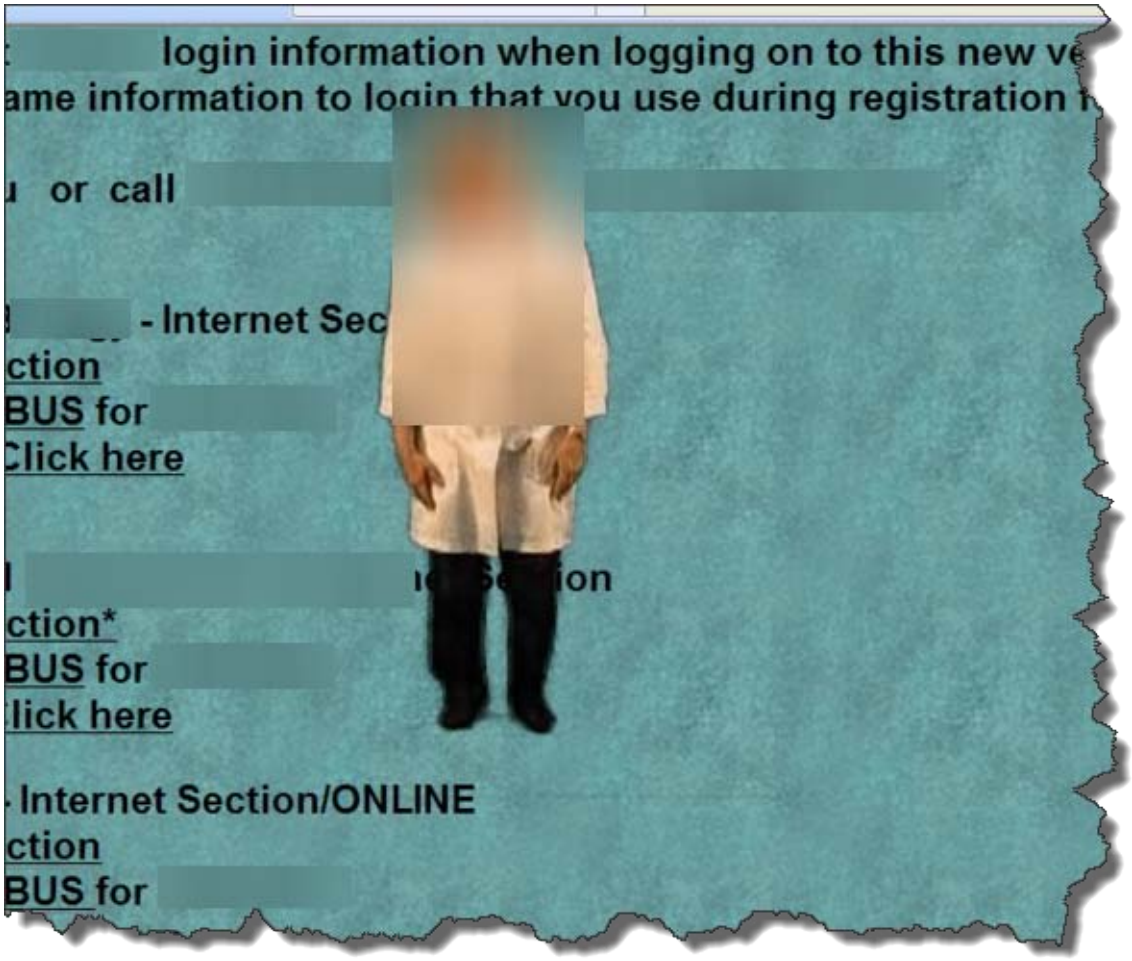
The Participant's identity has been concealed.

Appendix D – Participant Course Screen Shot Examples



Appendix E – Science Class Screen Shot

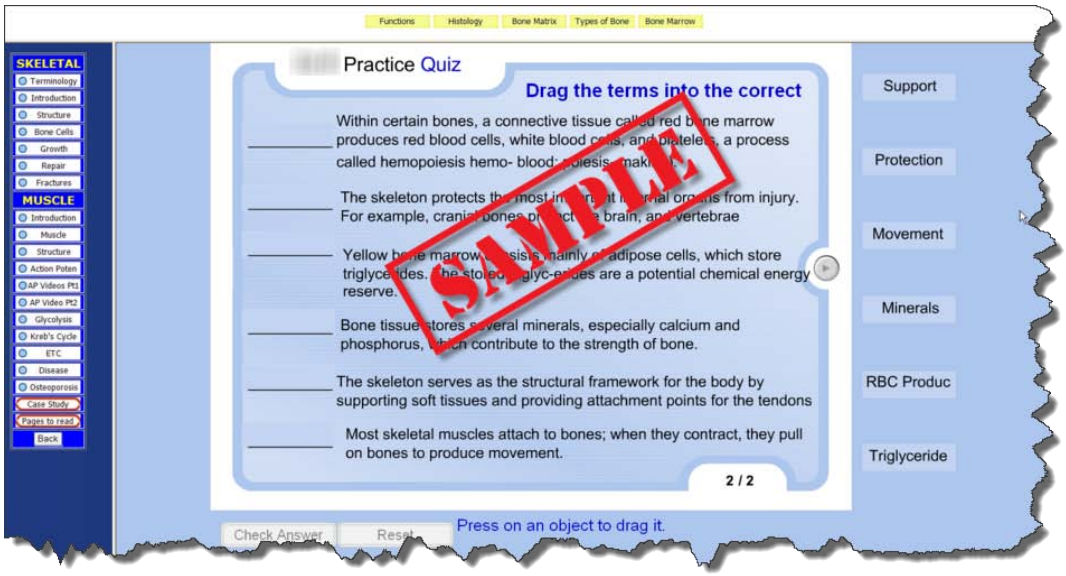
This is a screen shot of a participant's online science class with a Web out video. The teacher is walking along the course orientation page.

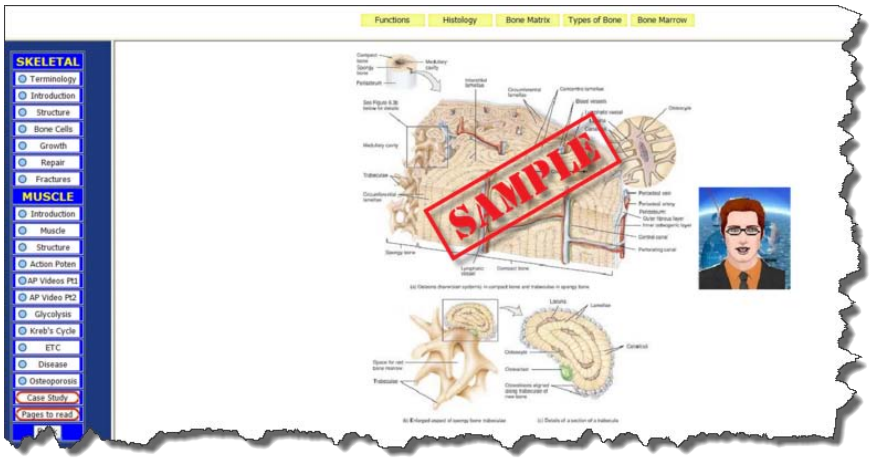


Appendix F – Anatomy and Physiology Screen Shots

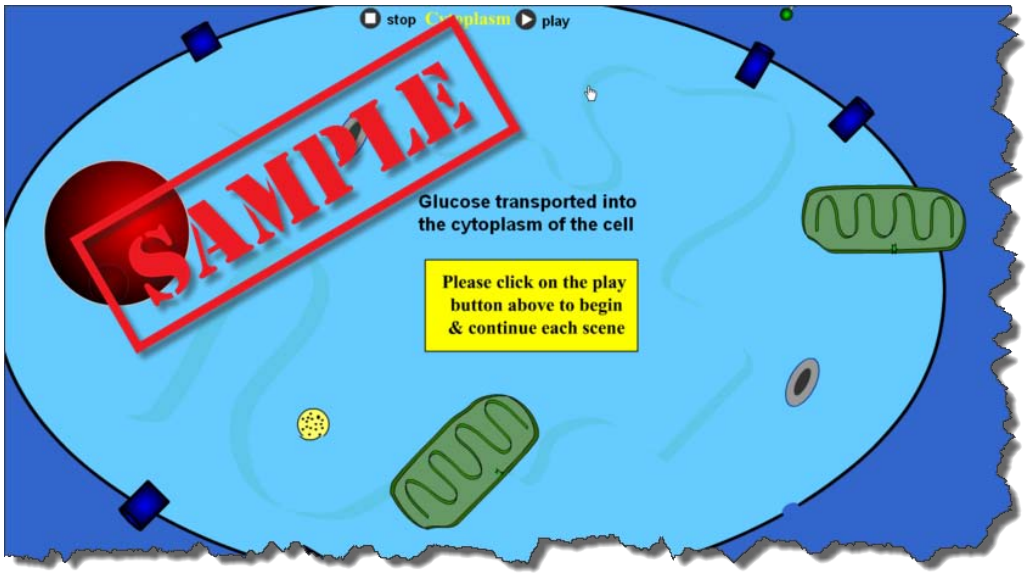
This instructor creates animation, and uses green-screen technology to insert himself in videos (i.e., he has walked around the inside of a blood vessel) to give students a unique perspective. Video was unavailable, but screen shots are offered here.

The researcher has the participant's permission to post these screen shots. Please consider them copyright-protected and do not reuse.



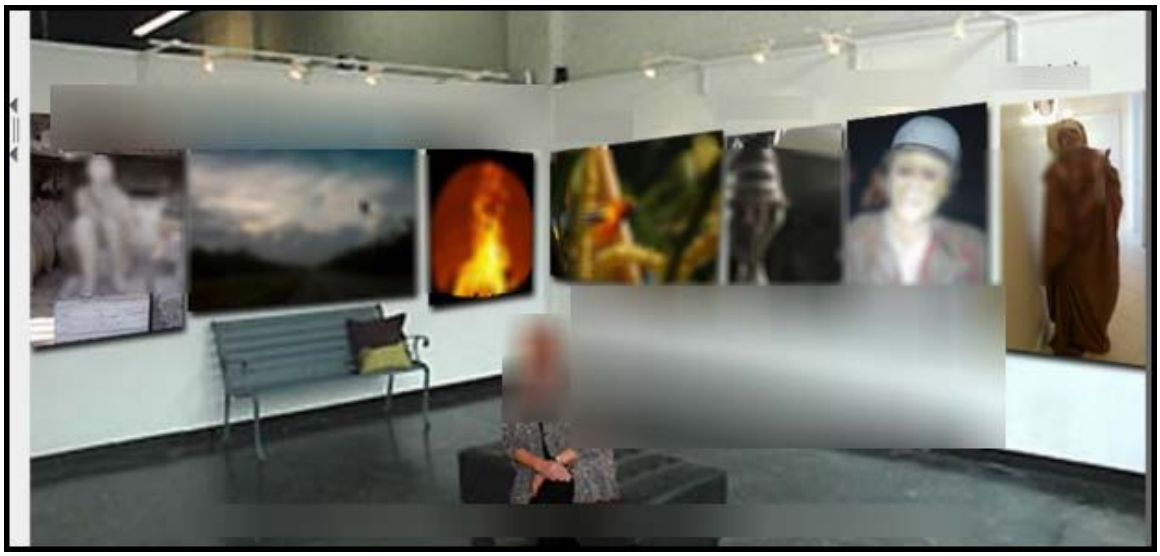

Functions
Histology
Bone Matrix
Types of Bone
Bone Marrow
SKELETAL
Terminology
Introduction
Structure
Bone Cells
Growth
Repair
Fractures
MUSCLE
Introduction
Muscle
Structure
Action Poten
AP Videos Pt1
AP Video Pt2
Glycolysis
Kreb's Cycle
ETC
Disease
Osteoporosis
Case Study
Pages to read
SAMPLE


The matrix comprises the other major constituent of bone. It has inorganic and organic parts. The inorganic is mainly crystalline mineral salts and calcium, which is present in the form of hydroxyapatite. The matrix is initially laid down as unmineralized osteoid (manufactured by osteoblasts). Mineralization involves the ability of bone cell call osteoblasts which release vesicles containing alkaline phosphatase (An enzyme). This cleaves phosphate groups and acts as the foci for calcium and phosphate deposition. The vesicles then rupture and act as a centre for crystals to grow on.
The organic part of matrix is mainly Type I collagen. This is made intracellularly as procollagen and then exported. It then associates into fibrils. Also making up the organic part of matrix include various glycoproteins the functions of which are not fully known. Other factors present include GAGs, osteocalcin, osteonectin, bone sialoprotein and Cell attachment factor.
Page Quiz
We will cover more specific later.....
Collagen is the protein of connective tissue in animals and the most abundant protein in mammals, making up about 25% of the total protein content. It is one of the long, fibrous structural proteins whose functions are quite different from those of globular proteins eg. enzymes. Long, tough bundles of collagen called collagen fibers are a major component of the extracellular matrix, which supports most tissues and provides cells their structure from the outside. Collagen is also found inside certain cells! It has great tensile strength and is the main component of cartilage, ligaments, tendons, bone and teeth.
SAMPLE


stop
Cytoplasm
play
Glucose transported into the cytoplasm of the cell
Please click on the play button above to begin & continue each scene
SAMPLE

Appendix G – 3D Art Gallery Screen Shot

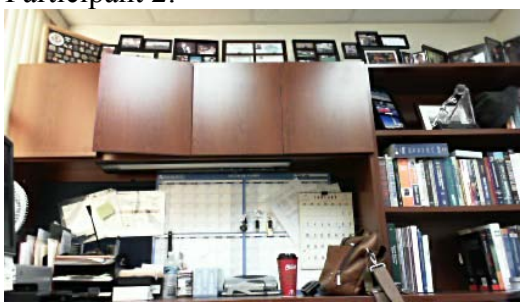
This photography teacher takes her students' photographs, and creates a 3-dimensional art gallery. The students' pictures hang on the wall, and she sits in the middle and admires them!



Appendix H – Pictures of Participants' Offices

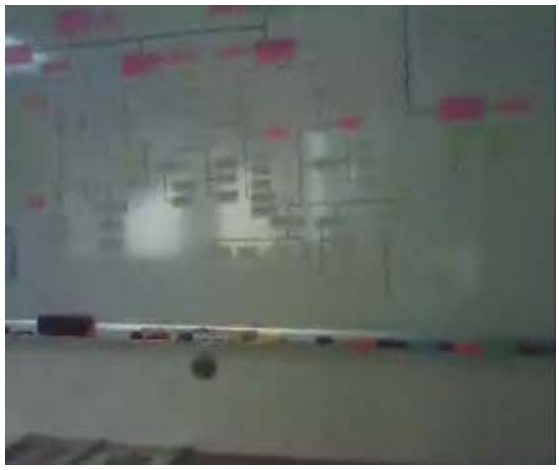
Participant 1:


Participant 2:




Participant 3:


Participant 4:

Participant 5:


Participant 6:


Participant 7:


Participant 8:


Participant 9:


Participant 10:

Appendix I – Data Analysis Process Spreadsheet Examples

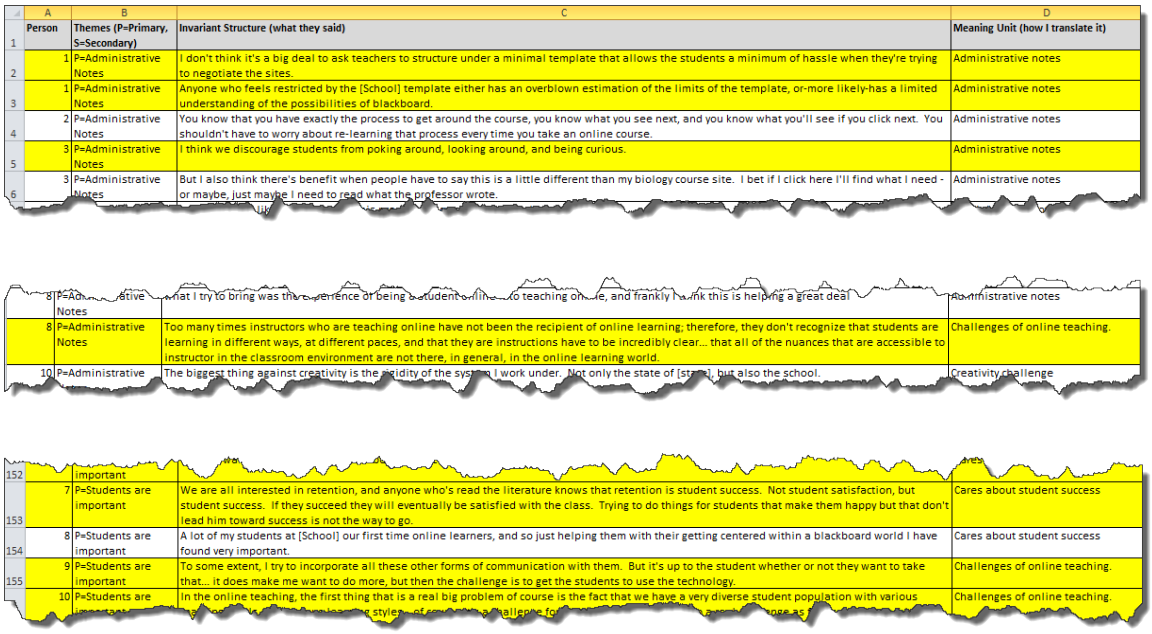
1. Sample of spreadsheet with Invariant Structure and the original Meaning Units.

	A	B	C
1	Person	Invariant Structure (what they said)	Meaning Unit (how I translate it)
2	3	Hobby - political activism, working out	Active in hobby
3	5	workout/Christian	Active in hobby
4	6	Art shows . . . And I'm pretty much obsessed with the little ones (grandchildren) right now	Active in hobby
5	7	exercise, pilot	Active in hobby
6	3	I send an e-mail to each student at their school account saying I'm really excited that you're signed up for your class. I just want to make sure you're aware that there are some specific requirements for meeting times for this class.	actively engaged. Cares about student success
7	8	I try to post announcements...two to three times a week. I also do broadcast emails, as well as individualized personal emails. I follow up announcements with broadcast emails	actively engaged. Cares about student success
8	8	another thing that I've learned from my own online learning experience is that it's critical to stay engaged. Even in that guide on the side model, it's critical to stay engaged. One of the ways that I do that is through announcements that are broadcast as well as personalized e-mails. The personalized e-mails are not just at an important juncture point as far as grades or assignments or whatever. Sometimes folks need some encouragement	actively engaged. Cares about student success
9	1	I don't think it's a big deal to ask teachers to structure under a minimal template that allows the students a minimum of hassle when they're trying to negotiate the sites.	Administrative notes
10	1	Anyone who feels restricted by the [School] template either has an overblown estimation of the limits of the template, or-more likely-has a limited understanding of the possibilities of blackboard.	Administrative notes
11	2	You know that you have exactly the process to get around the course, you know what you see next, and you know what you'll see if you click next. You shouldn't have to worry about re-learning that process every time you take an online course.	Administrative notes
		[illegible]	Administrative [illegible]

	A	B	C
86		[illegible] student population with various [illegible] and various learning [illegible] it's a challenge for in-course too... but it's also a real challenge as far as online teaching, because you never know what you have out there.	
87	10	The biggest tackle things I found was having everybody compatible so that they can understand what I'm doing is for them to even have the right programs to work in. It has never really been specified... to take this online course. You need to have Excel, you need to be able to open DOCX... those specifications somehow just don't get to online students.	Challenges of online teaching.
88	7	throughout the course I'm constantly putting announcements in	Communication is very important
89	7	So you know another thing that I found out... it's not really so much creativity as it is reaching out to students.	Communication is very important
90	1	I think I[illegible] ahead of the [illegible]	[illegible] elf innovative and/or creative [illegible]

	A	B	C
154		[illegible] on their own. B[illegible] at th[illegible] time, [illegible] so have [illegible] that are younger and need guidance. So I've tried to create some assignments that will guide them through the chapter and at least cover certain concepts that they need to cover.	
155	10	I think that has to be done, because, from what I gather back for my students... sitting in front of a computer screen for an hour or hour and a half is even less interesting than sitting in a classroom for an hour or hour and a half! I don't care who's teaching it, me included.	Focus on Student comments and evaluations
156	1	My number one rule is that they need to cover a single major point of information.	Information is often very organized.
		basically set [illegible]	[illegible]

2. Sample of Meaning Units that were clustered into Themes (Highlighted lines are meaning units that 2 of the 3 Expert Panel members agreed with). Note: Handwritten notes and discussions with Expert Panel members regarding their additional suggestions are not shown in this example.



	A	B	C	D
1	Person	Themes (P=Primary, S=Secondary)	Invariant Structure (what they said)	Meaning Unit (how I translate it)
2	1	P=Administrative Notes	I don't think it's a big deal to ask teachers to structure under a minimal template that allows the students a minimum of hassle when they're trying to negotiate the sites.	Administrative notes
3	1	P=Administrative Notes	Anyone who feels restricted by the [School] template either has an overblown estimation of the limits of the template, or-more likely-has a limited understanding of the possibilities of blackboard.	Administrative notes
4	2	P=Administrative Notes	You know that you have exactly the process to get around the course, you know what you see next, and you know what you'll see if you click next. You shouldn't have to worry about re-learning that process every time you take an online course.	Administrative notes
5	3	P=Administrative Notes	I think we discourage students from poking around, looking around, and being curious.	Administrative notes
6	3	P=Administrative Notes	But I also think there's benefit when people have to say this is a little different than my biology course site. I bet if I click here I'll find what I need - or maybe, just maybe I need to read what the professor wrote.	Administrative notes

	8	P=Administrative Notes	what I try to bring was the difference of being a student online to teaching online, and frankly I think this is helping a great deal	Administrative notes
	8	P=Administrative Notes	Too many times instructors who are teaching online have not been the recipient of online learning; therefore, they don't recognize that students are learning in different ways, at different paces, and that they are instructions have to be incredibly clear... that all of the nuances that are accessible to instructor in the classroom environment are not there, in general, in the online learning world.	Challenges of online teaching.
	10	P=Administrative	The biggest thing against creativity is the rigidity of the system I work under. Not only the state of [state], but also the school.	Creativity challenge

152		important		
153	7	P=Students are important	We are all interested in retention, and anyone who's read the literature knows that retention is student success. Not student satisfaction, but student success. If they succeed they will eventually be satisfied with the class. Trying to do things for students that make them happy but that don't lead him toward success is not the way to go.	Cares about student success
154	8	P=Students are important	A lot of my students at [School] our first time online learners, and so just helping them with their getting centered within a blackboard world I have found very important.	Cares about student success
155	9	P=Students are important	To some extent, I try to incorporate all these other forms of communication with them. But it's up to the student whether or not they want to take that... it does make me want to do more, but then the challenge is to get the students to use the technology.	Challenges of online teaching.
	10	P=Students are	In the online teaching, the first thing that is a real big problem of course is the fact that we have a very diverse student population with various	Challenges of online teaching.