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Being There: A Grounded-Theory Study of Student Perceptions of Instructor Presence in Online Classes

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BEING THERE: A GROUNDED-THEORY STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IN ONLINE CLASSES

by

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of experienced individual online students at a community college in Texas in order to generate a substantive theory of community college student perceptions of online instructor presence. This qualitative study used Active Interviewing and followed a Straussian grounded-theory design to guide the collecting and coding of interview data in order to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory. The researcher collected data through interviews with 16 online students, all of whom had taken at least four online courses at a community college.

A constant comparative analysis of the data generated a substantive grounded theory, the Theory of Establishing and Sustaining Instructor Presence to Enable Student Learning. This emergent theory states that the perception of instructor presence results from the student-instructor relationship, that it is established and sustained through four phases of instructor activity and student response: the conditional phase in which student and instructor respond to perceived needs, especially the need for flexibility, by choosing an online course (Hotel in Tahiti); the phase in which the instructor through course design and welcoming activities invites the student to full participation (Bienvenidos); the phase in which the instructor sustains presence by fulfilling the commitments of the previous

phase (Cats in Sombreros); and, finally, the phase in which the instructor may shift from strong instructor presence using direct instruction to lesser presence facilitating interaction and using indirect instruction while the student becomes a more active learner and develops greater self-directedness and self-teaching (Kick It Up a Notch). The theory also presents a process definition of instructor presence and offers an explanation for the relationship between the instructor roles of active instruction and facilitation.

The study recommends further qualitative research into perceptions of students in other regions, of students at other levels of study—including baccalaureate and graduate students, and of students who are less successful in online course work.

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Introduction

Context of the Problem

Reupert, Maybery, Patrick, and Chittleborough (2009) quoted a student whose comment indicated an issue that lies at the core of the emerging era of online education—the role of the instructor in the virtual classroom. The student said:

> I am not really into computers, but I do want a connection with the person who is teaching me. To me, it doesn't really matter if it is distance or not, or what materials are used. . . . I need to see that the other person is a person, and is someone I can relate to, on both the subject material as well as on a personal level. (p. 153)

This student spoke for a sizable portion of the millions of students who are taking a college class online right now—or will be someday. There are students in Korea and Indonesia and England and Serbia and all over this country who are taking classes at a college or university in America, including many who are taking class at more than one higher education institution. They are taking classes that only the few would have imagined a generation ago—classes in the sciences with simulated online labs, Music Appreciation, Spanish, Literature, History, Speech. Some are sitting at a desktop accessing a course website on the internet. Others are navigating the same course on an IPhone or IPad using wireless or satellite service. Some have downloaded parts of the course to access on a kindle or to listen to on a CD player or MP3 player. And there are other students doing a chore while waiting for a 20-year-old computer to boot up and access the internet through a dialup service. Any attempt to describe the totalities of possibility will be futile.

With all the flash and sizzle of virtual classrooms that stretch around the globe, there are still many students who are like the student mentioned above. They want to know who their professor is. They want a "connection." They want to know that there is a real person behind the curtain—that "the person is a person." And they want to be able to relate to that professor both on a personal level and through the course material. At least, some do.

There are also instructors and professors who wonder what it means to be an instructor in the virtual world of online learning. How can they be "here" when there is no "here"—just a widely scattered "there"? That, in a nutshell, is the issue surrounding what has come to be called instructor presence. It is easy to spot the professor in a classroom on campus, but what can instructors and professors do to be perceived by students as there and connected with the students?

Clearly, online education is no passing phenomenon. At this point, there is no reason to think it might replace actual physical classroom instruction, but online education has shown staying power, and educators must adjust to the new electronic environment. There has been, in fact, a large shift to online instruction in the 21st century; it can be seen in the phenomenal growth of online education in the last 15 years. According to a 1999 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (Lewis, Farris, Snow, & Levin, 1999), in 1997-98 there were 1,363,670 enrollments in college-level, credit-granting distance education courses" (p. iv). A 2008 NCES report (Parsad & Lewis, 2008) estimated "12.2 million enrollments (or registrations) in college-level credit-granting distance education courses" in 2006-07, 77% of which were online courses (p. 3). That is an increase of over 750% in 9 years. In a 2010 Sloan Consortium

report, Allen and Seaman related that 5.6 million students in U.S. higher education took at least one online class in the fall of 2009, an increase of more than a million from the year before (p. 2). They reported further that nearly 30% of students now take at least one online class. Finally, they concluded that "there is no compelling evidence that the continued robust growth is at its end" (p. 4). Massey (1997) perceived the "revolution in technology" (p. 67) as one of three primary external influences operating to create uncertainty and leading to other higher education problems: the need for "ongoing educational activities" due to rapid changes in technology (p. 76), competition from other institutions, and uncertain effects on the education process.

Newman, Couturier, and Scurry (2004) estimated that over time "the traditional and the online class will look more alike to the student" (p. 23). Both will use technology, command active learning, use student-student communication, and feature instructors as facilitators. More instructors are also having students in traditional classes take exams online and submit papers online in order to use services like Turnitin.

The professoriate could experience great change as nearly all professors find themselves teaching online at least occasionally. Or perhaps face-to-face classes will transition to blended classes with face-to-face components. Kim and Bonk (2006) concurred with Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, and Jones (2010) in arguing that "blended learning would have greater significance in higher education in the future" (p. 29). And they argued that colleges will have more online programs, more online certification, and more online recertification. Finally, they predicted that colleges will offer more courses and degrees related to online education, including training in collaboration practices, evaluation and assessment skills, and so on.

The result could be a different kind of professor, as online education continues to grow and as colleges draw increasingly from those who are more innovative technically, for instance, or seek to hire those proficient in online education. Online instruction could necessitate that professors teach technology somewhat as part of evolving online duties. More professors will likely feel a need to develop some expertise in course design. Kim and Bonk (2006) suggested that colleges will rely on more workshops for training in online learning.

Newman et al. (2004) also noted revolutionary changes in research. They cited a National Academy of Sciences panel report indicating "profound changes in gathering, manipulating, analyzing, and disseminating information" (p. 24). Availability of online database aggregates like EBSCO and JSTOR have become the norm in the first decade of the new millennium. Newman et al. concluded: "Higher education faces a sea change for which it must prepare" (p. 24).

Amid this sea change in higher education, questions arise about the effectiveness of online instruction. Allen, Seaman, Lederman, and Jaschik (2012) did a study of faculty and administrator beliefs about online education, finding that only 38% of surveyed instructors (full-time and part-time) "either agree or strongly agree that online education can be as effective" as face-to-face instruction (p. 13). In fact, they reported that 57.7% have "more fear than excitement" about the growth of online education (p. 30). There are two other points of importance in the survey: Of those surveyed, only about a quarter had taught online, but of faculty members who have taught online previously, 2 out of 3 believe online instruction to be as effective as face-to-face instructions.

The context of the problem to be considered in this study, then, is continued growth in online instruction with the attendant difficulties of adjustment to education in an online environment (see the discussion of Berge, 1998, regarding barriers to online education; also Yu-Chang, Yu-Hui, Mathews, & Carr-Chellman, 2009), questions about the emerging role of the virtual professor, the effectiveness of online instruction, and no small amount of faculty trepidation about where online education is headed and the role of faculty in it.

Ultimately, online instructors decide how they will appear to the students in the classroom and how to show themselves as real persons to their students. They will determine their online instructor presence.

The Problem—Instructor Presence

The problem itself centers on the role of the online instructor as someone who is in the virtual classroom and somehow known to students. Many researchers have used the term "instructor presence." Reupert et al. (2009) used this term to refer to an instructor's "being salient and visible to learners in either distance or face-to-face classrooms" (p. 47). Online instructor presence or teaching presence online has been studied within the context of the Community of Inquiry model (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Further development of the model has been provided by other researchers (Berge, 2008; Shea, Pickett, & Pelz, 2003; Shea, Li, Swan, & Pickett, 2005) who have added new understanding about instructors' technical roles and have provided applications of the Pickering model to instruction principles. These researchers and others are interested in

ascertaining the components of instructor presence, problems regarding instructor presence, and the best practices that will provide for optimum instructor presence.

Although online instructor presence has been studied relentlessly with a focus on the instructor, the problem is a lack of in-depth studies that give a picture of instructor presence from the perspective of students. Moreover, most research on instructor presence has been either qualitative research guided by an *a priori* model of online education such as those conducted within a Community of Inquiry framework or quantitative research that tests the same or similar concepts (Arbaugh, 2001; Berge, 2008; Picciano, 2002; Swan, 2002). These studies, while useful, nevertheless do not lead to discovery outside the larger context—or are less likely to do so. Stone and Chapman (2006) did research interviewing instructors regarding their perceptions of instructor presence. But there is a need also for in-depth qualitative research of the topic centering on student opinion, belief, perception, and experience.

There are many studies of student satisfaction, most of them quantitative (Alavi, Wheeler, & Valacich, 1995; Arbaugh, 2001; Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000; Gomez Alvarez, 2005; Herbert, 2006; Jiang & Ting, 1999; Shen, Hiltz, & Bieber, 2006). Berge (1995) did a qualitative study of barriers to online education, but even though some of the identified barriers are student problems, the research examined only the perspective of online teachers. Reupert et al. (2009) did a study that provides qualitative contributions in this area, but with a narrow focus on student perceptions of personal presence as a component of instructor presence. Their findings do speak to student perceptions of the broader field of instructor presence, but their study, based on a single focus-group discussion, is thin in data and lacks the richness of movement from

description to more abstract hypotheses and theory. Thus, there is a need for a qualitative study to fill a gap in the research by means of an inductive exploration of student experience and perception of instructor presence to generate new categories and new theory.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of experienced individual online students at a community college in Texas in order to generate a substantive theory of community college student perceptions of online instructor presence. This qualitative study used interviews based on Active Interviewing theory and followed a Straussian grounded-theory design to guide the collecting and coding of interview data so as to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory. Although several definitions of online instructor presence exist, this study commenced with a general definition of online instructor presence as whatever an online instructor says or does or presents that leads students to perceive the instructor as an active participant in the course. In accordance with grounded-theory methodology, the researcher collected data by doing the following:

- interviewing 16 students,
- conducting constant comparison analysis of the data, and
- letting the data drive the process of generating categories and theory with the expectation that a new definition of instructor presence or a new category altogether would emerge as a replacement.

Background

The explosion in online instruction has occurred in a hurried fashion—perhaps at times even haphazardly, as instructors rushed to transfer courses from the face-to-face classroom to the online format. Ideas regarding implementation of class strategies specifically for an online environment were often improvised on the fly. Similarly, students found themselves in online classes, at times for questionable reasons, especially at community colleges—which had more than 50% of all college online enrollments in the first five years of this century (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Distance from campus, job and family responsibilities, and even sickness or injury led students to seek the flexibility of online study (Moore & Kearsley, 2005; Newman et al., 2004). Others found themselves in online classes because face-to-face classes were already full, or because their college was not offering a needed class.

Concern about instructor roles, how they impact learning over distance, and barriers to online learning have been a longtime concern in distance and online education. Student and instructor alike may fear "faceless education" (Berge & Collins, 1995). Instructor presence is, of course, an issue even in face-to-face classes, but it is easy to ignore: The professor shows up at class, and students make note of who the instructor is. But in online classes there is no inherent means of enabling instructor presence, and students know without doubt that they are isolated in a remote spot where there is no professor. Ultimately, the instructor may well not have thought out how to appear to be present in the virtual classroom as an important person in the class.

The Community of Inquiry model developed by Garrison et al. (2000) is often seen as the foundation for the concept of instructor presence. This model stipulated the

necessity of online learning within a system of transactions among instructor, learner, and course materials. Then it identified three key elements of online learning, or three kinds of presence: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Garrison et al. further analyzed teaching presence by identifying three functions:

- facilitation,
- design and organization, and
- direct instruction.

Berge added a fourth function, the technical, which was conceded by the Community of Inquiry researchers (Anderson et al., 2001). These four roles comprise most activities carried out during a course by the instructor.

The first function, facilitation, means primarily facilitation of discourse, interaction in the form of discussion between instructor and student or between student and student. At times the term "facilitated discourse" is substituted. The broader context for the term "facilitation" is Rogers's theory that the primary role of an instructor should be that of facilitator, mainly as someone who gets class discussions going, interrupting only rarely to focus or redirect discussion or to encourage participation from particular students. The term "instructor presence" as used in current research has several components covering facilitation with an emphasis upon student learning instead of the traditional emphasis upon instruction—that is the activities of the instructor. For instance, Berge and Collins (1995) claimed: "The paradigm shift is from a teaching environment to a learning environment" (par. 10). Other scholars and researchers (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Boggs, 1995/1996; Boggs, 1999; Lasley, 1998) also raised an argument against the instruction paradigm and called for what has been called the learning paradigm. Boggs

himself prescribed this new paradigm as the domain of the community college. Barr and Tagg (1995) said, “We are beginning to recognize that our dominant paradigm mistakes a means for an end. It takes the means or method—called ‘instruction’ or ‘teaching’—and makes it the college's end or purpose.” They explained further that the mistake of the past has been to overemphasize instruction to the point that expenditure of funds is constantly required to improve instruction. Thus, they singled out as ineffective the “sage on the stage” approach to instruction (p. 14), particularly the lecture method, which they saw as passive and focused on the instructor’s performance instead of what students learn. They envisioned the new faculty member as a “coach” interacting with a “team” (p. 14).

Models of Inquiry

This qualitative study relied upon two models for the design of its research methodology:

- the Straussian grounded-theory model as first developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss (1987) and by Corbin and Strauss (2008), and
- the active interviewing model as developed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995).

Glaser and Strauss met in 1960 and did a research project together that led to their publication in 1967 of their groundbreaking work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Their purpose was to present a rigorous method of qualitative research that would enable a systematic collection of data, coding, and analysis of data for the purpose of generating grounded theory—theory bound to and grounded in an inductive analysis of data. Part of the rigor demanded is the researcher’s scrupulous determination to avoid letting the process of generating theory to be

contaminated with preconceived ideas. The researcher uses the method of constant comparative analysis to generate meanings, categories, and grounded theory.

This study used the Active Interview theory developed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995). Active interviewing is a process distinguished from what Holstein and Gubrium called the "interview conversation as a pipeline for transmitting information" (p. 3). The method called for exploratory data collection through the active interview process, recognizing both interviewer and respondent as engaged in making meaning. They argued for a research process exploring the reality of respondents and their unique experiences through respondents' narratives. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) rejected the view of the respondent as passive and simply a "vessel for answers" (p. 7). The result was a focus on emerging meaning through the interaction of all participants.

Research Questions

1. How do community college students describe their perceptions of instructor presence in the online classroom?
    a. How important do students perceive instructor presence as a factor in their success in or satisfaction with an online class?
    b. What experiences do students use to define instructor presence in an online classroom?
    c. What experiences related to instructor presence have students had that they would like to see repeated in other online classes?
2. What aspects of an online class do community college students perceive as essential to an instructor's presence in an online class?

a. How important is an instructor's facilitation of discourse and collaborative learning?
b. How important is an instructor's design and construction of a course?
c. How important is an instructor's provision of direct instruction?
d. How important is an instructor's ability to give technical assistance?
e. How important is instructor and student disclosure?

Definition of Terms

Active Learning—Student engagement in the learning process through interacting primarily with other members of the community. Also known as collaborative learning, active learning involves discussion, group projects, reading, writing, and researching. It also can involve interaction with course materials.

Cognitive presence—A social phenomenon of the online environment in which learning is achieved through and marked by the construction of meaning within community interaction.

Community building—The creation of a community of discourse through facilitation of an instructor.

Community of inquiry—An online learning environment in which members are engaged in active learning.

Direct Instruction—Explanatory discussion or demonstrations that are seen by students as coming from the instructor, such as explanations provided in assignment instructions, comments in evaluations, answers provided in emails or on a discussion forum, lectures, podcasts, posted papers from the instructor, PowerPoints, and so on.

Facilitator—An instructor role whereby the instructor encourages student inquiry or enables student-student interaction through design of course environment.

Feedback—Instructor-to-student communication providing evaluation of work or answers to questions or requests.

GT/GTM—Grounded theory/Grounded theory methods.

Informant—See "respondent."

Immediacy—An online learner's sense of reduced distance between the student and others.

Instructional design—The sum of an instructor's work in designing curriculum and facilitating students' interaction with course materials and with each other. It may include the technical aspect of designing a website within a course management system.

Instructor presence—The activities of an instructor in an online course that comprise the instructor's face to the participants, including instructor roles, instructional design, organization, facilitation, feedback and assessment, communication both inside and outside the internet setting, selection of readings, setting of curriculum, technical support, and technical design. Sometimes referred to as "teacher presence" or "teaching presence."

Instructor roles—Functions performed by an instructor. Berge (1995) identified four roles: pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical. Community of Inquiry proponents have since adopted the technical role as a lesser feature (Garrison et al., 2000). A better concept of instructor roles might include specific behaviors such as facilitation, direct instruction, and feedback.

Interaction—Communication or engagement between or among online class members, instructor, and/or course materials.

Interpretive practice—"The procedures and resources used to apprehend, organize, and represent reality" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 16). This term is used to characterize the active interview, in which both interviewer and respondent are engaged in making meaning.

Netiquette—Guidelines for polite communication in online interaction.

Presence—The feeling or perception of being in a virtual classroom as a participating member of the community. Picciano (2002) said that "Students who feel that they are part of a group or 'present' in a community will, in fact, wish to participate actively in group and community activities" (p. 24).

Reflexivity—The researcher's conscious, reflective process used to mitigate the dangers of allowing prior categories to contaminate the inductive process of interpretation and coding and to mitigate against the effects of the researcher's own biases. In the process, the researcher is consciously accounting for, considering, and noting the influence of the researcher's own role and of his or her past experience.

Respondent—Person being interviewed. This word may be used as a synonym for "informant." But for the interview process as used in grounded-theory research, "respondent" is preferred. The reason is that "informant" implies that the person being interviewed is an expert with the answers that are simply being passed on to the interviewer, whereas "respondent" is more neutral and allows for the idea that the person being interviewed is part of a collaborative conversation and is part of the meaning-

making process. The subjective perception of the respondent is not only valued but sought actively.

Social presence—Garrison et al. (2000) defined social presence as "the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as 'real people'" (p. 89). Similarly, Shea et al. (2003) saw social presence as "the ability of students to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry," a feature "deemed critical in the absence of physical presence and attendant teacher immediacy" (p. 65).

Teacher Presence/Teaching presence—The terms "teacher presence," "teaching presence," and "instructor presence" are often used as synonyms. Nonetheless, Anderson et al. (2001) distinguished between teaching presence and teacher or instructor presence: "[We] refer to this element of the community of inquiry as 'teaching presence' rather than 'teacher presence,' as a number of individuals who are not teachers often collaborate in carrying out this role" (p. 13). In other words, this term is used to designate all instances of teaching carried out in a class, including student-student teaching that takes place on a discussion forum. Specific roles of teaching presence in the Community of Inquiry model include design and organization, facilitation, direct instruction, and the technical role.

Text-based medium—The medium of online presentation, communication, and interaction. Anderson et al. (2001) explain that this is a "leaner" medium than that afforded in the face-to-face classroom. The text-based medium relies mainly on the written word and is largely devoid of non-verbal cues, tone of voice, and other "paralinguistic communication" that help clarify real-time conversation. (p. 14).

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that the unit of analysis will be restricted to individuals with a background of having taken at least four online classes. Thus, the study may not be applicable to beginning or less experienced online students. Furthermore, the study considers only undergraduate students at a community college in Texas, and their experiences may not be extendable to students in other states or other regions of the state or necessarily other community colleges—or to graduate students. The number of students interviewed could also be a delimiting factor, as results could vary with a greater number of participants.

Limitations

Qualitative research presents difficulty in regard to verification. For instance, it offers "limited generalizability of findings" (Creswell, 1994, p. 158). Specifically, this project explored and makes observations about only 16 student respondents in the study. As online education evolves, new types of experience and even new categories and meanings may emerge. Another limitation is that students being interviewed are passing on their own biases and prejudices. A final limitation is the difficulty of replicating the study since it is a study of a unique group in unique situations.

Significance of the Study

This study was written for current or prospective instructors and administrators engaged in or supervising higher education online, particularly at the community college level—and for the higher education community in general. It provides an important contribution to the body of research into online education and into the issue of instructor presence. The most important contribution is in investigating an area needing further

research, making possible a greater understanding of student perceptions of the online classroom. As a grounded-theory study relying on inductive analysis, it provides new insights into and concepts related to student opinions, experiences, and preferences regarding online study. Specifically, this research aids in clarifying how students see the role of the instructor in online education, what students see as factors that contribute to or hinder their success in online classes, what aspects of instructor's presence in the virtual classroom are valued by students, and how aspects of instructor presence impact students.

Individual instructors should gain insights into their students' perceptions, expectations, and preferences, thus aiding them in developing strategies for projecting presence in online classes, for designing and organizing courses, for communicating and otherwise interacting with students, for facilitating active learning, and for determining how to use available technologies. Such insights may result in instructors' increased success in utilizing instructor presence, as well as increased satisfaction and success for students.

Finally, this research may aid those in higher education who are responsible for developing faculty evaluation instruments as they learn more about what categories matter to students.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Introduction—Instructor Presence Study

This chapter reviews the literature on a series of topics related to instructor presence. It examines the community of inquiry concept that provides the foundation of the research in which the idea of teaching presence emerged. Then it examines the three community of inquiry concepts of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Next it examines a concept that has emerged and is differentiated from teaching presence—that of instructor presence. Finally, the chapter examines three key features of the community of inquiry concept of teaching presence along with another that was put forward by Berge (1995) and then loosely adopted as the fourth feature of teaching presence.

Community of Inquiry

Current discussions of instructor presence mainly have their origin in the community of inquiry model presented by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer in 2000. Since that time other researchers have conducted related studies into similar concepts labeled "teacher presence" or instructor presence. Garrison et al. (2000), presented a conceptual model of "community of inquiry that constitutes elements essential to an educational transaction" (p. 87) followed by a qualitative analysis of computer-conferencing transcripts from graduate online classes. In that conceptual model they identified three core elements that have become a beginning point for much current discussion of online learning. Those elements are cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (p. 89). These largely parallel the instructor roles identified by Berge (1995):

pedagogical, social, managerial, and technical. The latter role, the technical, is often accepted as a fourth feature among those in the community of inquiry movement but generally minimized (see Anderson et al., 2001). Berge (2008) updated the roles with amplified explanations that demonstrate how the roles have "shifted" in the online classroom. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) offered three similar categories within the "community" of online learning: knowledge-centered, learner-centered, and assessment-centered (pp. 20-21).

The community of inquiry itself is a learning environment that must be built up through cultivating in students an inquisitive nature, a desire to learn actively, and an orientation toward critical thinking. Anderson et al. (2001) explained that the concept is based on practical inquiry model of Garrison et al. (2000). Garrison et al. (2000), explained that practical inquiry as used in the community of inquiry "is grounded in experience but includes imagination and reflection leading back to experience and practice" (p. 3). Discourse allows students to engage in cognitive development marked by movements from concrete to abstract, from fact to idea, from private to shared experience, from perception to conception, from deliberation to action, from reflection to discourse. In discourse, a student encounters and identifies an issue, dilemma, or problem that emerges from experience. This is a triggering event that leads to the second phase of inquiry, exploration. In the third phase, integration, the student begins to construct meaning generated in exploration. Finally, the student is able to work toward a resolution "by means of direct or vicarious action" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 5).

Cognitive Presence

Anderson et al. (2001) posited that cognitive presence is the element that is "most basic to success" (p. 2). Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) viewed cognitive presence as active learning through "critical thinking and practical inquiry" (p. 2), which grow out of experience but also involve imagination and reflection upon what is learned. They found achievement of cognitive presence to be dependent upon "appropriate teaching and social presence" (p. 1).

Shea et al. (2003) defined cognitive presence as "the extent to which students are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained discourse in a community of inquiry" (p. 65). They conducted a quantitative survey analysis of student satisfaction in online classes and found a correlation between instructor behaviors (facilitation and direct instruction) and student perceived learning. They maintained that cognitive presence occurs in an environment of "effective teaching presence and satisfactory social presence" (p. 65). Berge (2008) argued for a pedagogical role similar to cognitive presence. He argued that "learning in virtual worlds is driven by a move toward informal, collaborative, reflective learning, with user-generated content" (p. 412).

Anderson et al. (2001) did a qualitative analysis of discussion transcripts to find indicators of cognitive development arising from instructor facilitation. They explained the importance of the introduction of conflicting ideas to stimulate the formulation of "congruent linkages": "cognitive development requires that individuals encounter others who contradict their own intuitively derived ideas and notions and thereby create cognitive conflicts. The resolution of these conflicts leads to higher forms of reasoning" (p. 7). Thus, cognitive development is closely linked to interaction with others in the

class, whether another student, the instructor, or course readings. In the system of Bransford et al. (2000), the parallel element is assessment-centeredness. Shea et al. (2003) explained that the concept of being assessment-centered meant that a good learning community would "provide many opportunities to make their thinking visible and to get feedback in order to create new meaning and new understanding" (p. 63).

Social Presence

Garrison et al. (2000) defined social presence as "the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as 'real people'" (p. 89). They explained that the role of social presence is to facilitate critical thinking and that it is a "direct contributor" (p. 89) to achievement of any affective objectives. Similarly, Shea et al. (2003) saw social presence as "the ability of students to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry. . . ." They made the further point that social presence "is deemed critical in the absence of physical presence and attendant teacher immediacy" (p. 65).

Some researchers have found a correlation between student perceptions of social presence and their sense of satisfaction and cognitive accomplishments. Richardson and Swan (2003) conducted a quantitative study that found that students who perceived high social presence also experienced strong instructor satisfaction and a strong sense of their own cognitive advances in the class. Picciano (2002) did a descriptive analysis of an online graduate class in Administration and Supervision complemented by a survey regarding student perceptions of interaction and learning. He concluded that "there is a strong, positive relationship between student perceptions of their interaction in the course

and their perceptions of the quality and quantity of their learning" (p. 28). Brady (2002) in a quantitative study tested for a correlation between "enhanced" teacher presence and student performance. He explained that though the "study did not demonstrate statistical evidence" of a difference in grades, it did show that student attitudes toward the instructor and their perceptions of the instructor's effectiveness were affected positively (p. 100). A quantitative survey study by Brady and Bedient (2003) utilized a control group and an experimental group of students subjected to two differing levels of instructor engagement. Students in the experimental group were subjected to extended "instructor interventions" including weekly emails from the instructor and detailed feedback to all emails and other interactions. The study demonstrated that the experimental group subjected to greater instructor activity had a higher level of approval for the instructor, but there was negligible difference between the two groups' academic achievement.

Baker's research (2010) related immediacy to social presence and found a relationship between instructor immediacy and instructor presence. Drawing on the 1971 work of Mehrabian on the concept of communication immediacy and Moore's transactional distance theory, she conducted an "empirical and quantitative" study to determine the relationship among instructor immediacy and instructor presence and the student attributes of "affective learning, cognition, and motivation" (p. 7). She used an online survey to measure these attributes. Survey items were mapped to Gorham's 1988 Verbal Immediacy Scale to measure instructor immediacy, the Teaching Presence Scale of Shea (2006), the McCroskey/Gorham Six-Scale Measure of Affective learning, the

1987 Learning Loss Scale of Richmond et al., and the 1990 Christophel Student Motivation Measure.

"Communication immediacy," explained Baker (2010), "refers to physical and verbal behaviors that reduce the psychological and physical distance between individuals" (p. 4). In face to face communication, nonverbal immediacy behaviors would include actions like "leaning forward, touching another, [and] looking at another's eyes" (p. 4). Verbal behaviors would include "giving praise, using humor, [and] using self-disclosure" (p. 4). Baker made the point that whereas verbal behaviors can be translated into writing done in the online class, analogues for non-verbal immediacy are difficult to attain. She noted several verbal immediacy behaviors: "initiating discussions, asking questions, using self-disclosure, addressing students by name, using inclusive personal pronouns (we, us), repeating contacts with students over time, responding frequently to students, offering praise, and communicating attentiveness" (p. 5). Baker (2010) did not develop the idea of non-verbal immediacy behaviors that might be engaged in, but she did mention what she called visual cues such as an instructor's picture. One might extrapolate to other possibilities such as pleasant or engaging design environment, speed of feedback provision, or even use of emoticons (see Adlington, 2010; Cobb, 2011; Lo, 2008). Baker (2010) found that instructor immediacy behaviors are related positively with affective learning, cognition, and motivation, but are not a significant predictor.

Teaching Presence

Teaching presence has been seen first in its relational role with social and cognitive presence in the overall educational process. Laves (2010) called teaching

presence “the glue” keeping a community of inquiry together “because it served to initiate and maintain an environment where social and cognitive presences could flourish” (p. 7). Anderson et al. (2001) examined what they called “the variable that is most directly under the control of teachers—the task of creating and sustaining ‘teaching presence’ in a text-based computer conferencing context” (p. 3). Garrison et al. (2000) identified three categories of teaching presence: instructional management, building understanding, and direct instruction. Anderson et al. (2001) later substituted facilitation for building understanding, defining teaching presence as “design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social process for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (p. 5). They also explained that they had adopted as part of teaching presence the term “direct instruction” instead of Berge’s pedagogical role (1995, p. 4). Moreover, they explained that facilitation includes instructor-student social interaction but not student-student interaction because students must also create part of the social presence in a class.

Anderson et al. (2001) identified optimal online education as “a transactional approach to education” in which the instructor has set roles and responsibilities (p. 3). In order for an instructor to achieve a collaborative construction of knowledge, they said, the instructor must navigate the difficult roles of facilitating discourse, designing the learning environment, and directing student learning—all in an online situation “dependent on written language only” (p. 3). They acknowledged Berge’s contribution (1995) of the technical role to the concept of teaching presence, but they maintained that its importance would lessen as technical proficiency grows. And they noted that much of the technical role can be served by others, such as tech support.

Teaching presence, according to Anderson et al. (2001), comprises the functions of design and organization, facilitation of discourse, and direct instruction—the instructor's day-to-day conduct of the course throughout a term. Anderson et al. (2001) contended that "it is only through active intervention of a teacher that a powerful communications tool such as collaborative computer conferencing, or cooperative learning becomes a useful instructional and learning resource" (p. 5).

Community of Inquiry researchers prefer the term "teaching presence" over other variations because they include the teaching role as taken on by any participant in a class and because a significant part of class discussion forums involves one student teaching another (see Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Anderson et al., 2001; Coll, Engel, & Bustos, 2009; Garrison et al., 2000). Coll et al. (2009) used the term "distributed teaching presence" to emphasize the idea of the teaching function's being carried out by participants throughout a class. Their study took a grounded-theory approach to a structural analysis of participant activity and analysis of content of participant contributions. They found that teaching presence "is distributed to different degrees between the participants" (p. 534).

Key Feature of Teaching Presence—Design and Organization. The first key feature of instructor presence is design and organization. Lear, Isernhagen, LaCost, and King (2009) noted the critical role of the instructor in designing "the caring environment that provides respect, authenticity, thoughtfulness, and emotional integrity" (p. 88). Brady and Bedient (2003) found that teaching presence mediated all the elements of a web course including course readings, web explorations, exercises, and any projects completed by students. Berge (1995) called the designer role the managerial role, which

"involves setting the agenda for the course: the objectives of the discussion, the timetable, procedural rules, and decision-making norms." He continued, "In online teaching, managing the interactions with strong leadership and direction is considered a sine qua non of success" (p. 410). Anderson et al. (2001) explained that the designer function is more time-consuming than the parallel role played by the face-to-face instructor because the design and organization must be thought through and implemented in advance in order to adapt instruction to the online mode. They pointed out that the online course may also require a higher preparation requirement due to the possibility of its being more visible to administrators, peers, and guests.

Specific designer tasks are fairly predictable: setting curriculum, designing methods, establishing time parameters, utilizing the medium effectively, and establishing netiquette (p. 6). Anderson et al. (2001) detected an overlap between the designer role and the direct instruction role:

- providing "lecture notes" or "online teacher commentaries,"
- mini-lectures,
- personal insights,
- designing a mix of individual and group learner activities,
- "synchronizing activities" to make students feel part of the community, and
- providing "a sense of the 'grand design' of the course and reassurance that participating in the learning activities will lead to attainment of their learning goals." (p. 6)

The pedagogical role is primarily a behind-the-scenes designer role, with the designer structuring the course as an "instructional facilitator" (Berge, 2008, p. 409). Regarding the design of curriculum, Anderson et al. (2001) said, simply, that it begins before the course when the instructor "plans and prepares the course of study" (p. 5). They noted that students need to be made aware of the "grand design" of a course and to be assured that participation will result in achievement of course objectives. This means that the instructor must set and communicate the curriculum, design methods, time parameters, expectations for interactions, and acceptable netiquette. Garrison et al. (2000) added that instructional design is the means by which the instructor plans for the integration of social and cognitive elements. Lear et al. (2009) recommended a design that implements asynchronous discussion and group projects that encourage learner engagement. Schrire (2006) delved deeply into the implications of curricular design using primarily discourse. She envisioned an online course structured according to learning community theory as a "networked model of online collaborative learning" (pp. 475-476). Pedagogically, the benefits of collaborative learning derive in part from "the relationship between written communication and cognitive development" (p. 476) because of the salutary effects of writing upon thinking. Dennen (2007) pointed out that the kind of asynchronous discussion that takes place in online courses "may be more reflective and deliberate than real-time conversation" (p. 98). She continued, "Whereas spoken words are somewhat ethereal, leaving one to remember the specific details and their meaning, written words linger on in archived form and may be read multiple times on multiple occasions" (p. 98). Design then will provide for ample writing that utilizes "analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (p. 476). Other principles underlying collaborative

learning include the following: that knowledge is "constructed by the learner" rather than "transmitted" to him or her (p. 478); that students build knowledge through problem solving that focuses upon "depth of understanding, decentralized, open learning and the support of small-group interaction" (p. 478); and that the learning of the individual "arises" from "the learning of the group" (p. 479). Learning occurs best in discourse that moves from a "triggering event" through "exploration, integration, and resolution" (p. 479). Schrire's study (2006) found that the full spectrum of critical thinking occurred more often when the group carried the discussion rather than in instructor-centered discussion. The study showed completely student-led discussion as less successful but student-led discussion with moderate instructor participation as most fruitful. Dennen's study (2007), similarly, showed less success with the one of three classes in which the instructor was less engaged.

Design, then, is first and foremost, pedagogical; but design also has a technological and technical aspect, as Berge and Collins (1995) maintained. Several studies point to the efficacy of an enhanced use of technology in addition to class discussions. For instance, Garrison et al. (2000) signaled the benefits of using technology to "create a learning environment that is paramount in achieving quality learning outcomes" because different technologies "meet a wide range of educational needs and achieve a wide variety of desirable outcomes" (p. 92). Berge and Collins (1995) argued: "Computer-mediated communication (CMC) promotes a type of interaction that is often lacking in the traditional teacher- based classroom. It allows learners the freedom to explore alternative pathways—to find and develop their own style of learning." Laves (2010) noted the importance of other technologies, observing that students in her study

linked sense of community to "discussion boards, personal webpages, and small group work" (p. 150). Laves also detailed other strategies to cultivate a sense of community: "student and faculty introductions, discussion boards, personal webpages, group projects and activities, video lectures, and emails" (p. 150). Reupert et al. (2009) provided an additional list of technological possibilities, including voice-over PowerPoints, weekly phone chats, podcasting, and videos.

The technical role calls for instructors to do what is necessary to make learners comfortable in the online environment. Berge (2008) stated: "The ultimate technical goal is to make the technology transparent to the user" (p. 410). He conceded that some or much of this role may be handled by support staff but maintains that it is, nonetheless, the instructor who receives the first call for help. And nothing precludes an instructor's being technically knowledgeable and taking care of technical problems, just as an instructor once had to solve problems on the mimeograph machine when doing last minute printing late at night or on the weekend.

Key Feature of Teaching Presence—Facilitation. The second key feature is facilitation, of which the primary element is community building (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison et al., 2000, 2001). Laves (2010) found that students saw instructor-to-student interaction as more important than student-to-student interaction in building a community. Lear et al. (2009) pointed to the importance of the instructor role in "facilitating the building of community and using structure to help students take advantage of learner-centered education" (p. 88). Their study found a strong correlation of students' sense of belonging in the class with the instructor's course design and participation. They show the need for an instructor to create an "open environment where

students feel welcome to share, agree, disagree, and discuss in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance" (p. 95).

The second element of facilitation is student-student interaction, or discussion, or discourse. For some, facilitation through discussion is the primary means of building community; and it provides the essence of online education. Discussion is the primary means by which the instructor can leave behind the teacher-centered role of lecturer (the sage on the stage) to become the student-centered facilitator (guide on the side) who stays out of the way so that the students can engage in lively discussion and debate (Berge & Collins, 1995; Boggs, 1995/1996, 1999; Lasley, 1998). In discussing facilitation in a classroom situation, Boggs (1999) argued for interaction, or discussion, among students in a classroom situation and called for an emphasis upon "student learning rather than teaching or instruction" (p. 69). He disparaged the "instruction paradigm," in which "teachers are subject-matter experts who dispense and explain information to students, primarily through lectures" (p. 69). Other researchers agree that student-student interaction is paramount in facilitation, but they see asynchronous online discussion as a tool that can have advantages over real-time discussion in a classroom—both in stimulating critical thinking and in presenting or explaining information, while utilizing greater expertise of both instructor and student. Finally, Arbaugh (2010) has done a re-examination of the sage v. guide issue in the context of online education and found that an instructor needs to play both roles—and more.

Anderson et al. (2001) argued that the facilitation of discourse "is critical to maintaining the interest, motivation and engagement of students in active learning" (p. 7). Within the community of inquiry environment, students work together to solve problems

and find answers and even teach each other. Roberson and Klotz (2002) wrote of the power of threaded discussion, which "allows the instructor to organize a thematic threaded discussion by posting a topical statement, question, problem, case study, etc., and then directing students to respond based on their knowledge, experience, readings, and interactions with other students" (par. 16). They saw advantages in threaded discussion over both chat and in-class discussions: students can download comments and reflect before responding, they can practice good writing and pay attention to writing skills in responses, and instructors can redirect discussion to pursue another avenue of thought.

A third element of facilitation is flexibility, including instructor intervention. Instructor presence theory (Berge, 2008; Laves, 2010; Shea, Li, & Pickett, 2006) indicates the need for an element beyond just making discussion available, what has been called directed facilitation. Dennen (2007) noted: "Instructor persona is not a fixed construct. Even in a learner-centered class, the instructor holds key responsibilities and may take control or center stage at times, and even the most teacher-centered instructor may offer momentary control or authority to students" (p. 95). Directed facilitation involves getting students to interact with great freedom but with some exertion of direction from the instructor. In directed facilitation, the role and knowledge of an instructor are not devalued, inasmuch as the instructor facilitates active-learning through designing tasks (e.g., discussion boards, group projects) but remains an active participant—starting discussion but not dominating it, shaping it from time to time by correction or questioning or even informing, and perhaps even by providing a link or a paper by the instructor. Anderson et al. (2001) explained that the instructor shares

responsibility with the students for satisfying course goals and must be the most active participant in discussion, reading and commenting to support the community. Instructors in this venue must set the tone for inquiry, encourage students, point out where students agree or disagree, push for resolutions, pull reluctant students into discussion, and assess the overall process (p. 7).

The fourth element of facilitation, "effective feedback" (Brady & Bedient, 2003, p. 1) is important in all communications (see also Laves, 2010; Reupert et al., 2009). It includes acknowledgement feedback (acknowledgement of a communication or a document submission) and informational feedback (course updates, announcements, grade explanations, discussion board summaries). Such feedback can occur through email or discussion or messages in the course management system.

Blignaut and Trollip (2003) categorized instructor responses to student postings as academic and non-academic. Academic responses may be corrective, informative, or Socratic. Corrective responses are used to clear up students' misconceptions, to remind them of things they have overlooked, or even correct content errors. Informative responses may provide more detailed information, discussion board summaries, or updates on assignments. Socratic responses are intended to encourage further reflection or research on the part of the student. Non-academic responses include administrative, affective, and other miscellaneous messages. Anderson et al. (2001) pointed out: "Teachers may be required to help students find congruent linkages when two seemingly contrary opinions are being expressed. Similarly, helping students articulate consensus and shared understanding, when these are already implicit in the discussion, is also useful" (p. 7). The researchers noted an overlap between instructor intervention in

discourse and "direct instruction": "Facilitation of discourse is usually integrated within direct instruction and in situ design of instructional activity. Under this heading we place teacher postings that stimulate social process with a direct goal of stimulating individual and group learning" (p. 7). Finally, Anderson et al. (2001) viewed facilitation of discourse as related to pedagogy and distinguished discourse from the purely social:

> Our facilitating discourse function differs from the "social dimension" of computer conferencing. . . . Therefore, we tend not to search in the "coffee room" or "chat" areas of the computer conference for evidence of these indicators [of social and group learning], but do look for indicators of support for social discourse within each message in the content focused discussions. (p. 7)

Key Feature of Teaching Presence—Direct Instruction. In addition to a need for the instructor to have instructional design and technological expertise, the instructor presence model calls for "direct instruction" as well. This feature recalls the debate about the facilitation or student-centered approach—the "guide on the side"—versus the teacher-centered approach, referred to as "the sage on the stage." Two recent studies have found that the student centered approach does not support direct instruction as an important part of online learning. Bentz's findings (2009) corroborated the findings of Shea et al. (2005), who found strong statistical support both for instructional design and organization and for directed facilitation but posited a two-component teaching presence structure omitting direct instruction. The latter researchers said,

> Although we believe that direct instruction may be an important element of teaching both in traditional and online environments, the indicators used here do not cohere into a single component that may be interpreted as a discrete factor; instead, they contribute to another factor. (p. 70)

Shea et al. concluded: "Either we need better indicators for direct instruction in online environments to understand teaching presence more clearly and comprehensively, or

direct instruction is not particularly necessary in online environments, and other factors are more important" (p. 70).

On the other hand, Laves (2010), in a qualitative study of instructor presence, found that "A review of the open-ended responses from students and instructors revealed that both groups considered direct instruction as the most important feature with regard to learning. Facilitated discourse was second and organization of a course was last" (p. 150).

Anderson et al. (2001) addressed the issue of facilitation-only instruction versus instruction utilizing both facilitation and direct instruction. Quoting from Vygotsky's statement (1985) that "the teacher must adopt the role of facilitator not content provider," Anderson et al. (2001) remarked: "The arbitrary distinction between facilitator and content provider we find troublesome" (p. 8). They maintained that facilitation alone might confer a level of independence that is inappropriate. They also refute a comment from Salmon (2000) that online instruction may not require high content mastery from the instructor, arguing that "such minimal subject level competency provides less than the ideal that defines high quality professional education" and that "there are many fields of knowledge, as well as attitudes and skills, that are best learned in forms of higher education that require the active participation of a subject matter expert in the critical discourse" (p. 9). Jones (2011) also spoke of the necessity that an instructor demonstrate content mastery as part of effective instructor presence.

Earlier discussion noted the need for the instructor to use content-knowledge beyond the design phase for providing directed feedback in the form of correctives, pointed questions, suggestions for related study, modeling appropriate responses, and

even sharing scholarship. Anderson et al. (2001) provided all the following tasks of direct instruction:

- present content/questions,
- focus the discussion on specific issues,
- summarize the discussion,
- confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback,
- diagnose misconceptions,
- inject or point to knowledge from diverse sources, and
- respond to technical concerns. (p. 10)

Other research supports this position. For example, Berge (2008), an advocate of student-centered learning, argued for learning-centered education while calling for directed discussion rather than student-led discussion. And the research of Laves (2010) also found directed facilitation more effective than un-directed facilitation. This kind of facilitation involves what might be called performance: keeping discussion on track, asking questions, providing needed information, and maintaining group harmony. The social role also suggests some use for expertise and performance: "promoting human relationships, developing group cohesiveness, maintaining the group as a unit, and in other ways helping members work together for their mutual benefit" (Berge, 2008, p. 410). These activities suggest a sage who has left the stage and has become a guide from the middle or even the back of the class. As Anderson et al. (2001) pointed out, the "subject matter expert" is not expected to take over all transmission of information, but rather "to provide direct instruction by interjecting comments, referring students to information resources, and organizing activities that allow the students to construct the content in their own minds and personal contexts" (p. 9). Shea and Vickers (2010) intentionally directed their investigation beyond discussion forums to a full course and all the activities of an instructor. They have identified several additional indicators of direct

instruction: “Providing valuable analogies, offering useful illustrations, conducting supportive demonstrations, and supplying clarifying information” along with “injecting knowledge from diverse sources, e.g., textbook, articles, internet, personal experiences” (p. 133).

Key Feature of Teaching Presence—Technical Role. Berge in 1995 identified the technical role of instructors as a key feature of online learning. Anderson et al. (2001) accepted this addition to the community of inquiry features of teaching presence, but suggested that the “onerous” role of technical assistance would decrease in importance “as users become more experienced and as the tools of online learning become more intuitive and ubiquitous” (p. 3). Lear et al. (2009) examined the technical role of instructors, saying that they “may use class design, activities for interaction, the media technology, and their own engagement to promote the social aspects of learning” (p. 87).

Berge (1995) explained that instructors function in a technical role as they engage in use of “instructional technology” (para. 5) and in the process of mediating communication through the medium of computer use. One such opportunity is through using networked computers to enable interaction among participants in an online class—for example, through email, chat, and discussion forums. Berge (1995) says technology presents a new freedom to students so that they are able to “explore alternative pathways—to find and develop their own style of learning” (para. 18). Moreover, new instructional and learning possibilities are created through content-delivery via “graphics, text, and/or full-motion video” (para.18).

Bouras (2009) in a quantitative study found a correlation of instructor and learner presence with student satisfaction and perceived learning. She also addressed issues of an

instructor's technical function in an online course. Pointing out the problem of poor presentation in which online learning becomes no more than "lecture notes placed on a computer network," she even suggested the possibility of using "course designers from outside the walls of the institution in order to create a program that is user friendly and delivers the courses in a manner that ensures satisfaction to all participants" (p. 29).

Instructor Presence

The concept of instructor presence must be distinguished from "teaching presence" as described by Community of Inquiry researchers. Anderson et al. (2001) viewed teaching presence as the instructor's administration and design of the course and the instructor's day-to-day conduct of the course throughout a term. The Community of Inquiry term "teaching presence" focuses on those activities that enhance or facilitate interaction in a course, even viewing design and direct instruction through the lens of interactions. It is important that teaching presence includes teaching done by any participant in a course and that at times facilitation may qualify as direct instruction. Laves (2010) used the term "direct facilitation" for the combined activity of facilitating discourse and direct instruction. In Community of Inquiry research, the sense of presence is mainly a social awareness, a "feeling that a sense of community has been established" (Laves, 2010, p. 157).

On the other hand, the term "instructor presence" tends to focus on the instructor and his or her activities. Definitions are many and varied. Researchers who speak of instructor presence or teacher presence put greater emphasis upon "presence" as a pervading sense that the instructor is there in the course activities. Farber (2008) said that presence in a physical classroom is more likely when the instructor is aware of the

"people in the room" and "is unwilling to settle for less, and stays in touch with his or her own interest" (p. 219). These qualities seem related to presence in the online classroom. An instructor aware of people in the room must also be present in the room and must build some understanding of the students in the class. The instructor unwilling to settle for less has an intention of thinking how to bridge the distance so that presence is as near in the online classroom as in the traditional classroom. And the instructor staying in touch with his or her own interest is going to disclose enough personal information to demonstrate the relevance of elements of study in a way that helps students to understand.

Similarly, Cao, Griffin, and Bai (2005) found that some synchronous interaction, such as chat room, is needed for stronger student satisfaction. Presumably, telephone conferencing could meet some of this requirement. Brady and Bedient (2003) identified weekly synchronous chat and instant messaging as beneficial as well. They also heralded the importance of "detailed feedback" regarding "cognitive, affective, behavioral, and personal" issues to increase sense of community and belonging (p. 3).

Reupert et al. (2009) spoke of the necessity that the instructor "be human" (p. 52). The student quoted at the beginning of the introduction (from Reupert et al., 2009) might define instructor presence as an instructor's showing himself or herself as a person in the class, someone with whom the student can relate. Laves (2010) defined instructor presence as "not being an absentee land-owner but being an active participant/leader in the class" (p. 128). Picciano (2002) wrote of the instructor's visibility to the student. Similarly, Baker (2010) equated instructor presence with the "virtual 'visibility' of the instructor as perceived by the learner" (p. 5). Blignaut and Trollip argued that the

instructor must speak up, for "being silent" is "equivalent to being invisible" (2003, p. 347). Dennen described instructor presence as "how an instructor positions herself, . . . how learners position her and how she accepts the positions they ascribe to her" (2007, p. 96). The definition of social presence given by Garrison et al. (2000) might be extrapolated to say that instructor presence is the instructor's ability to project personality into the class to appear as a real person.

The term "instructor presence" is often applied to a myriad of activities that an instructor may engage in beyond facilitation of discourse or interaction. Researchers generally envision all the things an instructor might do to appear to be present to students in the virtual class—even things that might take place outside the internet framework, like instant messaging, texting, talking on the phone, using the mail, utilizing an outside blog, meeting students at a community performance.

In addition to instructor visibility, Baker (2010) saw instructor presence as related to action and interaction, communication of accessibility, consistent feedback, facilitation of discussion, and providing content expertise (p. 5). In relation to social presence, instructor presence is students' social sense that the professor exists and is real, an engaged participant in the course. Baker also related instructor presence to immediacy and found instructor presence to be a significant predictor of learning, cognition, and motivation (p. 14).

Baker (2010) found further that students in synchronous classes perceived greater instructor presence than those in asynchronous classes. This suggests that incorporation of some synchronous activities in an asynchronous class might be helpful in creating

instructor presence—activities such as telephone conversations and synchronous chat sessions. She specified several practical implications of her research:

- That "practitioners" can set curriculum, design methods, establish time parameters, utilize the medium effectively, and establish group norms via conventions of "netiquette" as a way of establishing instructor immediacy even before a class commences (p. 23);
- that facilitating discourse—pointing out areas of agreement and disagreement, encouraging movement toward consensus, encouraging, drawing in participants, prompting discussion, and assessing effectiveness—is an important part of instructor presence; and
- indicators for using direct instruction to create instructor presence include "presenting content and questions, focusing the discussion on specific issues, summarizing discussion, confirming understanding, diagnosing misperceptions, injecting knowledge from diverse sources and responding to student's [sic] technical concerns. (p. 24)

Reupert et al. (2009) did a qualitative study of student perceptions of instructor presence using a focus group discussion and end-of-class surveys. Their focus was on the "personhood" of the instructor as they asked questions about the importance of instructor presence in an online class and what personal qualities they sought in an instructor. They began by defining instructor presence as "being salient and visible to learners in either distance or face-to-face classrooms" (p. 47). One of their key findings was related to definition of instructor presence: they said that a number of students wanted an instructor to "be human" (p. 52). Still, these students preferred that instructor personal qualities be

"mediated through learning" (p. 47); that is, the students preferred that relationships developed be those necessitated by the learning environment.

Interestingly, though Reupert et al. (2009) reported having conducted a process of inductive analysis, creating categories from participants' words, coding, and discovering themes, what they present is a list of themes that emerge from comments from a handful of participants. Their primary finding is more a summary and a collection of student observations than a hypothesis or theory. Their research found that most students want "engaging, passionate, and understanding instructors who show these attributes through self-disclosure, relationship building, humor, and individualized feedback." All in all, the research of Reupert et al. (2009), while thin due to lack of saturation of categories, does provide a fair amount of data in the form of quotations from students in the focus group and a number of categories of interest:

1. Relative importance of an instructor's personal qualities;
2. The important personal qualities instructors bring to teaching;
3. How instructors' personal qualities impact teaching and learning; and
4. How distance education might become more "personal." (p. 50)

The categories are not fully fleshed out and realized in the research—most being represented by only a few examples, but they are useful, nonetheless, and come closest to the sort of substantive hypotheses and theories the current research project strives for. Regarding the importance of the personal qualities of instructors, they found that students generally want instructors to "be human," to provide an interpersonal space that includes instructors interacting "as people" (Reupert et al., 2009, p. 50), and to create a tone of voice that comes through with some emotion. A handful of students were not interested

in the instructor or other students in the class—preferring to work independently and avoid personal contacts with the instructor or other students unless necessary. Personal qualities identified by students included the following: "ability to engage," "sense of openness in connecting with students," "being approachable," "passion and enthusiasm" for the course content, and an ability to present up-to-date material and make it relevant. Regarding impact on teaching and learning, the researchers identified several important needed features. They identified several features that fit the category of immediacy behaviors: "patient" and "passionate" teaching," with "specific teaching practices including self-disclosure, relationship building, humor, feedback, and good organization." They highlighted the importance of an instructor's showing connection between the study and his or her own life. Regarding "impact on student learning" (p. 51), the researchers focused again on passion and enthusiasm as a means of engaging and motivating students.

Reupert et al. (2009) recommended several ways to make online learning more personable:

- voice over PowerPoint slideshows
- timely feedback
- weekly phone chat including chat room tutorials and lectures
- pod casting of the material
- residentials
- videos
- being allocated a contact person for problems, personal and teaching
- 2-3 smaller tutorials in regional centres
- personal emails (p. 53)

Dennen (2007), operating within the framework of Harré and van Langenhove's positioning theory (1999), conducted a qualitative analysis of discussion threads in an online class with observation and data gathering taking place during the unfolding of the

class. Instructor position is related to role but has more to do with an instructor's intentional actions at varying points in a class to establish changing levels of attributes like "power, composure, confidence, or authority" (p. 96). Instructor positioning in turn influences the students' sense of the same or similar attributes. Dennen explained: "Position is a construct that is fluid and can change with each speech act. It is readily adjusted by discussants based on their particular situation and is always relative to others in the conversation" (p. 96). Dennen pointed out the importance of an instructor's being seen and felt as a presence in the virtual classroom from the very beginning: "The first week of a new online course is a critical time for establishing instructor presence. In the absence of a physical instructor, students look to whatever text and image-based presence might be available to learn more about who will be guiding and assessing their educational experience" (p. 96). An instructor who demonstrates authority and confidence earlier in the term and then works to instill a sense of authority and confidence in students may still be seen as a strong presence even while receding into lesser activity. Nonetheless, there may be other times when an instructor needs to reassert greater presence in the class.

In addition to the activities of an instructor, the term "instructor presence" also is related to the role of fostering a sense of belonging among students. Lear et al. (2009) did a mixed-methods study of the relationship between instructor presence and student engagement. In the qualitative phase of their research, using telephone interviews with students, they found that a majority of students "felt that the development of sense of belonging to the class was most related to the structure and/or interaction of the instructor" (p. 93). They found further that the instructor's course design and the

instructor's engagement were the most important influences upon student engagement, leading them to conclude that "the instructor does play an important role in helping students to become engaged in the class" (p. 94). Akyol and Garrison (2008) also found a correlation between teaching presence and perceived learning.

Discussion

On the other hand, is there room in instructor presence for that much-disparaged dinosaur, the lecture? The studies by Laves (2010) and by Reupert et al. (2009) both mentioned lectures among the technologies interesting to students. Instructor presence could include such activities as dramatic reading, lectures or mini-lectures (podcasts), modeling composition, presentation of scholarly work, direct instruction, and demonstration of ongoing exploration and research. It is a strange development that in an era of falling favor for lecture as a teaching technique that much of new technology development is focusing on delivery of lecture. Copley (2007) suggested that podcasts are favorably received by students "when compared to traditional handouts" (p. 391) and as a supplement to in-class lectures. Students reported valuing the ability to revise notes or to take notes at their own pace, to make up missed lectures, and for test preparation. Copley also reported "an overall enthusiasm for podcast lecture materials" (p. 393). Yu-Chang et al. (2009) argued that podcasts recorded by the instructors were found by students to be motivating and could enhance the "instructor's virtual presence" (p. 119). Lee and Chan (2007) indicated a student perception of podcasts as an enhancement of learner-centeredness—in spite of the perception among many educators that lecture is teacher-centered. Factors include ease of access for students and "leverag[ing] the affective qualities of the human voice in such a way as to provide a relaxed and casual

feel" (p. 204). They also raised the possibility of making the lecture/podcast less formal or even creating a more pleasing format, such as a mini-lecture with background music. Jones (2011) claimed that lectures can be used effectively and within the principles of active learning when students are "compelled to read, speak, listen, think deeply, and write" (p. 77).

Performance roles exist across the spectrum of online classroom activities that are demonstrations of instructor expertise rather than behind-the-scenes work without being showy. Thus, though a seamless and transparent environment is desirable, even the technical aspect of an instructor's role can include performance—for instance, in an instructor's use of audio and visual content that enhance the student experience. Miranda (2006) urged adding "dynamic elements" to enhance users' experiences, suggesting such elements as blogging and podcasting.

Having a guide who willingly sits on the side to enable student leadership in discussion does not preclude the role of guide who may need to re-direct discussion or inject needed information or suggest a path for exploration. Furthermore, the guide role need not preclude the instructor's role as expert or sage who communicates via lecture or podcast or voice-over PowerPoint. In fact, advances in technology make it all the more possible to produce high-quality lectures that are more compact, more powerful, more effective. Arbaugh (2010) argued that instructors for online classes need to perform the roles of both sage and guide. Moreover, Hughes (2009) noted advantages in online video over in-class lectures:

> Course readings, audio files, and video lectures all allow students to pause, rewind, review, and reflect as they progress through the content. Additional advantages of audio files and video lectures include engagement of more areas of working memory, novelty, and a greater sense of knowing the instructor. (par. 5)

Dyson (2008) studied three one-minute strategies for making lectures more effective by making the lecture experience more active and less passive: "write down one thing you have already learnt, one question you would like answering, and take a break" (p. 265). Dyson conceded that lectures are lesser in effectiveness than other methods, but he was interested, because of the continued prevalence of their use in higher education, in learning whether short interventions might enhance the effectiveness of lectures. The strategies were designed to stop lectures and provide an opportunity for reflection and re-directing attention and to overcome students' waning attention levels during lectures. The idea involves moving lecture more toward facilitation and more toward active learning. Dyson found increased engagement on the part of students, but the limited variety of interventions seems to have made the interventions less effective over time.

Cramer, Collins, Snider, and Fawcett (2007) reported enhanced learning and favorable student response to an online Video Lecture Hall that utilized voice-over PowerPoints. The online lecture hall was available to face-to-face students to review in-class lectures, and about 20% voluntarily used the lecture hall for studying and review.

Just as professors embody myriad personalities, so instructor presence need not be a cookie-cutter item. It is the professor's self-designed persona that inhabits the virtual space of an online course, projected through myriad communications or through lack of communication. It is the house the professor has designed to make the website experience attractive or serviceable, intimidating or inviting, colorful or dull. It is the passion or lack of passion for learning that is modeled. It is the reception given to ideas that are off the beaten track or just off-track. It is the problems and questions posed in discussion, readings assigned, writing projects called for, diversions and enhancements offered

spontaneously. It is the speed and style with which feedback is offered, the personal touch or missing response. It is the expertise and knowledge demonstrated that earn student respect. It is the totality of the learning experience.

Reupert et al. (2009) concluded that students wanted to experience the personal presence of online instructors and wanted some self-disclosure and wanted to engage instructors in discussion forums and wanted to encounter the instructor's sense of humor and wanted a relationship with instructors. But they wanted it only as a part of the education process—in other words, they wanted to engage the instructor's presence as a key part of enhancing their learning experience. After all, the student's learning is where the focus must be.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Restatement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of experienced individual online students at a community college in Texas in order to generate a substantive theory of community college student perceptions of online instructor presence. This qualitative study used interviews based on Active Interviewing theory and followed a Straussian grounded-theory design to guide the collecting and coding of interview data so as to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory. Although several definitions of online instructor presence exist, this study commenced with a general definition of online instructor presence as whatever an online instructor says or does or presents that leads students to perceive the instructor as an active participant in the course. In accordance with grounded-theory methodology, the researcher collected data by doing the following:

- interviewing 16 students,
- conducting constant comparison analysis of the data,
- letting the data drive the process of generating categories and theory with the expectation that a new definition of instructor presence or a new category altogether would emerge as a replacement.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

This section describes qualitative research design and Straussian grounded-theory research design in particular and presents a rationale for using this design. The qualitative study used Straussian grounded-theory design to generate substantive grounded theory of

community college student perceptions of online instructor presence. Qualitative research is particularly suited for the exploration of an area of study where research is nascent or lacking or where much of the research work has been derived from concepts and theory from another area. That is, the qualitative researcher is looking for emergent knowledge rather than "tightly prefigured" ideas (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). Qualitative research involves field work in the natural world and entails a recognition that the researcher is at times studying the subjective reality of others and that the researcher's own life experiences and the act of research itself must be taken into consideration as part of the study at hand. Marshall and Rossman said that qualitative research is complex—both inductive and deductive, but grounded-theory research is primarily inductive. The qualitative researcher, instead of attempting to record external reality objectively, is an interpreter and sees the act of interpretation as one of the factors determining the shape of the reality that emerges (Creswell, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Online education has been an area of intense research activity the past 15 years, and out of these studies has grown a heightened interest in the emerging concept of instructor presence. Still, research has been focused primarily on online education overall, the efficacy of online instruction, and students' perceived success and/or satisfaction. Much of this research has been quantitative. Thus, research studies dealing with students' perceived success or satisfaction has often relied on prefigured categories.

For example, Broder and Dorfman (1994)—asking the question "What's important to students?"—examined student evaluations in a number of very traditional categories: instructor knowledge of subject, preparation for class, ability to create

interest, organization of lectures, ability to explain subject material, and interest in students. They conceded that past measurements had not revealed the relative importance placed upon these categories and thus conducted a study using an ordinary least-squares framework to measure how attributes of teaching are prioritized by students. Their study was a quantitative study of an online classroom that demonstrated the difficulty of a quantitative approach to the problem. The unasked question is, How valid are the categories themselves? Students given a questionnaire that asks about an instructor's teaching effectiveness will provide a spread of low and high rankings, but how can we be certain that these are, after all, the categories that students would identify as important if given the opportunity to take a fresh look or a more open look?

Broder and Dorfman's objective was to" identify teacher and course attributes that contribute to student ratings" (1994, p. 236). They found that students most highly value "the interpersonal skills of the instructor (enthusiasm, ability to stimulate thinking, ability to maintain interest and stimulate study)" (p. 246). Broder and Dorfman (1994) conclude: "knowledge is important, [but] the ability to deliver that knowledge is equally, if not more, important. Finally, students expect to learn new knowledge from their courses. They also expect this knowledge to be useful and relevant in other courses" (p. 246). These findings are not insignificant, but one problem is that this research assumes that students are expert informants who have the answers and that their answers will provide an objective picture—even though the researchers express doubt regarding the ability of the students to evaluate teaching: "Some argue that the process is biased, while others question the students' ability to evaluate teaching" (p. 235). Significantly, no attempt was made to determine how much students valued these categories or whether

there might be other categories of greater importance. The qualitative researcher would be noting a possible underlying problem and would seek to know more about the respondents and their biases and subjective views of the quality of instruction. Interestingly, Broder and Dorfman in this comment detected a weakness in the approach, in that it concentrates on attributes that have previously been identified as important from the perspective of the instructor instead of seeking attributes best matched to student perceptions. Another aspect of the bias can be seen in the comment questioning students' ability to evaluate teaching. A qualitative study would recognize the inherent difficulty of asking students to evaluate according to a system that somewhat requires insider information available only through the instructor perspective and would actually recognize the value of students' subjective perceptions. Qualitative methods also recognize the complexity of the process of explanation and allow an interviewer to probe inconsistencies in the words of respondents and also inconsistencies that are observed and verbalized by respondents. Because of problems like this, there is a need for a qualitative study of student perceptions of online education.

Assumptions of Qualitative Design

The primary assumption of this qualitative study is that although the physical world exists apart from perception (George Herbert Mead's "world that is there"), reality itself is social, emerging in the language used to refer to individuals' subjective experience in and perception of that world. Individual perception of reality is process and partial and subjective, and research is an investigation of the process by which reality is interpreted by individuals—both by subject respondents and by researcher/interviewers. Creswell (1994) has explained: "Qualitative research is interpretative research" (p. 147).

It is an inductive process in which data is collected for the purpose of interpretation. The data themselves include the language and statements of the subjects in the form of descriptions and narratives, along with researcher notes and memos about the circumstances, respondent tone of voice, and theoretical implications. The qualitative researcher uses close examination and analysis of the data for the purpose of inductive building up of meaning. Meanings and categories and theories are grounded in the data, emerging from the data, and through the inductive process of analysis, coding, and interpretation.

Thus, the qualitative researcher assumes the value of what is said by respondents and how they speak and the words they use, all within the context of the situation. Qualitative research assumes the value of personal voice and informal speech in the data collected, and even the reporting of research results is marked by more informal language and narrative. The design of the research is also subject to the phenomenon of emergence—of categories, patterns, meanings, and theories. The shape of an interview itself evolves according to the direction taken by the respondent.

A researcher using interviews for qualitative research interacts, within the larger process of investigation, with that which is being investigated, with the area of study, and also with respondents. The researcher calls on reflexivity to maintain integrity—a conscious process of openness to the data and commitment to see past one's biases. Though qualitative research is an exploration of values and biases and subjective experience of respondents, it is seen as valid, reliable research in its authentic adherence to the data and the perceptions of respondents. In theoretical sampling, there is an

assumption of persistence that theories formulated for one group "will probably hold for other groups under the same conditions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49).

Other important assumptions include the following:

1. The researcher can work as a participant observer and maintain the integrity of the study, neither imposing his or her own biases nor forcing the data into preconceived categories.
2. Concrete student narratives can reveal significant abstract ideas and aid both student and researcher in the process of discovering meaning.
3. Constant comparative analysis can enable the researcher to use subjective student perceptions to generate more generalized concepts and meanings.
4. Concepts and categories and meanings and theory generated from a limited field study can be useful in providing direction for further corroborating research.
5. A researcher can participate in close collaborative conversation to take somewhat the perspective of the other and use constant comparison analysis to move from the subjective toward neutral observation.
6. In theoretical sampling, there is an assumption of persistence that theories formulated for one group "will probably hold for other groups under the same conditions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49).

Type of Research Design

This qualitative study used Straussian grounded-theory design and an active interviewer approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) for the gathering of data. This section discusses each aspect of the research design.

Grounded-Theory Research. Glaser and Strauss in 1967 proposed a new kind of qualitative research they called grounded-theory: "*the discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed*" (p. 1). Strauss in a 1994 interview tells of meeting Glaser and their developing grounded-research theory during a study they did together in 1960 (in Legewie & Schervier-Legewie, 2004). The new method as described in their 1967 publication constituted a two-fold effort to maximize the discovery process and to generate a theory mapped closely to the data. They aimed to improve research generally by linking theory and data more thoroughly. Furthermore, they sought to improve qualitative research—first, by moving it from overemphasis upon description into what they saw as the more useful realm of theory and, second, by making it more rigorous through a more systematic methodology. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also saw the then-current state of qualitative research as one of over-subordination to quantitative research, being used nearly exclusively as a precursor to what was seen as the more important and more legitimate quantitative research. Their purpose was to introduce rigorous new methods of qualitative research that would enable systematic collection of data, coding, and analysis of data. They said that their methods were usable in quantitative research also but that they were focusing on qualitative research because of the suitability of deriving theory from data. They noted, ironically, that "the only qualitative methods receiving much development were for the quantification of qualitative data!" (p. 16).

The key elements of the discovery process advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) included: (a) the systematic obtaining of data, (b) the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis, and (c) the generation of theory. The purpose is the generating of ideas throughout the process and ending with a unified theory emerging

from data and closely linked to, or grounded in, data— as opposed to the kind of verification of ideas sought in quantitative research. They argued that a theory emerging from and grounded in such a systematic discovery process is so "intimately linked to data" that it is "destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation" (p. 4). Interestingly, part of the rigor necessary in a qualitative study involves interacting closely with the data and making inferences from the data instead of following preconceived theories—or even hypotheses formed too quickly.

There are two kinds of grounded theory—substantive and formal. Substantive theory involves a specific area of study—e.g., nursing care, coach-player relationships—or, as in the case of this study, instructor presence in an online classroom. Formal theory deals with a larger, formal area of study such as power roles, gender issues, or deviant behavior. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that both kinds of theory must be grounded in data. They emphasized the necessity that researchers conduct a study "without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, 'relevancies' in concepts and hypotheses" (p. 33). The first task is to avoid applying formal theories before collecting data and to generate substantive theory from the data itself. The danger to be avoided is forcing the data to fit into preconceived theories. The researcher needs to be open to the deriving of hypotheses and observations that might not be in consonance with established theory. Furthermore, the researcher must be as open as possible in apprehending the data, must remained unbiased by theory, and, above all, must be faithful to the data.

The intimate linking of data is such that Glaser and Strauss (1967) insisted upon an approach that shunned preconceptions and relied upon an inductive process of

generating theory from data. The goal is the generation of a theory that fits the data and works practically. Such a goal, Glaser and Strauss maintained, necessitates that the theory be generated during research—not before, not after, but through a process of ongoing examination and re-examination and contemplation and tentative theorizing. Marshall and Rossman (1999) maintained: "By avoiding precise hypotheses, the researcher retains her right to explore and *generate* questions in the general area of the topic" (p. 54).

A grounded-theory approach, then, is well suited to an exploration of student perceptions because of its appreciation for and attention to the data. The reliance upon an intensely inductive approach to data assures that the perceptions and experiences of students will be valued highly. Much has been accomplished by research into the online process, instructor presence, and teaching effectiveness. However, research that attempts to capture a view of students and their attitudes toward online education by relying upon instruments that reinforce what instructors and administrators have thought about students will not take us to an in-depth understanding of how students think or what is behind their actions. Qualitative methods are "messy" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 8), in part because they do not begin with a neat set of known elements to be compared to an objective reality. But this messiness is an inherent advantage because of its focus on the data. Moreover, qualitative methods do not attempt to ignore the subjectivity or biases of those being studied—of online students, in this case. Rather, qualitative methods acknowledge bias and subjectivity and seek to capture a rich view of the perspective of those being studied, even embracing bias and subjectivity as essential parts of a larger view. Thus, qualitative methods are more complete and more capable of capturing tacit perceptions and even eliciting the verbalization of perceptions previously unknown even

to those being studied. Most importantly, they are ideally suited for the investigation at hand.

Straussian Grounded Theory v. Classic Grounded Theory. Over the years Glaser and Strauss developed their approaches in divergent ways. Glaser's approach (1978, 1992) has come to be known as classic grounded-theory research whereas Strauss's approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, 1978) has taken the name "Straussian." My primary reason for choosing Straussian grounded theory is Strauss's willingness to admit the use of a literature review. This section considers the case for omitting a literature review and the case in favor of using a literature review.

The case for omitting a literature review. Glaser (1992) has been adamant in insisting that a literary review be avoided in order to keep the process of theory generation free from preconceived ideas. The classic grounded-theory approach as outlined by him led to an argument against consideration of professional literature in the area of study until categories have begun to emerge. His fear is that the researcher will not be able to block out concepts and theories from the literature and will be caught up instead in forcing the data to fit the ideas in the literature. McGhee, Marland, and Atkinson (2007) identified additional reasons for avoiding an initial review:

- keeping the researcher from "being constrained, contaminated, or inhibited;"
- avoiding assumptions that might creep in from the literature unawares, avoiding a focus on the literature instead of the data; and
- maintaining the researcher's clear vision instead of allowing contamination from other researchers (p. 336).

The commitment to generation of theory during research had led Glaser and Strauss (1967) to develop a very open approach—one well-suited to an exploration of student perceptions. Initially, they focused so intently on the inductive nature of their approach that a literature review has not generally been part of the classic approach, or its use is delayed until the end of the study. Glaser and Strauss said:

> An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. Similarities and convergences with the literature can be established after the analytic core of categories has emerged. (p. 37)

Moreover, Walker and Myrick (2006) pointed out that the researcher must avoid being biased by *a priori* beliefs in order to maintain a clear openness necessary to derive theory strictly from the data. Regarding qualitative research, Creswell (1994) advised that literature is "less used to set the stage for the study" (p. 21). Bryant (2004) also noted the lesser emphasis upon a literature review in qualitative research.

The case for using a literature review in grounded-theory research. Still, Glaser and Strauss (1967) left some room for a literature review, perhaps even an initial literature review. They maintained: "Our position . . . does not at all imply that the generation of new theory should proceed in isolation from existing grounded theory" (p. 6). Moreover, at least one researcher, Thornberg (2012), has argued the efficacy of incorporating a literature review at the outset in even a classic grounded-theory research project. Similarly, Bryant (2004) cautioned researchers against neglecting or forgoing a literature review, quoting Fetterman's observation that the researcher should have "an open mind, not an empty head" (quoted in Bryant, p. 63). Corbin and Strauss themselves (1990) acknowledged that an initial literature review may be needed and can be used

without precluding the researcher's open approach to data collection and theory generating.

The approach that later came to be known as Straussian grounded-theory research (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss, 1987) actually called for use of a literature review. Breckenridge and Jones (2009) have concurred with that approach, explaining how the literature could be used judiciously: "Pre-existing knowledge can guide the researcher in identifying a starting point for data collection, but this knowledge should be awarded no relevance until validated or dismissed by the formulation of the emerging theory" (pp. 119-120).

Reflexivity. McGhee et al. (2007) agreed that reading the literature could be an integral part of grounded-theory research, explaining that the researcher's reflexivity serves to ameliorate some of the problems of bias. They argued: "Use of literature or any other preknowledge should not prevent a grounded theory arising from the inductive–deductive interplay which is at the heart of this method" (p. 334). A key factor, they maintained, is reflexivity, which is a "consciously reflective process" that makes it possible to maintain openness in the inductive process in the context of a literature review (p. 335). At issue is the researcher's role in the process of research, which they argue should be acknowledged, explored, and noted by the researcher—and even "shared with readers" (p. 335). Moreover, the researcher's reflexivity is strengthened through use of the memo system, which is a means of maintaining self-awareness of the issues and of the attendant liabilities of researcher entanglement with the research. Thus, reflexivity requires the researcher's conscious consideration of past experiences, their influence

upon the researcher's role as researcher, and the necessity to be open to the data and emergent concepts and hypotheses.

Glaser (1992) has written about a tension between the need to allow concepts and theories to emerge and the problem of a natural inclination to force data to fit preconceived theories. McGhee et al. (2007) inferred from this tension a danger in carrying reflexivity too far. They cautioned against letting reflexivity interfere with the researcher's creativity, which is necessary for the generation of concepts and theories.

Corbin and Strauss (1990) recommended inclusion of an early literature review because of its ability to stimulate theoretical sensitivity, its usefulness in providing secondary data, its usefulness in raising questions, its usefulness in providing a guide to the theoretical sampling process, and its ability to provide supplementary vitality. Some kind of initial review is also often needed to satisfy the requirements of institutional review boards (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; McGhee et al., 2007). Finally, at the time of formulating a topic, there may not be many topics with which a well-read researcher is not already familiar. In the case of this study, I came to the topic through experience as an online graduate student and as an online instructor of students in undergraduate English and Humanities courses. I thought much and read much on the topic of online presence before deciding to embark upon this investigation. Thus, I decided that inclusion of a literature review was one good reason for choosing Straussian grounded-theory design.

Data Collection Procedures

Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasized the need to make data collection rigorous in qualitative research; thus, it is important that an entire interview be conducted within a strong but flexible plan (see Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 225).

I chose to use interviews with online students for data collection for three reasons:

- to be able to respond flexibly to student observations with follow-up questions sensitive to word choices and the direction of the narrative production;
- to elicit narratives that illustrate emerging concepts and reveal tacit and hidden perceptions; and
- to pursue deeper revelation, even to encourage respondents to assist in the making of meaning.

Data collection strategy for this research investigation consisted of in-depth interviews with 16 community college undergraduate students who had taken a minimum of four online classes. The in-depth interview strategy embodies the research genre of "individual lived experience," "relying on a single primary method for gathering data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 61). Interviews with students, or respondents, attempted to achieve what Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) call "collaboration" between interviewer and respondent in the spirit of a "friendly talk" (p. 219). A good interview is not just asking questions and recording answers. Rather it is "researching people" (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 219), and it involves listening and asking for clarification and delving deeper into discussion or explanation. It is "close and personal" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 62) and involves a time of moving into another person's

world in order to see things from the perspective of the other. It takes place in a shared space in which both interviewer and respondent affect the process of data collection.

Within the space shared with the respondent, the qualitative researcher is a participant observer (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) said that interviewers "are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents" (p. 3). In this investigation, I personally conducted interviews and interacted with the respondents, either in face-to-face meetings or telephone conversations. I obtained IRB approval both at University of Nebraska—Lincoln and at the community college that granted permission for the student interviews. My recruitment letter fully communicated to respondents the purpose of the study, the procedures for both researcher and respondents, and the respondents' ability to withdraw from participation at any time and for any reason.

During an interview, a researcher may observe body language or tone of voice or level of emotional intensity; the researcher should include such observations in the field notes or memos, which become part of the artifacts of the study along with the transcripts of interviews. The interviewer must listen well, use good personal interaction skills, frame questions well, and use gentle probing to elicit valuable and detailed responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Moreover, the interviewer needs to communicate "that the subjective view [of the respondent] is what matters" (p. 110).

The interviews approximated "elite interviewing" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 113) inasmuch as subjects were chosen somewhat for their expertise: undergraduate students who have had at least four online courses. The researcher sought to explore and

describe the perspectives and perceptions of students who have spent enough time in online education to have had a variety of experiences, to have developed some ideas about how they think online instruction should be conducted, and to have studied enough online to have gotten past the confusion and frustrations of beginning online students dealing with unfamiliar technology and other new challenges. The recruitment letter, in fact, even explained to the respondents that they had been chosen somewhat for their "expertise."

The Active Interview. This study used the Active Interview theory developed by Holstein and Gubrium (1995), whose purpose was to create a "conceptual sensitizing device" to enable interviewers as researchers to capture both the "*hows* of social process" and the "*whats* of lived experience" (p. 5). The active interview is a research process for exploring the reality of subjects and is distinguished from interrogation, as used, for instance, in a criminal investigation. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) disavowed the view of a research interview as something akin to "prospecting"—a process used to gain information, to learn what a respondent knows. They argued that an interview conversation is not "a pipeline for transmitting information" (p. 3). Rather it is a "social encounter" and the "productive site of reportable knowledge itself" (p. 3). And they rejected the view of the respondent as passive and simply a "vessel for answers" (p. 7).

In the active interview, they explained, both interviewer and respondent are active participants; and both are engaged in the making of meaning. The interviewer is "unavoidably implicated" in the process of creating meaning (p. 3), and respondents are seen not as containers of knowledge to be tapped but as "constructors of knowledge in collaboration with interviewers" (p. 4).

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) described the active interview as "interpretive practice" (p. 16). It is a collaborative conversation in which both interviewer and respondent engage in making meaning and turn their attention to how meaning is made as much as to what is said, the content. "Reality is constituted," they say, "at the nexus of the *hows* and the *whats* of experience, by way of interpretive practice" (p. 16). The active interview is "improvisational" and "spontaneous," yet "structured—focused within loose parameters provided by the interviewer" (p. 17). Finally, it is a "conversation" that seeks above all to "cultivate" the respondent to flesh out "narrative territory" (p. 76).

The activated or enlivened respondent, instead of just "telling" what is known, is part of the process of making meaning. The respondent "transforms the facts and details" and "pieces experiences together, before, during, and after occupying the respondent role" (p. 8). In this view, the respondent is assigned "competence"—that is, the respondent is accorded respect as someone capable of producing a narrative. The active interviewer has no comport with an attitude such as that in the earlier example in which the ability of students to evaluate instructors was dismissed. The active interviewer is seeking to draw out the respondent's story that will reveal his or her perspective or even multiple perspectives. Perhaps a respondent is incompetent to answer questions that come from concepts outside that person's perspective—such as a child answering a question about parental disciplinary methods or a student filling in bubbles about an instructor's ability to maintain student interest. However, in the active interview, the researcher is concerned above all else with the perspective that cannot be attained through the questions about preconceived categories—For instance, in the perspective of the child or student who can tell a story that will provide enlightenment. How the story is organized

or pieced together or elaborated becomes as important as what is said. The respondent is valued as an interpreter and constructor of meaning, because he or she is invested "with a substantial repertoire of interpretive methods and stock of experiential materials" (p. 17). Because the respondent is assumed to be competent in the active interview process, subjects who might otherwise be marginalized are given voice. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) maintained, thus, that "all kinds of people, not just the educated or well-heeled, were competent to give credible voice to experience" (p. 22).

The active interviewer is more than someone who simply asks a set of predetermined questions and probes for complete answers. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) cited researchers (Cannell, Fisher, & Marquis, 1968; Converse & Schuman, 1974) who have found that much of what interviewers say after an initial question goes beyond the predetermined questions (p. 38). Thus, they maintained that the researcher/interviewer should be conscious of being implicated in the production of meaning and should purposely control the interviewer role. The key for the interviewer is to "orient" himself or herself to the process, not as a mere questioner recording answers from a passive subject, but as someone who becomes activated as interviewer and someone who activates the respondent. Both must be "organizers" and "constructors" of meaning. (p. 19). In fact, the interviewer "interjects" (p. 77) himself or herself into the conversation to "activate, stimulate, and cultivate" the respondent's "interpretive capabilities" (p. 17). The interviewer must also provide precedence and perspective, with a goal to "incite or encourage respondents' narratives" (p. 77). The central role, then, of the active interviewer is to "activate" "narrative production" (p. 39).

In activating narrative production, the interviewer has several tasks that coincide with the general task of asking questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995):

- to "provoke," at times to "suggest" "narrative positions, resources, orientations, and precedents for the respondent to engage in addressing the research questions" (p. 39);
- to "set the general parameters for responses"—both encouraging and curbing answers within the research topic (p. 39);
- to offer possible relevant conceptualizations or perspectives for consideration
- "to direct and harness the respondent's constructive storytelling" (p. 39);
- to introduce the interview in such a way as to prepare the respondent's orientation to the topic and to guide the respondent's thought connections between the topic and experiences to be used in narrative production;
- to use every aspect of the interview, including transitions, as an aid to "urging" a "unique interpretive position" (p. 44);
- to gather background information and use it to make data collection "more productive, incorporating indigenous interpretive resources, perspectives, and landmarks into their inquiries" (p. 45);
- to listen well, even to provide an "audience" (p. 28) to a narrative production by using "mutual attentiveness, monitoring, and responsiveness;" and, further,
- to "engage the respondent, working interactionally to establish the discursive bases" to be used by the respondent to provide pertinent narratives (p. 47).

The Importance of Narrative. To accord respect to a respondent due to the capability of telling his or her story indicates that the key element to be sought in the

interview is narrative. The interview is, after all, a narrative production, and the respondent is envisioned as a story-teller. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) were not suggesting that respondents make up stories or that they be encouraged to do so. Rather, they said, "The improvisational narrative combines aspects of experience, emotion, opinion, and expectation, connecting disparate parts into a coherent, meaningful whole" (p. 28). The narrative is the respondent's relating of experience and also a way of interpreting experience. In an active interview, the respondent "becomes a kind of researcher in his or her own right, consulting repertoires of experience and orientations, linking fragments into patterns, and offering 'theoretically' coherent descriptions" (p. 29). In this role as researcher/collaborator, the respondent may even provide "indigenous coding" (p. 56), with or without the prompting of the interviewer.

Asking the Questions. According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), "The interviewer's directions may be as general or as vague as 'Tell me what you think about . . .' or as demanding and specific as 'On a scale of 1 to 10, tell me how satisfied you are with . . .'" (p. 28). The questions and prompts are framing devices for the respondent/narrator to use in characterizing and interpreting experiences. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) recommend three important approaches to interviewing:

- expecting the unexpected,
- asking a limited number of closed questions to gain insights into respondents and their backgrounds, and
- asking primarily open questions during the interview itself.

The unexpected in an interview can occur when the interviewer allows respondents to "speak for themselves" and listens while they tell about their own lives. The interview

must “be both structured and flexible at the same time” (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 220). The interviewer must be flexible enough to listen even when an answer may seem off-course—because an unexpected, and key, answer may be embedded in the conversational track the respondent is following. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) insist that the interviewer must even intercede to help the respondent to consider alternative perspectives and concepts. Rather than trying to suppress all assumptions or biases, the interviewer is better off to express them and give respondents a chance to add new perspectives in interacting with the interviewer. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) maintained: “Rather than ignore our hunches, we need to form questions around them, follow them through, and see where they will lead us” (p. 221).

Closed Questions. Closed questions are questions that call for a yes-or-no answer or multiple-choice answer or require a simple information answer. Questions like these tend to be conversation-stoppers because there is little reason for elaboration beyond the immediate answer. There is a place for closed questions in interview research, though: they can help the researcher to gain knowledge about the respondent’s background, history, and interests in such a way as to enable the interviewer to begin taking the perspective of the respondent (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call this type of question “fixed format” questions (p. 52). As the researcher in this project, I acknowledged the limitation of closed questions, yet I devised a short set of closed questions to gather background information and to help prepare for the questions that would be used to probe more deeply.

Open Questions. Open questions are designed to encourage respondents to communicate their perspectives in a freer conversation. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) recommended questions that elicit narrative responses:

- Tell me more about the time when. . . .
- Describe the people who were most important to. . . .
- Describe the first time you. . . .
- Tell me about the person who taught you about. . . .
- What stands out for you when you remember. . . . (p. 222)

Questions like these transfer control of the interview in large part from interviewer to respondent, or informant. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) spoke of "enlivening" the respondent by providing an "active" role in the process of making meaning. At the point of enlivening, they maintained, the respondent "not only holds fact and details of experience but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details" (p. 8).

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) emphasized that open questioning must be linked with an array of skills that make up good listening: body language, eye contact, and attentiveness that communicate focused interest in what the respondent is saying; hearing comments to the end without interruption; verbal acknowledgements, follow-up questions that emerge from participant responses, encouragement to extend responses and relate experiences—and, of course, attentive hearing. Similarly, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) spoke of "mutual attentiveness, monitoring, and responsiveness" (p. 47) and a heightened level of activeness that calls for the interviewer to work "interactionally to establish the discursive bases from which the respondent can articulate his or her relevant experiences" (p. 47).

The interview itself should be conducted in an informal, conversational style so that the student respondent will be as comfortable as possible. Highly technical language should be avoided, and the interviewer should allow and even encourage respondents to frame responses in their own way (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). A key idea is to encourage respondents to formulate their own concepts and responses through relating their experiences. Open questioning shifts the focus from requested information to an invitation to respondents to explore their experiences and thoughts and to verbalize their perspectives in a revealing way.

Sampling Procedure: Theoretical Sampling

Glaser and Strauss (1967) called for use of "theoretical sampling"—a process of deciding what data to collect next while "jointly collecting, coding, and analyzing data" (p. 45). Thus, an interview procedure of data collection would feature initial choices of interview subjects based simply on the subject or problem area without a theoretical framework. But coding and analysis begin immediately during the data collection, and further selections for sampling are guided by the data needs. They explained: ". . . further collection cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory. . . . The emerging theory points to the next steps" (p. 47). The next steps emerge in the researcher's recognition of gaps in the developing theory or a need for further data regarding specific research questions. In regard to active interviewing, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) concurred that sampling is an "ongoing process." "Designating a group of respondents," they said, "is tentative, provisional, and sometimes even spontaneous" (p. 74).

Theoretical Sensitivity. The process is controlled by the emerging theory. Theoretical sampling requires "theoretical sensitivity" to enable one to generate concepts and theory as they emerge from the data. This skill utilizes the researcher's personal inclinations and temperament, combined with theoretical insight and an ability to use those insights. Corbin and Strauss (2008) added that the researcher's experience and background play an important role in the process of generating theory.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the operant criteria are "theoretical purpose and relevance." The purpose, they reminded, is discovery of theory, not "verifications of 'facts'" (p. 48). Their concern is to establish a more systematic approach less controlled by preplanning, routine, and *a priori* theory. They summarized:

> The criteria of theoretical sampling are designed to be applied in the ongoing joint collection and analysis of data associated with the generation of theory. Therefore, they are continually tailored to fit the data and are applied judiciously at the right point and moment in the analysis. The analyst can continually adjust his control of data collection to ensure the data's relevance to the impersonal criteria of his emerging theory. (p. 48)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) contrasted theoretical sampling and statistical sampling in relation to their purposes. Whereas statistical sampling has a purpose of obtaining accurate evidence of distributions and to make verifications, the purpose of theoretical sampling is to discover categories, their properties, and their relationship with each other. In theoretical sampling, there is an assumption of persistence that theories formulated for one group "will probably hold for other groups under the same conditions" (p. 49).

Orientation to People. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) contended that the more important concern in sampling is "an orientation to people" (p. 25). They explained:

> First, we must keep in mind that the word *people*, which we use as a collective term of reference for all potentially appropriate respondents, has a distinctly democratic flavor. It extends interpretive privilege to a wide range of voices,

> assigning narrative competence to all those placed in the category, recognizing their common worth as human beings and, hence, respondents. (p. 25)

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) maintained that selecting people instead of representative populations demonstrates the worthiness of subjects to tell their stories in spite of differences. What it encourages is "representations of diverse and complex experience" (p. 26). Thus, they would object to any characterization of students as somehow incompetent to evaluate instructors, as some people commented to Broder and Dorfman (1994).

Theoretical Saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the success of theoretical sampling lies in reaching "theoretical saturation" (p. 61), the point at which no additional data are emerging to enable the researcher to develop further properties. Repeated instances of similar data indicate that a point of saturation has been reached, and data collection in that area can be stopped. At that point the researcher proceeds to collect data from other groups—or in the study of a single group, from subjects more likely to contribute data to a different category in the study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that adequacy of sample can be judged by how "widely and diversely" the researcher has sampled in order to reach the saturation point. It is also important that conceptual saturation be reached to enable the generating of theory (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009). The sample can be judged too small when the theory developed is thin and leaves excessive areas with exceptions. Holstein and Gubrium found the possibility of depth of information if respondents are activated and respected as "people, in their capacities as competent narrators of their lives" (1995, p. 29).

In this research project, I did theoretical sampling in three ways: through selection of the institution and target group of students to be interviewed, through the selection of the last few interview subjects, and through theoretical control of the shape of the interview. I chose a community college in West Texas as the higher education institution in which to research because of its mid-size enrollment, the large rural area it serves, and the size and breadth of its online program. The college has an enrollment of 6000-7000 and serves a geographical area covering five large counties. The college is a large provider of online courses; in fact, contact hours for students in these courses comprise 19.5% of the college total. A large number of students from colleges and universities from around the state take classes at this institution, increasing the diversity of the online student population. The community college target group was chosen for the purpose of collecting data from students with ample experience in online courses, a minimum of four courses.

The research proposal was approved by Institutional Review Boards at both The University of Nebraska—Lincoln and the selected community college. The community college's Information Technology department provided an email list of all the students who had taken classes at the college in the previous academic year (August 2011 to August 2012) and had had a minimum of four online courses. I sent out a blanket email request for volunteers for students to participate in the research study through in-depth interviews either in person at the college or by telephone. I included a request for the following additional information:

1. A phone number at which I can reach you to make interview arrangements.
2. The number of online classes you have had.
3. How many of your online classes have included discussion forums.
4. How many of your online classes have included creative use of technology.

The purpose of the advance questions was to identify respondents who might be able to provide insights into areas that had not yet reached theoretical saturation while data collection, coding, and analysis of data was still in progress. My reasoning was that after interviewing 8-10 students I might see a need to interview a few students who had had greater experience in an area than the group of students already interviewed. For instance, if I had mostly students who had taken four classes only, I might have an opportunity to add students who had taken a significantly larger number of online classes. Or I might need additional students who had had discussion forum experience, or students who experienced a greater range of creative use of technology. The purpose was to saturate the categories under study.

The interviews themselves evolved over time as I shaped the interviews more and more based upon the larger concerns touched on by previous respondents. I even used comments from previous interviews to spur respondents to think more deeply, more thoroughly, in order to get them to verbalize ideas they may not have thought about previously, or to take a slightly different perspective. I also gradually was more sensitive to the concerns of respondents so that I could note a commonality between a topic they were discussing and the next topic I wanted to move them toward. I worked also to slow down and let the respondents more fully develop their thoughts and provide nuance wherever possible. The last three students who were interviewed were added partly because they were from the more traditional college age group and had less experience with online coursework than most of the previous respondents. Those last three students were also added somewhat spontaneously, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) had suggested could be the case. The last interview conducted was one of the best and most

thorough interviews, but very little new information emerged—indicating that theoretical saturation was largely attained.

The Role of the Researcher

In this research project, I was the sole instrument of research. An important concern is the role of the researcher in relation to the participants in research. Classic grounded-theory research calls for an independent relationship whereas the Straussian approach calls for a researcher actively engaged with participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Ultimately, the researcher, to be effective, must be aware of his or her own biases and must take steps to mitigate them and must weigh the liabilities against the advantages in utilizing an initial literature review. I must acknowledge at the outset that there exists a possibility for my reading in the field of study and my experience as online instructor, online student, and administrator over online education to lead to forcing of concepts upon the data.

The challenge for me as researcher was to avoid bias due to my experience as an online student, my experience as an online instructor, my experience as an administrator over online courses, and my reading in the field of online instructor presence. It is important that Glaser and Strauss (1967) did not call for the researcher to begin research with a *tabula rasa,* a mind devoid of knowledge of the field. Rather, they argued that the researcher must avoid letting any preconceived theory "*dictate"* the process of research.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) addressed the situation in which the researcher and participants "share a common culture" and asked, because "it is impossible to completely void our minds" of the common experience, "why not put that experience to good use?" (p. 80). They did not suggest that the researcher add his or her experience to the data or

force experience upon the data; rather they suggested that the researcher's experience be used to "bring up other possibilities of meaning" or suggest "something new to think about that will make us confront our assumptions about specific data" (p. 80). The key, they said, was to let experience inform the research at a conceptual level rather than at the level of data.

In this project I used my reading and experience and a set of informal preliminary interviews of both instructors and students to generate interview questions to be asked. I then formulated the questions so that they covered the student's online experiences thoroughly and that they gathered information relevant to my research questions and sub-questions. However, the questions were not mapped to any particular theory or to my expectations; rather they were designed to explore student perceptions and to draw out students' stories. A challenge I faced in conducting interviews was to listen to respondents' answers with a level of attention that would enable sensitivity to word choices that might help in asking follow-up questions that might elicit more nuanced observations. I limited the use of closed questions and used more open questions in order to draw out participants' stories and to get them to perceive themselves as part of a meaning-making process. I accorded the participants great respect and let them know that I was interested in how they perceived their experiences. One student-respondent seemed to apologize by adding in the phrase "in my opinion" at the end of a statement, and I quickly reminded her, "Well, your opinion is what we are talking about." I encouraged respondents to provide narratives and paused to give them adequate time to consider so that they could clarify and exemplify their responses. Later, in the coding process, I read and re-read the transcripts as recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), looking closely

for words and phrases that would allow "substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own" (p. 34).

I believe that my experience both as instructor and student enhanced the possibility of creative thinking and theory-generating. Moreover, the literature review increased this possibility. LaRossa (2005) noted that the literature itself can be seen as part of the data to be considered. Ultimately, I determined that the combination of aspects of the research design provided some assurance that the research could be conducted without over-reliance upon the literature or the forcing of categories. Those aspects include the following:

- my reliance upon reflexivity;
- my background as an inductive interpreter of literature;
- my awareness of the sources of my temperament and attitudes toward the instructor-student relationship in the online classroom;
- my experience on both sides of that relationship;
- my lack of conviction regarding categories and concepts as presented in the literature;
- the relative paucity of literature regarding student perceptions of online presence;
- my professional curiosity about what attention could be given to instructor presence that might enhance my own success as an online instructor,
- my plan to consider both the literature and the data of the research as material to subject to constant comparative analysis for the purpose of generating categories, concepts, hypotheses, and theory; and

- my design and formulation of interview questions to elicit exploratory answers rather than yes/no responses or answers based on categories taken from the literature.

McGhee et al. (2007) insisted that the most important factor is not familiarity with the literature or lack thereof, but the presence of "inductive-deductive interplay," the use of induction to generate theory, the researcher's open-mindedness, the use of reflexivity, and faithful use of the method of constant comparative analysis (p. 341). On the whole, the Straussian grounded-theory research design—with its emphasis upon exploration through rigorous inductive analysis of the data, its recognition of the usefulness of a literature review, and its recognition of the importance of the researcher's active relationship with participants—made it well suited for this research project.

Data Analysis Procedures

Glaser and Strauss (1967) have noted that it is often a natural impulse for a person to generate theory, but they distinguished purposive generation of theory as a distinct process requiring a controlled methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This section explains constant comparative analysis, coding, and the generating of theory.

Constant Comparative Analysis. In grounded-theory research, the controlled methodology for analyzing data is called constant comparative analysis. First, this method is analysis in that it requires that the researcher even at the outset of data collection begin closely analyzing data into minute units or indicators (Strauss, 1987).

Next, this method is comparative because it involves, first, systematic comparison of units of study, indicators, to each other and, second, to data collected in the next phase of collection. Thus, in interview research, the researcher would actually begin analysis

during the first interview through the use of memo writing and would continue by subjecting all the data collected to microscopic analysis. The purpose is to note similarities and differences that enable inductive coding and the generating of concepts, categories, hypotheses, and theories.

Finally, this method is constant because (a) in each phase the researcher constantly returns to the beginning point of analysis and continues the process of analysis; (b) in each phase the researcher is finding similarities and differences, writing memos, and coding; and (c) the researcher is constantly, even simultaneously, engaged in the processes of analyzing, comparing, and abstracting from the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) found the process useful for work with small units such as the in-depth interview study at hand, but they maintained that it could be used in any social setting: "Our discussion of comparative analysis as a strategic method for generating theory assigns the method its fullest generality for use of social units of any size" (p. 21).

The process of comparative analysis itself is related to what Glaser and Strauss (1967) called the "cumulative nature of knowledge and theory" (p. 35). It involves, thus, "a progressive building up from facts." In this study, I used statements from respondents as the "facts" from which to build up theories. These facts are not facts in the sense of being quantifiable or indisputable—but in the sense of being actual statements from the participants. If a murderer lies on the stand, his lie becomes one of the "facts" to be considered by the jury in trying to generate its own theory. The facts also include how things are said and contradictions and word choices that may belie deeper significance.

Coding. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that the research begin with open coding which develops into axial coding and finally selective coding (Strauss, 1987; Corbin & Strauss, 1998). This section explains these three phases of coding.

***Open Coding*.** Corbin and Strauss (2008) described open coding as breaking the data down into parts, examining closely, comparing and contrasting, and asking questions. Strauss (1987) said that the basis for grounded theory is the concept-indicator model that "directs the *conceptual* coding of a set of *empirical* indicators" (p. 25). Open coding uses "indicators"—words, phrases, statements from the data, or observations—to develop "concepts." Indicators are constantly compared with each other as the researcher works to identify new insights until theoretical saturation is reached. The researcher is looking for terms used by study subjects—terms that can be thoroughly and "minutely" analyzed (Strauss, 1987, p. 31) in order to move to coding of more general concepts. Strauss (1987) explained that the more detailed the analysis the less the chance of missing categories and the greater the chance of discovering appropriate categories and reaching saturation.

Memo writing is an important aspect of open coding. LaRossa (2005) pointed out that the key to developing new concepts is asking generative questions, questions that push the researcher to think more abstractly and theoretically. Strauss (1987) called for frequent interruption of the coding process in order to write self-memos that move the researcher toward the theoretical realm and the generating of concepts and theories. He also noted that the researcher must avoid becoming committed to codes or concepts too quickly and cautions against finding significance in "face sheets"—factors like age, race,

gender, or social class. These, he posited, must become part of theory only if and when they are demonstrated to be relevant.

The progressive building up from facts involves constant or continual study of the data in search of emerging categories. Part of the process of constant comparative analysis is a constant turning over of the facts to the point of absorbing them in order to allow categories to emerge. But this phase of the process must be joined to a careful coding of categories and rigorous analysis of the body of data in light of these new categories. This is a process that one goes through multiple times to discover emerging categories and to generate theory.

The inductive process moves toward greater abstraction in the process of grouping concepts to form categories. LaRossa (2005) argued that Strauss actually used the term "categorization" to mean both the grouping of similar concepts and also "dimensionalizing," the grouping of concepts that seem to be dissimilar (pp. 842-843). LaRossa proposed calling the resulting categories "variables" (p. 843).

An important point about the generated concepts used for categorizing is that they must have two essential features: that they be "analytic" and "sensitizing" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 38). A concept is analytic when it is general enough that it denotes characteristics of entities, and it is sensitizing when it yields a meaningful picture that facilitates one's grasping it in terms of personal experience.

Axial coding. Strauss (1987) explained that the term "axial coding" is a reference to the practice of analysis that takes place around the axis of "one category at a time" (p. 32). He recommended that beginning analysts use a coding paradigm, which is a reminder to code according to what he calls "paradigm items" (p. 27), such as conditions,

consequences, relations among actors, and strategies. Axial coding is further coding within a category, involving analysis of paradigm conditions and other subcategories relating to the who, what, when, where, and why of the category (Strauss, 1987). Collection of qualitative data proceeds simultaneously with open coding and axial coding. The process is "not linear but concurrent, iterative and integrative, with data collection, analysis and conceptual theorizing occurring in parallel and from the outset of the research process" (McGee et al., 2007, p. 335). LaRossa (2005) distinguished axial coding from open coding in its focus upon an "explicit" examination of relationships between variables or categories (p. 848).

Axial coding and identification of core category. Strauss (1987) referred to the coding process with the inclusion of axial coding as "increasingly dense conceptualization" in which linkages of categories will "eventually" lead to identification of the "core" category (pp. 32-33). Hunter, Murphy, Grealish, Casey, and Keady (2011) explained this interrelated process: "Concepts, categories and sub-categories are continually subjected to questions and comparisons, with the aim of identifying the core category and its links with the others" (p. 10).

LaRossa (2005) equated the core category with the research study's "main story" (p. 850). He explained that the core category is the category or variable that has the most numerous and strongest links to the other categories. It is also the category that is "theoretically saturated and centrally relevant" (p. 852). The core category is the focal point for generation of theory, and it must account for variations and exceptions in patterns of behavior (Strauss, 1987). Corbin and Strauss (2008) claimed that the core category "has analytic power" because of its "ability to explain or convey 'theoretically'

what the research is all about" (p. 104). The researcher is looking for "that special something that ties together all of different categories to create a coherent story" (p. 104).

Selective coding. Once the core category or variable has been identified, the researcher is then able to turn to selective coding, a more limited and more focused kind of coding. This kind of coding, according to Strauss (1987), "pertains to coding *systematically* and concertedly for the core category" (p. 33). The core category becomes the center of concentration for the researcher's analysis, and it becomes the "guide to further theoretical sampling and data collection" (p. 33). As research progresses, selective coding comes to dominate the process as it moves toward generation of theory.

Generating Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) stipulated two elements of generated theory: "conceptual categories and their conceptual properties; and second, hypotheses or generalized relations among the categories and their properties" (p. 35). Generating conceptual categories and identifying the core category ready the researcher to begin generating first hypotheses and then theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) pointed out that at first, the researcher may find everything important and that work quickly leads to generation of hypotheses: "In the beginning, one's hypotheses may seem unrelated, but as categories and properties emerge, develop in abstraction, and become related, their accumulating interrelations form an integrated central theoretical framework—*the core of emerging theory*" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 40).

The next phase after generation of hypotheses is generation of theory. It involves integrating of concepts and categories into an emerging theory. Substantive theory is

open-ended, subject to the placing of new data and concepts into the larger scheme. Formal theory is oriented to the larger scheme and must never be "forced" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 41). Emerging theory or "tentative theory" (McGhee et al., 2007, p. 335) then guides further data collection. The result is "crystallization" (p. 40) of this core as a framework, and a clustering of categories emerges quickly. There may be a danger of allowing axial coding to close off the process of generating concepts and hypotheses prematurely, but Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that when generation of theory is the purpose, one is "alert to emergent perspectives" (p. 40) and the influence of those perspectives to modify and change the theory being developed.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained that some researchers have difficulties moving from description to the abstraction of concepts, categories, and theories. They point out the necessity of writing lengthy memos in order to locate the most important ideas that enable the researcher to decide upon an adequately abstract core category that can be used in generating theory. They maintained:

> Theory building is a process of going from raw data, thinking about that raw data, delineating concepts to stand for raw data, then making statements of relationship about those concepts linking them all together into a theoretical whole, and at every step along the way recording that analysis in memos. (p. 106)

Corbin and Strauss (2008) posited that the most important aspect of moving from description to theory is in understanding that theory is explanatory. Rather than simply describing phenomena, the researcher as theorist must focus on specific properties and explain why properties and relationships of properties lead to specific kinds of results. They recommend writing a descriptive story line and moving from that to theoretical explanation.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) concluded as follows, in regard to the importance of a focus upon emergent categories and theory: “In short, our focus on the emergence of categories solves the problems of fit, relevance, forcing, and richness” (p. 37). What the researcher is seeking, said Glaser and Strauss (1967) is a “theory that ‘fits or works’ in a substantive or formal area (though further testing, clarification, or reformulation is still necessary), since the theory is derived from data, not deduced from logical assumptions” (pp. 29-30). A key, then, in deriving theory is its grounding in data as opposed to speculation, common sense, or logical assumptions. They argued that theory can be derived from a small number of cases or even a single case: “[The researcher’s] job is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior” (p. 30). The researcher’s job is to identify categories and their principles in order to generate theory beneficial to future research or suggestive of further research.

The process of generating theory can result in either a “well-codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 31). Glaser and Strauss chose the discussion approach because their emphasis was upon the process itself, or what they called “theory as an ever-developing entity, not as a perfected product” (p. 32). This approach is very open. The theory generated represents a culmination of research, but in other ways it is the beginning of a process of modifying and rephrasing and conducting further research.

In summary, the process of generating theory involves simultaneous data collection, coding, and data analysis. These processes “should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of an investigation to its end” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.

43). The researcher must be aware of the entire process from the beginning of data collection through the generation of theory. Even as a researcher is conducting an interview, a concept may emerge; and it is then saved for later coding or used immediately in a follow-up question. Coding may affect the next interview and may lead to a new approach toward analysis. It is also important to avoid any inclination to so separate the processes that one may ignore an idea that emerges in a phase where it may seem out of place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). Thus, the data collection progresses in the shape of a growing circle as the researcher constantly goes through a repetition of analytical phases. Movement is inductive as the researcher frames the analysis in ever more abstract terms: from minute details (indicators) to concepts to categories to saturation and a core category to hypotheses and tentative theories and finally to theory.

Methods for Verification

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that verification is an issue primarily for quantitative research or for qualitative research that is replicating or testing an existing theory—not for qualitative research in which the generating of theory is the purpose. Others also (see Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Leininger, 1994) have maintained that standards of verification and reliability are applicable only or mainly to quantitative studies. On the other hand, Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) insisted on the importance of verification. They defined verification in qualitative research as "the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study" (para. 17). They claimed further that the procedures of qualitative research are "self-correcting" (para. 17) because they

are built into the process to identify and correct errors before they are embedded in an investigation.

Rigorous Adherence to Research Method. Glaser and Strauss (1967) maintained that the larger issue for qualitative research is rigorous adherence to research method: adequacy of data for generation of theory, careful analysis and constant comparison of data, theoretical sampling to enable the saturation of categories, and generating of theory intimately linked to and grounded in the data. Morse et al. (2002) identified five verification strategies to ensure reliability and validity—all built on the notions of rigor and investigator responsiveness:

- Methodological coherence—This strategy involves the "responsiveness of the investigator" (paras. 19-21) to ensure "congruence between the research question and the components of the method" (para. 23).
- Appropriateness of sample—This strategy necessitates selection of subjects who have adequate knowledge to ensure that categories are saturated.
- Concurrent collection and analysis of data—This strategy assures "mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know" (para. 25).
- Theoretical thinking—This strategy provides the researcher with emerging ideas that are "reconfirmed in new data" (para. 26). It requires "macro-micro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation" (para. 26).
- Theory development—This strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) assures that theory is developed from the data according to the grounded theory method

and provides "a template for comparison and further development of the theory" (para. 27).

Respecting "People" with a Story to Tell. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) added that it is essential that the respondents studied be respected as "people" with a story to tell and that they be enlivened or activated to become competent narrators of their stories and collaborators with the researcher. They contended: "Because the respondent's answers are continually being assembled and modified, the answers' truth value cannot be judged simply in terms of whether they match what lies in a vessel of objective answers." It is, in fact, the respondents' stories that are sought, in all their depth and complexity and detail—not simple, objective answers according to preconceived categories as in a survey or fixed-format interview.

Grounded theory researchers and theorists, nonetheless, have identified other areas in which the researcher can take steps to ensure soundness.

Internal Consistency. One such area is internal consistency, which is of the highest importance in grounded theory research. It demands that data collection, theoretical sampling, coding, and generating of theory be done inductively without contamination by preconceived theory. Moreover, it demands that these processes be carried out systematically and continuously, even simultaneously at times. Glaser and Strauss (1967) clarified the necessity that the theory must "fit" what is being studied, maintaining, "[T]he theory must have applicability that emerges from the data." Internal consistency demands accurate record-keeping, detailed notes, systematic coding, theoretical sampling "intertwined inextricably with the abstraction of description into theory" (quoted in Breckenridge & Jones, 2009, p. 122), and a careful accounting of the

reasoning behind theoretical sampling. Finally, the theory must "work" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to provide explanation across situations.

Reliability. Another important area is reliability. Part of the concern is accuracy. Kirk and Miller (1986) pointed out the importance of assessing reliability in traditional interviewing according to truth of responses and accurate answers. I used recorded, transcribed interviews to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data collected. Nonetheless, accuracy is a lesser issue in grounded theory research. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) explained: "When the interview is viewed as a dynamic, meaning-making occasion, however, different criteria apply, centered on how meaning is constructed, the circumstances of construction, and the meaningful linkages that are assembled for the occasion" (p. 9).

Hunter et al. (2011) explained the goal of grounded-research and the context in which it is conducted:

> GT research aims to understand what is going on in a given instance, particularly in common social settings that are not well understood and have not been exhaustively researched. GT research does not produce a set of definitive findings or a description; instead, it produces an ongoing conceptual theory. This theory will be recognizable to people familiar with the instance and will be modifiable to similar settings. (p. 7)

Audit trail. Use of an audit trail is also important (Bowen, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to ensure conformability. The researcher through careful coding and memo writing leaves an audit trail that can be investigated near the end of the research phase. The auditor's job is to evaluate the consistency of the researcher's inferences from the data and their congruence with the emergent concepts and theories.

Ultimately, the most important guarantee of the validity of grounded theory research is in the rigor of its method and its suitability to investigation of the research

questions. For this study, qualitative research—specifically, grounded theory research—provided a rigorous investigative methodology to discover useful new insights into the perceptions of instructor presence from the perspective of experienced community college students in online classes.

> [C]rucial elements of sociological theory are often found best with a qualitative method, that is, from data on structural conditions, consequences, deviances, norms, processes, patterns, and systems; because qualitative research is, more often than not, the end product of research within a substantive area beyond which few research sociologists are motivated to move; and because qualitative research is often the most 'adequate' and 'efficient' way to obtain the type of information required and to contend with the difficulties of an empirical situation. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 18)

Chapter Four

Findings

> I think that a great way to establish a presence in on an online class to offer some way that the professor could tell the students of the personal experiences that they have actually come across in that situation. (Alison, participant in research study)

> [Instructor response time] is the closest we get to simulating being in a classroom and of course the aspect of online education called the discussion board. (Caitlin, participant in research study)

> Not that the professor's an online avatar that doesn't really have a life outside of class. It is nice to know kind of what the instructor thinks or what their likes and dislikes are, and you can only find that out through on an online class if the instructor says it specifically. (Patti, participant in research study)

The Research Question

This research study using in-depth interviews began with two questions designed to open an exploration that would generate substantive theory regarding community college student perceptions of online instructor presence:

1. How do community college students describe their perceptions of instructor presence in the online classroom?
2. What aspects of an online class do community college students perceive as essential to an instructor's presence in an online class?

The first question regarding perceptions of presence was supplemented with sub-questions asking how students perceive instructor presence as a factor in online classes, how they define the term, and what experiences they would like to see more widely distributed. In this study, the respondents had strong opinions that ranged from the frank observation that instructor presence does not exist at all in some online classes to forceful statements about instructor presence that works. These students also were eager to communicate their insights about the importance of instructor presence and about things

that work to" establish it" in the online classroom, as Alison said in the quoted dialogue above.

The second question was intended to discover what aspects or components of the online class are seen as essential, or even critical, to the online classroom, and the sub-questions seek opinions/perspectives regarding common elements of online practice: an instructor's facilitation of discourse and collaborative learning, course design, direct instruction, technical assistance, and instructor and student disclosure. The students in the research sample were willing and eager to discuss these issues, as evidenced by Patti above in her statement that the instructor is not really an "avatar" but a real person about whom at least a few things should be revealed.

This chapter details the evolution of the research project as it unfolded from the data collection process of interviewing, coding, and generating substantive theory and themes. It begins with an analysis of the researcher's role and possible biases followed by a discussion of the participants in the study.

Researcher Role and Bias

I have biases stemming from my experience as an online instructor, online student, and administrator over online education. I am in my fortieth year of teaching college English—Composition, American Literature, British Literature, World Literature, Developmental Writing, and Creative Writing—and have been teaching Humanities for about five years. I have been teaching online for more than 10 years and have taught nearly all these courses online. For the past 10 years I have also been a college administrator overseeing growth and development of a large program of online courses in several departments and have been taking online graduate courses myself. I have biases

regarding online education and instructor presence, but those biases are spread across three perspectives—those of student, instructor, and administrator. And in my experience, those three perspectives are in constant interaction, competition, conversation, re-examination, and intermingling. Interestingly, I constantly compare my experience as a student/instructor in a face-to-face classroom—30 years of teaching face-to-face and approximately 100 graduate hours in traditional classrooms—with my experience as a student/instructor in an online classroom for the past 10 years.

My concern with instructor presence also is spread across these three perspectives. Additionally, I have, perhaps, added a fourth through my reading extensively for the literature review. I cannot really say which perspective I lean toward most strongly, however. As a student, I cherish memories of strong relationships, even friendships, and bull sessions outside class, with graduate students and professors in English and Philosophy. These include wonderful bull sessions arguing philosophy after class in a small café on The Drag at the University of Texas—Austin, group sessions studying for the written exam for admission to the doctoral program at UT, and mesmerizing discussions of John Steinbeck and Ed Ricketts' theory of non-teleological thinking with my buddy Brooks Landon (now a professor of English at University of Iowa) and his wife Marie over a gourmet meal he had prepared on a short budget. They also included great one-on-one discussions with Professor R. J. Kaufmann regarding George Eliot and St. Augustine, with Professor Gordon Mills regarding rhetoric and role-playing, and with the poet Thomas Whitbread regarding T.S. Eliot or Thomas Roethke and my own poetry as well. I also recall with great fondness a class party in the home of the venerable philosopher Charles Hartshorne where we had a lively living-room

discussion on the topic of phenomenology. Finally, most vividly, I recall weekly discussions of George Herbert Mead's philosophy in the office of the Mead scholar Professor David L. Miller. My memory is strong today of sitting in his office in Wagner Hall with the morning glare of the sun behind this impressive gravelly-voiced philosopher before me, listening with rapt attention to him as he spoke of Mead and looking occasionally to his bulletin board three feet away, where hung a yellowed newspaper clipping about his long friendship with a dancer he met during his days as a graduate student at the University of Chicago. Online classes may not bring such experiences as often as classes on campus, but such connections are possible. I recall in my online collegiate career some superb ongoing threads of conversation at four in the morning with other night owls and creative engagements with other students as we worked to control a disaster at the virtual Broadwater University. I also value greatly numerous email exchanges with a professor over issues in the state of the modern professoriate.

Of course, there have been negative experiences in both face-to face and online classes—for example, one with an instructor who was often literally not present in a face-to-face class due to excessive drink and another with an instructor who never really introduced the area of study but spent six weeks sitting on his desk reading 3" x 5" bibliography cards to us and then assigned a long research paper on a topic that we received no guidance for. Furthermore, I had an online class at another university where no work was posted till halfway through the term and the class ended a month late. In another class I experienced an instructor who would not answer an email. These

experiences lead me to empathize with the sadness of students like Alison and Patti when they speak of a lack of instructor presence.

Because of weak experiences with instructor presence, I wish, as an instructor, for strong experiences for my students—experiences of depth with professors and classmates. And I wonder whether anything similar can enter the experience of the online student. Such experiences certainly occur on campus in class and in the hallway after class, inside faculty offices, and in a café after class. I even recall an occasional telephone call, too—particularly one several years ago when I had a 45-minute discussion of *The Scarlet Letter* over the phone one afternoon with a young woman newly awakened to literature. And I have a clear memory of a student who came to me one spring afternoon after a Composition II class to explain that she was 30 years old and she did not see how she would be able to stand this class in which everyone else was 18 or 19, because of the difference in maturity level. I explained that the class roster was nearly exactly the same as the roster for my Composition I class the previous semester and that she would find the students to be full of fun and quite mature for their ages. I asked that she give them a week to find out who they really were. It was no surprise to me when she came back a week later to say that this was the most mature group of students she had been in class with. She was delighted by their willingness to listen to her, and she found herself learning from her younger classmates. She stayed. Will the online student stay and similarly gain by it?

I would answer that the student may very well gain from other students through a well-managed discussion board, through email conversations, even phone conversations. The student may even find a long-term friend, as did two students about five years ago in

an American Literature class of mine. They were students from a university 400 miles away, but on the discussion board they discovered that they attended the same university and actually lived a few blocks apart. They met for coffee and then began studying together and became good friends.

As an instructor, I, too, recognize the value of the flexibility of the online class. I teach online in part so as to be able to do class work when it fits my schedule, without interfering with the sometimes rigid schedule of an administrator. Online classes are time-consuming, though, and an instructor must manage a class schedule carefully in order to maintain any flexibility. I will never forget the student who emailed me 59 times in two weeks trying to find out how to do the assignment without reading the instructions. I probably should have drawn the line earlier.

As an administrator I sometimes hear student complaints about assignments not posted or not graded, emails unanswered or rude, and tests that will not open. On the other side, I hear instructor complaints about unsubmitted work, rude or demanding emails, and technology that is not working properly.

The challenge of this researcher's bias requires rigor to avoid imposing my views upon the data and the ability to block out experience and reading background at times. The safety check is the spread of my perspective over three somewhat conflicting yet complementary roles—four, if reading is counted. The possible advantage is the use of my bias to increase the sensitivity to hear what the respondents are telling me (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This researcher's aspiration is to hear what is said with sensitivity and to seize on significances with "the creativity and feeling that give qualitative research its soul" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 90).

Data Collection and Initial Coding

The community college gave me a list of email addresses for all the students who met two conditions: (a) They had been enrolled in at least one course at the college after the beginning of the Fall 2011 semester, and (b) they had been enrolled in at least four online courses at the college. I sent out recruitment letters and received responses from 27 students willing to participate. Of those 27 students, I interviewed all those with whom I was able to make connections successfully. Some did not respond to follow-up emails, some did not follow up with signed consent forms, and some either had too many difficulties with scheduling or ended up canceling for one reason or another. I ended up with a total of 16 respondents, whose names have been changed to protect identities. I have named them alphabetically according to the order of the interview.

I initially interviewed 13 student participants in a two week period in September 2012, beginning the process of collecting indicators and open coding during and after the first interview, noting concepts as they emerged in both brief notes during interviews and memos written afterward. Later I conducted three additional interviews. In the very first interview, Alison spoke sadly of weak instructor presence and declared a strong desire to hear "personal stories"—from her professors primarily, but also from fellow students. These, she said, enable her to "relate" to what she was learning and to build her memory. This concept was also an important topic discussed by the following two respondents. Thus, as interviewer I came to expect personal story to be a dominant concept and was sensitive thereafter to discussion that touched that concept and more prone to direct follow-up questions in that direction—an instance of theoretical sampling. The concept of personal story surprised me somewhat, especially because of the intensity with which

Alison, Belen, and Caitlin discussed the subject. I was later surprised to find that the concept of personal story was not quite as important to the full group of respondents as to these three.

The constant comparative process actually began with the first interview as I analyzed and compared details of Alison's discussion for similarities and oppositions, for resonances in conversation, for unlike topics with underlying connections. But the constant comparative process began in full with the second interview. After taking notes and writing memos, I did open coding again and began comparing elements of the two interviews and noting connections between them. The shape of the interviews themselves evolved over time as concepts and meanings emerged from the data. While waiting for transcripts to come in, I spent time listening to and absorbing, even living with, the recordings of interviews during my daily one-hour commute.

The Interviews

Most of the interviews, 12 of the 16, were done via telephone. The other four—those with Jan, Isabel, Deana, and Helen—were done face-to-face. The length of the interviews was usually in the 30- to 40-minute range, though a couple went over an hour, and one was only about 15 minutes. The interviews were recorded on a Roland recorder that writes directly to a compact disc. I had technical difficulties with the first two interviews. Alison's interview was the first completed interview, but I started an interview with Belen before her interview and finished it a couple of hours after the interview with Alison. Alison's interview had technician difficulties, as I failed to start the recording until about 10 minutes had transpired. I began an interview with Belen, and then we got cut off. When we reconnected, I failed again to record the first couple of

minutes. After we got started, Belen explained that he was driving and that the traffic had gotten bad, so we needed to talk later. After he arrived at his home in Austin, we were able to conduct the interview without difficulty. The other interviews encountered few difficulties, though there were some reception problems with Erin and Nick, a married couple living in Austin. I interviewed them a week apart, and each happened to be shopping in IKEA in Austin when I called them—hence the reception difficulties. Those interviews went quite well in spite of the respondents' location and multi-tasking.

The students seemed eager to participate and confident of their ability to assist. This may be due in part to my recruitment letter in which I said that they could be considered "student-experts" due to their having taken at least four online classes. At times a few of the students seemed to speak more as a representative of online students, so I had to ask them more specific questions and ask them to give examples relaying their own experiences. A few seemed to think that their online experiences encompassed most of the possibilities, but others had apparently given a great deal of thought to the topic in regard to how online instructor presence works in a class, how it shows, how it can be utilized more, and how it could be improved.

My goal was to make the interviews be collaborative conversations, as stipulated in grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). These were intended to be what Holstein and Gubrium (1995) call "active interviews"—conversations in which both researcher and respondent are engaged in the process of creating meaning. And, for the most part, I believe they were. In more than one instance, I would ask the respondent to consider something or to think of an example, and the initial answer would be, "No." But I waited as the mind churned, and the respondent then

provided a very thoughtful answer or example. On the other hand, one interviewee, Gloria, did not respond much at all, and her interview was only about 15 minutes. I had included sample questions in my recruitment letter, and she answered each of them in a brief paragraph in the email in which she volunteered to participate. Then, during the interview, she referred me to her email, which I then had to access in order to see what she had written. "Well, I don't have much to tell except what I wrote in that little paragraph that I sent you," she said. And she really did not. Nonetheless, her brief interview was useful in the position she staked out and in her ways of revealing and concealing. For example, when I asked her whether she found instructor presence valuable, she answered "No" but then proceeded to explain when it is important and why:

> No, the time that it is important for the instructor to be present is to clarify assignments and I think that I stated in the little paragraph, sometimes there are discrepancies in the syllabus and then on what the assignments are from Blackboard.

Alison also was willing to dig deeper and formulate ideas that gave a fuller picture. She was a bit despondent about what she perceived as a lack of instructor presence in her classes, but her memory was jogged regarding some positive examples of presence, and she spoke very eloquently not only about these but also about things she wished had been part of her online classes.

The Participants

Of those 16 respondents, there were 13 women and 3 men. Six were 19-26 years old, and 5 were 26-30. There was 1 respondent 31-40, and 2 each fell in the 41-50 and 51-60 age brackets. At the time of the interviews, 8 were current students at the community college, 6 were current students at a Texas university, and 2 were recent recipients of a baccalaureate degree. Of the current community college students, 6 were

working on an Associate's degree or certificate, including a retired teacher working on a second degree; the seventh was a university student, and the eighth was a recent university graduate. The eight university students included three recent graduates from the community college. The universities represented numbered four and included three of Texas's research universities. Five of the students had taken Spanish classes at the community college, and four were current students in Health Information Management Technology. Of the eight current community college students, only two were living in the college's home town; two others were occasionally commuting to the college from about 90 miles away. The diversity of the group demonstrates strongly the variety of students being served by the community college. Table 1 provides a description and summary of the participants and their experience.

Table 1

Participants in In-depth Interviews for Instructor Presence Study

Pseudonym	Age Group	Online Experience/Online Need	Current Status
Alison	19-25	7 courses, 4 in Spanish	University student who took CC courses
Belen	19-25	5 online classes Took non-major classes online in summer to have more flexible schedules	University student who took CC courses Political Science major
Caitlin	51-60	7 online classes Took online classes for flexibility Lives 90 miles from campus	Retired teacher seeking second degree at CC Health Information Management
Deana	31-40	8 online course Lives 90 miles from campus Has husband, 10-year-old son—flexibility needed	CC Student seeking Associate's degree or certificate Health Information Management
Erin	19-25	6 online courses Full-time student with full-time job Flexibility needed for junior and senior years	Recent recipient of Associate's degree Current university student Seeking baccalaureate degree
Fonda	26-30	10+ online courses Student returning after starts and stops Likes flexibility of online classes	CC student seeking Associate's degree Health Information Management
Gloria	41-50	13 courses Works full-time Needs flexibility	CC student seeking Associate's degree or certificate Health Information Management
Helen	41-50	10+ courses Husband works out of town much of time Has children	Current university student Recent recipient of Associate's degree Seeking baccalaureate degree in English
Isabel	26-30	8 courses Single mother with children in home Needs flexibility in schedule	CC student seeking Associate's degree Will soon move on to University to study Art History

Table 1 continues

Pseudonym	Age Group	Online Experience/Online Need	Current Status
Jan	51-60	6 online classes Needs flexibility 90 miles from university	RN seeking BSN from University Currently in online program at University
Karin	26-30	6 online classes Taking online classes to try to finish coursework in four years	Recent recipient of baccalaureate degree in English
Larry	26-30	8 courses Started with two online classes in military Liked flexibility	Political Science major at University Currently taking classes at CC
Madeline	26-30	15 online courses at CC, 25 total	Recipient of Associate's degree at CC Current university student Seeking baccalaureate degree
Nick	19-25	6 online classes Took online classes at CC for Spanish	Current university student Seeking baccalaureate degree In Theatre or Psychology Taking online classes at CC and University
Olivia	19-25	6 online classes Took online classes in Homeschool program	Recipient of Associate's degree at CC Current university student Seeking baccalaureate degree
Patti	19-25	5 online classes Prefers face-to-face classes but takes some classes online for flexibility	CC student seeking Associate's degree Will soon move on to University to pursue baccalaureate degree Taking one online University class

Theoretical Sampling

I continued close examination of the transcripts and open coding and constant comparison through the 13th interview and had begun to think about categories by the third interview. As I was completing the 13th interview, I received responses from three additional willing participants: a male student who had earlier canceled an interview, and from two females whose experiences promised to increase the range and diversity of my

subjects. The male student was only the third male participant. All three students were current students at the community college and in the 19-26 age bracket. Although I was not attempting to attain a representative sample, I believed that adding a few students from the more traditional community college demographic could help to saturate the concepts I was working on. Theoretical sampling calls for collecting additional data for the purpose of filling gaps in order to facilitate development of theory. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argued that selecting sources of data is an "ongoing process" and "sometimes even spontaneous" (p. 74). Judging that these respondents might enrich the data I would be working with, I added these three additional interviews and continued the processes of reading, listening, and open coding.

Open Coding

With each transcript, I began with a process of collecting indicators—that is, words, phrases, statements from the data, or observations. In Table 2, I have provided an extensive list of the indicators collected from the 16 interviews. Open coding, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008) entails close examination of the data, breaking it down into parts, making comparisons, and questioning. The indicators, then, are both identified bits of data collected and data that results from the process of breaking down the data. For instance, many students identified the abstract concept of availability as an important component of online instructor presence. Most talked about email and discussion-board responses, which are important indicators, and much more concrete than the concept of availability. An analysis of availability into parts reveals other indicators that might provide a possibility for discussion. Thus, I asked students whether they themselves had

Table 2

List of Initial Indicators and Concepts from Interviews

Self-teaching	Establish presence	Guided website tool	Résumé
Self-directed	Unestablished presence	Sample paper	Personal page
teacher engagement	videos	detail	attractive aesthetic
feedback	email	detailed explanation	organization
response	communicativeness	video links	syllabus
graded papers	tone	research	Expertise
timeliness	tact	reflection	credentials
commenting	hands-on	humanize	validation
updating course	merely facilitators	cats in sombreros	know material
adding elements	YouTube	direct feedback	introductory email
good/bad/ugly	not there	nothing to write	bienvenidos
direct instruction	just enrichment	nothing to share opinion	clear guidelines
communication	come alive	show not a robot	clear expectations
availability	crucial	kick it up a notch	allow challenges
email	flexibility	comments for progress	get in and get out
phone	cooperation	relate to material	minimal interaction
discussion board	anecdotes	necessary evil	instructor profile
course design	politeness	Khan Academy	spontaneous
links	encourage questions	Course Era	pictures
web design	answer questions	PowerPoint	intro forum
terrifying	audio	voiceover	knows more on topic
opinion	podcasts	camaraderie	face time
lecture	office hours	learning from others	human side

Table 2 continues

self-paced classes	Skype chatroom	creative forum	not avatar
flexibility	know as individual	extra reading	teacher instruction
personality	not present	elaborate explanation	Humanized
abrasive	virtually here	lose motivation	Rich
personal stories	one-on-one	timeliness	creativity
Information page	emotionally present	not robot	working ahead
picture	motivation	like instant messaging	info page

called instructors, whether an instructor had ever been available through cellphone or text messaging, and whether they had had an office visit with an instructor. Open coding and identifying of indicators and concepts is analytic, and that process is supplemented by comparing and contrasting, which facilitates the possibility of re-grouping indicators and concepts into more beneficial concepts and, ultimately, categories.

Memo Writing. Memo writing is an important part of the open coding process. Its purpose is to interrupt the process with reflection and probing to call into question the efficacy of the concept and both to reveal a more appropriate concept and to move the researcher toward more abstract and theoretical thinking. As I did open coding around the concept of availability, it occurred to me that availability is a more passive state, a potential for connection rather than actual connection. And, in some cases, I noted, students really did want simply a passive state of availability. Several students spoke of availability and noted the importance of an instructor's posting of a phone number, but most had never called an instructor. Both Gloria, who was generally negative about the need for instructor presence, and Deana, who was generally positive, spoke highly of an

instructor who was available by Skype, but neither had participated in those sessions.

This is a memo I wrote early in the process:

> Availability—sounds like students want to have email contact and phone contact, but few seem to make the call. They sound reluctant to. They don't want to call at home at all unless the instructor has specified exact times that would not interrupt schedule. Availability is pretty passive. A dictionary can be available on a shelf for years without actually being taken down. Some seem satisfied with availability, but some want the instructor to reach out by calling or emailing. That goes beyond availability. Is there a better term? Maybe communication? Communication is mentioned by some and communicativeness also. Communicativeness seems closer, but is there a term that would cover both the passive and the active?—both availability for communication and instructor-initiated? Or should the passive and active move different directions to more appropriate concepts?

From Concepts to Categories. From the concepts and indicators I drafted a rudimentary set of 10 concepts to begin the process of analyzing and breaking down into properties:

- Importance of Instructor Presence,
- Establishing Presence,
- Grading,
- Personal Stories,
- Instructor-Student Connection through Discussion Board,
- Student-Student Connection through Discussion Board,
- Direct Instruction,
- Availability,
- Self-Directedness, and
- Personalized Course Site.

The purpose of identifying the concepts was to use them to generate categories. The list appeared to need much work in both grouping concepts and in breaking down concepts to allow the data to generate a set of four or so categories that would be at a similar level of abstractness and be capable of containing the most important or most distributed indicators. Nonetheless, the concepts seemed to pass the tests put forward by Glaser and Strauss (1967)—that they be both analytic and sensitizing. A concept is analytic if it is abstract enough to be analyzed into properties or characteristics; it is sensitizing if it produces a picture that facilitates an understanding accessible through personal experience.

The process of analyzing concepts confirmed many of the identified indicators and led to new properties as well. And another reading of the transcripts added to the list of properties and indicators. This set of concepts was characterized by some overlap and gaps that demonstrated the need for analysis and re-grouping into categories. In the following sections I will provide a processual narration for the first phase of coding for each of the 10 concepts, examining and analyzing the indicators initially clustered with each concept. That process is impossible to describe or narrate with 100% accuracy since the axial coding phase actually overlapped the open coding phase. As Marshall and Rossman (1999) have said, qualitative methods are "messy" (p. 8). Nonetheless, I have included observations from the axial coding done and questions raised during the open coding process.

The Concept of Online Instructor Presence

This research study was designed to generate an understanding of the community college student's concept of instructor presence and to generate a useful and viable

definition. However, this analysis of instructor presence as a concept pointed to some problems. The first problem is its dimensionality, a term used by Corbin and Strauss, (2008), to denote the variability of properties that specify the range of a concept. The term "instructor presence" covers the range of properties from no presence, or "lack of presence, to "strong presence."

Understandably, the concept of online instructor presence is the messiest of all: I have included indicators that range all the way from presence to absence, competing terms that are at roughly the same level of abstraction as online instructor presence, and indicators that signify tools of instruction that students in the study connected with instructor presence. One respondent, Fonda, made the following comment regarding her experience with both lack of presence and strong presence:

> I feel that I have had both sides, one that was not present at all and "Just do it on your own and just get it to me," and then one that was present to me. I have been thinking about it since I saw that, I can tell whenever they are present and they are engaged as we are, they are in it, they want to help us, they are very, I guess, I don't know, you can tell that their hearts are in it.

Belen made a statement echoed by others about "self-paced" classes in which the instructor was not present versus classes with engaged instructors who were present. Deana mentioned an instructor she knew from a face-to-face class who was "not present" in the online class she took after that. She complained that he did not answer questions, replying instead, "Just look in the syllabus." Helen interpreted the two extremes of presence in an instructor's syllabus:

> I could tell the difference between a syllabus where the instructor was present in it and very detailed in how it was written versus one that had been copied from last semester. And that to me—that instructor was not present. None of the dates were changed and that was the same on Blackboard.

Helen also spoke of an instructor who showed herself to be "virtually there" when she found an interesting comment on the discussion board, broke into the discussion, and proposed that they turn the discussion in that new direction. Interestingly, Nick, a student in Theatre, noted a literature class in which the instructor's lack of presence on the discussion board was a good thing because it created "this great libertarian, free thing" On the other hand, he found the experience paradoxically "terrifying" because he was missing "that sort of formal expertise learned opinion."

Nick's observation was one that caused me to think about instructor presence not only as having a range of dimensionality between strong presence and lack of presence but also a range of dimensionality between heavy reliance upon the instructor and the opposite extreme of independence. In fact, several of the respondents spoke of instructor presence as "hands-on" attention. Deana spoke of missing the hands-on experience of the classroom. Erin said that she needed more hands-on attention in Math, a class dominated by practice exercises and tests and lacking much instructor activity. Larry spoke of making a trip to campus to see a professor when he needed a more hands-on explanation. Isabel, an effusive supporter of online coursework, said that she takes online classes because they are more hands-on and she gets more one-on-one attention from an instructor. Isabel actually used the term "hands-on" eight times and even managed to use it in conjunction with what appeared to be her favorite word, "opinion." She spoke of getting more hands-on opinions from her classmates on an Art Appreciation discussion board. Another student who used the term, Erin, clarified that she was not really talking about shifting the work burden to the teacher. Instead, by a hands-on approach she meant grading papers, responding to emails, answering questions, perhaps a short podcast

explanation. Deana, however, came close to speaking of instructor presence at the level of dependency, saying, "You cannot have somebody hold your hand the whole way through" and then adding parenthetically, "unfortunately that would be nice," I laughed and asked her specifically whether she really wanted that extreme level of attention:

> R – (Researcher) – Now tell me the truth, you said that would be nice, but when I listen to you talk about your own independence, you probably really would not like it if somebody were holding your hand all the way through, maybe at the first.
> D – No, because you cannot really put yourself into it. You are just being instructed.
> R – So you want both.
> D – Yes, I want the best of both worlds.

For Deana, the "best of both worlds" was instructor engagement and occasional one-on-one attention but at a balance that allowed for independence and flexibility.

And then there was Gloria, who asserted that instructors should be "merely facilitators" and otherwise should simply be around to answer questions or clarify instructions or ambiguities in the syllabus. It was not clear what she might want the instructor to facilitate other than the syllabus and the assignments, because she labeled discussion boards and the watching of videos "busy work." She was adamant, though, about the need for the instructor to be available for questions. She liked one instructor's use of a live chat session for students and saw that as an appropriate instance of instructor presence, but she did not participate because she did not have any questions that needed to be answered. She said of her own engagement that she was only as engaged as necessary. For discussion boards, her practice, she said, was to "get in and get out."

Another problem with my analysis of the concept of Instructor Presence was its inclusion of what I would call "components," features that students like or would like to see used for presentation of information, including videos, audios, podcasts, and

PowerPoints. These seemed to necessitate being separated from Instructor Presence as a concept.

Table 3

Analysis of Concept of Online Instructor Presence

Online Instructor Presence	Indicators	Indicators	Transcript References
	Teacher engagement Teacher instruction Virtually here Merely facilitators Not present Not there Terrifying Nothing to write Nothing to share Opinion on Nothing to share with other students about Links YouTube Lecture Videos Audio Podcasts Sample paper Video links Like guest speakers Instructor post own papers Need information Live video conference Twitter Course Era Khan Academy Direct feedback Staying "out of the weeds" Answer questions	Come alive Crucial Know as individual Instructor not "blending" students Together Encourage questions Emotionally present Humanized Face time Human side Not avatar Show not to be a robot More there Communication Feedback Response Graded papers Timeliness Commenting Tone Tact Politeness Detailed explanation Hands-on One on one Hold your hand Motivation Just being instructed Rich Just enrichment snippets	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The other important problem was in my inclusion of another aspect of or evidence of instructor presence, a concept that seemed to warrant standing alone—"feedback" is a

term that may suffice. This concept includes grading, commenting on papers, answering questions from email or on discussion board, and clarifications or corrections. An important concept, feedback needed to be separated from instructor presence as its own category or incorporated into a more abstract category. Table 3 on page 112 presents indicators from the interviews that were relevant to the concept of online instructor presence.

The Concept of Establishing Presence

"Establishing Presence" is nearly an instance of what Corbin and Strauss (2008) called an "In-Vivo Code" (p. 65), a concept using the words of a respondent rather than a term created by the researcher. I took the term from the first student I interviewed, Alison—before realizing that I had seen the term in Dennen (2007, p. 96). This term denotes a process in which an instructor acts to make presence a part of a course. The term is fruitful in that it approximates my tentative definition of instructor presence but focuses more on process, showing that instructor presence is more dynamic than the tentative definition indicates. At the outset of this study I defined "instructor presence" as "whatever an online instructor says or does or presents that leads students to perceive the instructor as an active participant in the course." "Establishing instructor presence" puts the focus on the processes that work to give an impression of presence at the beginning of a course and implies at least one other process, which might be termed "maintaining presence."

Alison spoke of an instructor who has not yet established presence or does not have an established presence. She even speaks of an "unestablished presence." Specifically, her comments refer to the necessity of grading in order to establish

presence, but she implies a deeper understanding that grading is just one part of the process: “I do not expect if you turn in an assignment two weeks early to have it graded within 24 hours, but definitely a good turnover on grades responding is a great way to establish presence.”

The word “establish” comes from the Latin word *stabilire,* to stabilize, or make firm; and it has a richness of meanings, three of which seem most applicable here: to bring into being on a stable basis, to cause to be accepted, and to show to be valid or true. Alison is searching for instructor presence in ways that create a foundation for the course and for a student-instructor relationship. She wants an instructor who has won her acceptance, demonstrating the course approach to be valid—someone “virtually there,” as Helen said. The concept of establishing presence promises a richer concept than has been formulated so far, and it suggests a category including course design or other elements. Table 4 shows the indicators associated with the concept of Establishing Presence.

Table 4

Analysis of Concept of Establishing Presence

Establishing Presence	Indicators	Transcript References
	Establish presence Unestablished presence Good/bad/ugly Personality Abrasive Personal stories Up-to-date Welcome email Like an actual classroom	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Grading

The respondents for this research study were greatly concerned with grading and generally agreed with Alison concerning its importance as an element of instructor presence. Students object primarily to lack of timeliness in grading and to receiving a grade without comments on written work. Karin tells about a paper that she turned in three weeks early but did not receive a grade until the class was over:

> I could not understand why it wasn't graded by the last day of class. And I emailed her over and over and over and over again because I wanted to know what I did. I wanted to know if I improved or how I could improve. It would have been nice to know before my final. I like to know where I am standing in a course at all times. Do I need to increase my study habits, or are my study habits accurate? What am I lacking? . . . What do I need to do the best? What are my chances of succeeding and excelling? And she ignored the paper. I don't know how you ignore a paper for, like, five weeks.

Karin and Patti and others spoke of grading done automatically by the course management system, such as exercises and tests in Spanish and Mathematics. They want to know that the instructor is present even in such a system. Nick and Karin note, for instance, that automatic grading can create problems that have to be checked by instructors. If an instructor says that he or she will check the grading within a specified time and then does not follow through, the instructor's credibility and the student's perception of presence are undermined. Nick and Karin each reported having at least one Spanish instructor who was just setting up a system that mostly ran on its own and another who was engaged and present in other ways. Karin noted that she had a Spanish instructor who showed presence by checking the quizzes quickly. Patti explained the value of receiving a comment even on something graded automatically: "It is not just the generic 'You made an 8/10, you get this grade,' but the teacher was involved with the grading."

The other issue is graded work with no comments. I asked Karin if she had ever received a grade on the paper that had not been graded before the final exam. The following dialogue illustrates her despair about the situation:

> K – I got to see the grade on the paper the day after the course ended. So that was not good timing at all.
> R – Was it actually graded?
> K – Yes, she actually gave me a grade on the paper. And that same time is when I got the grade in the class as a whole, but it was frustrating.
> R – Did it have comments?
> K – No, she did not give comments at all.

Alison also complained about receiving a Spanish paper without comments. She asked: "What made you decide the grade? What was your grading rubric? How did you even come about this grade?" Alison reported that when she emailed these questions to the instructor, the instructor replied that she did not like the writing style in the paper. Alison commented that even that limited response was better than no response. Another student, Jan, complained that some instructors "just give you the grade and you just go on about your business." But she also said that she likes it best when she gets comments, stating wryly,

> Some teachers will actually comment on what you did wrong. . . . Even though I do something wrong, if they tell me what I did wrong and what I could have done to get it right, I like that the best. If I can be told, "You did this. This is how you fix it" and I fix it and turn it in and get the next paper and it says, "You fixed it," then that's great. But they pay attention to who you are and what they said last time and I like that."

One point Jan made was that grading comments were needed to enable the possibility of improvement. Alison asserted that comments gave her a chance to "kick it up a notch"—to redouble her efforts to improve, that is. Lack of grading, however, is common, according to Madeline. "You just lose motivation," she said. Another student, Olivia, also complained about grading not done before the end of the semester, but she was

appreciative of comments that told her how to improve. Similarly, Erin praised an instructor who went through a paper and "made notes and highlighted things" and explained where more elaboration was needed. She noted: "That was helpful, too, because it helps you move forward in a class because you could say, "This is where I started and this is what I can do to improve." Table 5 delineates the indicators for the concept of Grading.

Table 5

Analysis of Concept of Grading

Grading	Indicators	Transcript References
	Timely grades Grading with comments Presence in your grades Comments for progress Comments help students to kick it up a notch Instructor just giving a grade No comments Lose motivation	A, C, E, F, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Personal Stories

The concept of Personal Stories was mentioned by half the respondents but highly emphasized by Alison, Belen, and Caitlin. Other students (Erin and Patti) liked the use of personal stories, mainly to give the "human side" of the instructor. Erin wanted assurance that the instructor was not a "robot," and Patti wanted to see that the instructor was not an "avatar" and wanted to be assured that the class was not going to be a "master-slave situation." For most of these students, the place for these personal stories was the

instructor information page. Caitlin said that it helped when instructors put in "bits and pieces of their lives—without being too personal."

Beyond the idea of instructors' providing personal stories to help students to get to know them, Alison, Belen, and Caitlin agreed that personal stories and anecdotes could facilitate understanding of the course material by giving them something to "relate to." Caitlin mentioned a Geography course in which the professor posted pictures from places he had been all around the world. She said it was helpful in learning about both the subject and the professor. In another instance, Alison provided an interesting angle on how her learning was aided:

> I think that one of the ways especially when it comes down to studying for a test one of the things that kind of draws your memory. . . . is the lecture on the different topics covered and the personal stories that the professors provide you. And I think that is a great way to establish a presence in an online class. . . . For instance, with history, particular instances where maybe they dealt with local government or worked for an election, for instance. And I think, if they were able to provide personal stories, it would definitely help.

Another respondent, Belen, said that it helped if classmates shared personal stories of an experience in this regard, and he praised a professor whose personal story, whose disclosure, helped bring understanding about how the instructor taught the class:

> My class last semester at the University was an Applied Macroeconomics class, and the professor was talking about how economics and politics are related, and he said that he was of a liberal persuasion and he . . . talked about how he had grown up with his parents being Democrats, and also this played a part in the way he taught the class. I think that really helps.

Table 6 presents an analysis of the indicators for the concept of Personal Stories.

Table 6

Analysis of Concept of Personal Stories

Personal Stories	Indicators	Transcript References
	Give personal view Make possible to relate to material Human side Provide "bits and pieces" of instructor's lives anecdotes case scenarios	A, B, C, E, I, L, N, O, P

The Concept of Instructor-Student Connection through Discussion Board

The concept of Instructor-Student Connection through Discussion Board is problematic as a stand-alone concept. The natural approach seemed to be to combine it with the other concept related to use of discussion boards, Student-Student Connection. However, the community college students I interviewed tended to see instructor response as a most critical part of instructor presence, whether that response was on an instructor question-and-answer forum for questions or within a student discussion forum or in an email or in a phone call.

Respondents valued the forums available for student questions, noting the usefulness of a medium in which they could not only get answers but also read replies to other students. Caitlin, Deana, and Fonda agreed about the value of these forums; and even Gloria assented to the need for an instructor to be present to answer questions and provide clarification when the syllabus or instructions for an assignment are unclear. The students' focus was on getting a response—anywhere—not necessarily in a forum situation. They seemed willing to have questions answered and explanations given, through email just as much as on a discussion forum, even though they might not have

the benefit of other students' questions. This concept probably will end up subsumed in another concept or category.

Table 7 presents the analysis of the concept of Instructor-Student Connection through Discussion Board.

Table 7

Analysis of Concept of Instructor-Student Connection through Discussion Board

	Indicators	Transcript References
Instructor Student Connection through Discussion Board	Instructor presence Presence provides snapshot of the person Intro forum Skype chatroom Opinion Live video conference Answer student questions Correction of errors Clarification Helping student stay "out of the woods" Snapshot of the person Spontaneous participation Creative participation	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Student-Student Connection through Discussion Board

The concept of Student -Student Connection through Discussion Board was seen by this group of community college students as very important to the online environment, but less important as an element of instructor presence itself. Fifteen of the community college students expressed an opinion that the discussion board adds to the online experience. Caitlin named the student discussion board along with instructor response as the only two methods in an online class of "simulating a classroom." One student, Olivia, reported that she did not have good experiences in online classes until encountering a

discussion board in her third online class. Her first class had been a self-taught Spanish class with little instructor presence, and then her second class had been an English class in which students simply downloaded Word documents with instructions and then did the assignments, with little interaction with the instructor or other students. After that, though, she took a Humanities class that introduced her to student forums. "I liked that," she said, "and felt that there were other kids in the class, and I was able to meet some friends that I already knew, and it was nice that they were in there with me. And I really enjoyed that class. I felt that the teacher was there and involved." She came to see the discussion board as a place for students to connect and learn together. In fact, she said that learning "multiplied exponentially" through interaction on the discussion board. Helen spoke of camaraderie developed with classmates on discussion boards. She also cited learning from other students, especially in a Creative Writing class that involved students' critiquing of each other's stories—a very effective way, she said, of gaining needed help to improve her fiction.

Two respondents spoke to the issue of the asynchronous nature of online discussion—with quite divergent observations. Erin claimed that she preferred online discussion to classroom discussion because she did not have to answer immediately. Instead, she had time to reflect and even research before adding in her response. For Isabel, however, things were quite different: she spoke of a discussion at a deadline that transcended its asynchronous nature so much that it seemed, she said, like an instant messaging discussion. My interview with Isabel was face-to-face, and she was quite animated as she described people in an Art Appreciation class making comments and others joining in almost immediately with responses. That class was so powerful, she

said, that she changed her major from Nursing to Art History. Isabel testified that she thrives on opinion. She said that she wanted to know everyone's opinion and to share her opinions—and that a discussion board provided the perfect vehicle.

On the other hand, other respondents who reported learning from others on the discussion board still found it to be less beneficial and occasionally lacking depth of discussion. Karin said that she enjoyed the exchanges on the discussion board, especially when asked her opinion: "What was your opinion? And that is always, I guess it is kind of a key phrase for me when I am in a classroom. I love that, I eat that up." Still, she eschews light conversation on the discussion board, preferring to engage in a minimum of "brief chitchat" before getting to "the real conversation."

For two respondents, the student discussion board was primarily a nuisance that they had to tolerate. Jan reported that her usual practice is to work well ahead in her classes, making it necessary at times to come back later to discussion board, and most of the time she is not willing to. She also said that she did not find much instructor presence in the discussion board and that she engaged in only as much discussion as necessary. Another respondent, Gloria, was disdainful of the discussion board. Asked if she minded participating in discussion boards, she responded, "No, I think that it is a total waste of time." When asked about learning from other students, she answered, "No. My experience in Blackboard was, 'This is an example: listen to this video and comment on it.' Ok. I don't care what other people say about it. You know, 'What did you learn from this video?'—and it was just a waste of time."

The student-student discussion board created problems for my analysis because the discussion board is only tangentially related to instructor presence. It has two areas in

which it may impact instructor presence: (a) the instructor's role in facilitating the discussion and social interaction, and (b) the instructor's participation in the discussion board. The former is an instance of what the Community of Inquiry group (Akyol & Garrison, 2008; Anderson et al., 2001; Berge, 2008; Garrison et al., 2000; Shea et al., 2003; Shea et al., 2005) call teaching presence—the others being design/organization and direct instruction. The research question here, however, is how students perceive instructor presence; and in this group of community college students, few perceived instructor presence in the simple facilitation of discourse. However, Helen actually called Blackboard a facilitator of interaction between students and instructor. I then asked her specifically, "Is there any instructor presence in how the instructor facilitates discussions among students?" Her answer was that there was some instructor presence in how instructors word the questions. In other words, simply facilitating discussion is primarily a question of design or organization. One other student, Madeline, spoke of facilitation of discourse as related to instructor presence. She said: "I feel as if the teacher was kind of there to facilitate the discussion, I felt that they were kind of more present. And, of course, if I was able to communicate with them when needed through email, I felt that they were a part of the class." On the other hand, Madeline was actually speaking of instances on discussion board in which the instructor "came back on" and asked a secondary question. Helen, too, spoke of an instructor who showed that she was "virtually there" by stepping into a discussion on the forum and suggesting a new direction for conversation. But in both these cases, the instructor is interjecting, to use Helen's term, himself or herself into the conversation rather than just facilitating it.

In fact, this group of community college students found presence on the discussion board primarily in instructor response. Alison, Belen, Caitlin, Deana, Erin, Fonda, Helen, Isabel, Karin, Larry, Madeline, Nick, Olivia, and Patti all spoke of the need of instructors to show their presence by responding on the discussion board. Belen said,

> Sometimes professors require you to post something and then they reply to the stuff that you post. That way you have the professor looking at what exactly you post and they are giving you feedback. So that also creates instructor presence I would think.

Erin said that instructors could "play a big role" by creating a discussion board mainly for students. How so? By responding to questions on the discussion board. Nick said that he found minimal instructor presence on the discussion boards, and those times were when the instructor answered questions on the board. Students do not seem to want instructors to dominate the discussion board, but they want to see at least some interaction in the discussion, primarily at the beginning. Patti emphasized the importance of instructors' showing at least a minimal presence in discussions:

> I understand that in huge classes like the ones at a university or whatever, the instructor might not have time to read everyone's individual stuff, but the instructor should make an appearance per se on the discussion board and kind of act like the moderator. Let someone know that there is a really truly good piece up there and tell them that it was good, because if they are just writing it for other students to read, you are going to get the lower case I's, the lol's, and other stuff. . . . But the instructor must make an appearance on the discussion board by posting something or kind of indicating that they are actually reading—even if they're not always commenting.

Table 8 presents an analysis of the concept of Student-Student Connection through Discussion Board.

Table 8

Analysis of Concept of Student-Student Connection through Discussion Board

	Indicators	Transcript References
Student-Student Connection through Discussion Board	Instructor presence if actively facilitated Instructor participation Simulating being in a classroom Camaraderie Learning from others Cooperation Sharing opinion Multiplying learning Engaged more with students if instructor engaged Improved by research and reflection between posts Create forums Student critiques valuable Like instant messaging Busy work "Get in and get out"	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Direct Instruction

One of the sub-questions for this study is "How important is an instructor's provision of direct instruction?" The respondents in this study said that direct instruction was very important as an element of online study and online instructor presence. For instance, Alison claimed that she had never really experienced much online instructor presence because her classes had been mostly exercises and textbook assignments for Spanish and Math classes. When asked about direct instruction, she replied: "No, I have not personally encountered that—although, I think that would be very important and a great asset for an online course." Olivia explained that what she is looking for is that "a real teacher will instruct a class and stuff." Another student, Helen, equated instructor presence with "actual instruction"—for instance, instruction about how to write a paper or whether to use MLA or APA. Students also spoke of the importance of providing

direct instruction through a variety of means—for example, a sample paper (Madeline) or even one of the professor's papers (Deana), doing an assignment along with the class as a demonstration (Patti), giving detailed answers on an instructor discussion board (Caitlin, Deana, Helen), downloadable podcasts that could be listened to while doing other things (Isabel), and live video chat (Jan). Nearly every student mentioned answering questions in an email. Erin said that one of her classes was more effective because it was online and featured "quick and reliable email responses from professors, with feedback, with answers, with references maybe." On the other hand, Patti pointed out that when many students were having the same problem, a class email was the better way to go.

Students expressed great interest in direct instruction provided through video, podcasts, PowerPoints, and other technologically innovative methods. Alison said that her Math class could have greatly benefited from short 10-minute podcasts that provided explanation. She added that a podcast could give a personal aspect to the class because the student could hear tone and expression in a voice or even hear a personal story. Olivia mentioned the use of audio in relation to instructor presence: "Without the little discussion forums or the audio clips, I felt that the teacher was kind of saying you are on your own—you figure it out—and I am too worried about my campus class. So I really think that it is important for the teacher to be there."

Respondents spoke most strongly of their appreciation for videos. Jan said, wistfully: "I like those, and we don't have any." The comment did not seem to make sense, but she explained further that the Nursing program she was in did not use videos—but that she had liked the use of videos in previous lower-level classes such as Psychology. The respondents seemed willing to accept links to videos or audios or

websites and to accept them as an important part of instructor presence, but they wanted professors themselves to create at least some of their own videos. Deana expressed this position powerfully:

> There is never a time when direct instruction is not important. As far as if it is a paper that they want you to write, they are going to have to give you some direct instruction. They just can't say, "Write this paper." They have to tell you what font they want it in, or how many pages they want, and what they want the topic to be or—if you get to pick a topic—what is the appropriateness of the topic that you can pick? Things like that. So it definitely should be a part of the class. It does not have to be a big percentage of the class because being an online student you have to adapt to the online environment. You have to take initiative and do things on your own.

Belen agreed that direct instruction does not have to be pervasive, remarking: "I prefer that an online professor has his own videos and supplemented with an external link."

Students were generally less impressed with PowerPoint displays, but they were more impressed when the PowerPoint was produced by the instructor, especially if the instructor did a voiceover. Patti and Belen both spoke highly of PowerPoints with voiceover. Another student, Fonda, said that she preferred PowerPoints over video because she could read at the same time—and she liked it even more if these were created by the instructor personally. She said that she liked all kinds of instructive support, and that she would appreciate even PowerPoints from the textbook as a supplement to a self-paced class.

The respondents were more willing to see instructor presence in links and the posting of research work and other sources as long as these were a supplement to the instructor's own work. Caitlin said that the internet itself as part of an online class is "almost like having guest speakers come into the class room." She and others (Alison, Belen, Caitlin, Fonda, and Nick) said that they liked being able to search for YouTube

videos to find extra instructions and extra information, but they expressed a desire to see direct instruction first.

In Chapter Two I asked the question "Is there room in instructor presence for that much-disparaged dinosaur, the lecture?" Advocates of learner-centered instruction (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Berge & Collins, 1995; Boggs, 1995/1996, 1999; Lasley, 1998) have called for instructors to become facilitators who manage the learning environment so that students can be active learners. These educators have generally opposed the lecture because they see it as part of a teaching environment instead of a learning environment. A lecture involves passive students expected to take notes and absorb a lecture, to receive the knowledge presented by the lecturer.

However, a number of studies (Copley, 2007; Cramer et al., 2007; Dyson, 2008; Hughes, 2009; Laves, 2010; Lee & Chan, 2007; Reupert et al., 2009; Yu-Chang et al., 2009) have indicated that students accept the validity of lecture, especially with changed formats—for instance, shorter lectures instead of 50- or 80-minute lectures, or lectures that call for pausing and reflecting or asking questions—practices that incorporate active-learning principles. Along these lines, Jones (2011) argued that lectures could be made compatible with principles of active learning when students are given activities that require them "to read, speak, listen, think deeply, and write" (p. 77).

The interview respondents in this study saw some drawbacks in the use of lectures; for instance, Nick said, "I could understand where a video of a 50-minute lecture could get a little tedious to watch." Belen called lecture a "necessary evil." Helen expressed the fear that a video lecture would be passive learning, and she prefers to be able to raise her hand and ask questions. She compared lecture to reading, which she saw

as similar to a "required lecture" in her brain; but she maintained that it involved more active learning because she could go back and re-read.

Still, students were interested in the possibilities afforded by video; and they liked the idea that they could listen to a lecture more than once or pause or rewind. Helen liked having a PowerPoint with voiceover, because it had both words and voice. The medium of lecture actually received a fairly strong endorsement. Larry reported liking a lecture to help focus on what has been learned from reading: "Once you hear the teacher, it kind of comes in perspective." Belen actually reported that he often sought out lecture, sitting in a classroom lecture that was being filmed for an online class, for instance. He said also that he and a friend often recorded lectures to listen to later. And he even went searching for online videos for extra instruction. He spoke very highly of videos from the Khan Academy (khanacademy.org) because of the short instructive YouTube lecture-videos. Moreover, he suggested that the free courses at Course Era (coursera.org) were good models for online instruction. Those courses have a very simple online format and feature extensive use of video lecture.

Karin spoke with great passion about an innovative government instructor who used video to stimulate active learning among students:

> He would send us a video of him discussing the topic that we were on at the time, and this video would be completely interactive. He would send you to the different links to look at something and ask you to pause and think about your opinion. And you had to get your hands in it and get dirty and figure pieces and parts out. He made you really take a part of the learning and put it in your hands, and it was amazing. And it was a phenomenal course because he simply got really creative with it. . . . You would get interactive, crazy things popping up on your computer screen, and it was fantastic because it really drew in your attention and he was obviously very aware that today's students need kind of a varied approach to their learning style. You need the video, the words, the things to do, to kind of really ingrain it into your mind with the plethora of students that they are getting in these online courses with very different backgrounds and very different

> learning styles. You really have to give them each option in order to teach themselves. And this professor was so creative, and it was not like any lecture you get when you sit down in a hall full of 200 students trying to learn English. It was very tailored to what students really need and to each aspect of learning with the visuals, the auditory. It was just out of this world, and I think that professor should probably get a medal or something because that was fantastic.

A related topic is instructor expertise, and it seems related to student's desire to have instructors do some of their own video.

Table 9 provides the indicators of the Concept of Direct Instruction.

Table 9

Analysis of Concept of Direct Instruction

	Indicators	Transcript References
Direct Instruction	Credentials Demonstrates expertise Knows more on topic Elaborate explanation Full explanation off top of head Self-done video Self done audio Self-done podcasts Self-done PowerPoint Self-done PowerPoint with voiceover Written lecture Shared papers Extra reading Lectures Lectures necessary evil Links to videos Links to websites Lectures with feedback Direct instruction validates learning Expertise enhanced by allowing challenges	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Availability

Every student participating in this research study identified availability as an essential ingredient of instructor presence, perhaps even the most important ingredient. Table 10 shows the set of indicators identified as touching on the concept of availability. Nick said: "I think instructor presence is almost part and parcel to communication. . . ." Students cited availability through an instructor discussion board, through email, through telephone, and through Skype or even texting. Caitlin and Gloria were impressed that instructors were available to be contacted through Skype. Respondents stressed the importance of rapid response to questions and timeliness. Those who complained—Patti, for example—were bothered by lack of response or slow response, especially if an instructor gave an answer too late for it to be used in the completion of an assignment. Patti also reported being pleased with an instructor who was available to students through texting.

On the other hand, availability is not necessarily equated with actual contact. Most students report never having called an instructor on the phone, but they want to know that the instructor is available if they need to call. They prefer to know exact times of availability so that they do not interrupt a professor's life unnecessarily. Deana also stressed the importance of an instructor's showing some warmth and willingness to communicate:

> I had a class in which the professor—I knew him, I had taken him on campus, so I knew how he operated—but online he was so different. He was so cold, to the point where you would send him an email and he would say, "Look in the syllabus." Do you know what I mean? Instead of saying, "Well, here is what you need to do, and here is where you can find it." I have had professors where you really have to work hard in order to get them to talk to you.

In sum, the respondents wanted to avoid burdening instructors with excessive communication—they just wanted to know that the instructor was available when needed.

Table 10 gives the analysis of the indicators for the concept of Availability.

Table 10

Analysis of Concept of Availability

	Indicators	Transcript References
Availability	Communicativeness Email Office hours Phone Timeliness Quick response Not robot Not avatar Building relationship with professor	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Self-Directedness

Several respondents used the term "self-directedness" for the necessity that online students take greater responsibility for their work—or the ability they have to determine how and when they carry out various requirements of a course. Respondents related it to the flexibility sought by students as a means of allowing them to take college classes while working full time or taking care of young children or living too far away to commute often. Some students related it to the freedom to do schoolwork when they wanted to and to arrange their schedules with greater control. Belen pointed out that even though one might think a self-paced class with no deadlines is the ultimate in freedom, it is actually very helpful to have deadlines to work with in order to avoid getting so far behind that success is impossible. Several respondents (Patti, Deana, Jan, Karin, Fonda)

noted that having freedom to control more of their schedules required giving up some freedom and working ahead. Patti stated: "It is more freeing to go ahead and read the stuff that you need to read than to watch TV." Fonda added: "I had to create a schedule. Otherwise, I would not hold myself accountable. I was afraid that I would procrastinate." Madeline explained the hard lesson of self-directedness that beginning online students must learn:

> In an online class you have to keep up with it for yourself, and you have to budget your time and make sure that you are making time for all of your work and I think that in the beginning it is hard for a lot of people. I think, yeah, it is probably more important in the beginning.

Respondents generally did not think highly of self-paced courses, mainly due to lack of instructor presence and lack of instructor contact to help stay on schedule (Alison, Belen, Olivia, Erin, Nick, Patti). Fonda said that she even took classes less seriously when they were self-paced, though she liked a self-paced Medical Terminology class. Olivia said that a self-paced class would be all right if the class were one that she was really interested in, giving the example of her Spanish class because she liked to study Spanish. Other students, however—Alison, Nick, and Erin—complained specifically about self-paced Spanish classes. Olivia added that she would prefer not to have a self-paced class if it involved difficult material. For such a class, she said, she would need a class with instructor presence. Helen reported that she changed instructors because the course lacked instructor presence and was more like a "correspondence class."

Some students claimed that having greater control over an online class contributed to increased learning. Isabel attributed greater learning to self-teaching. She said that she learned more because she was "more engaged" in an online class because "you have to self-teach yourself the majority of the time." Furthermore, she had to push

herself to study more, and that increased her success. Fonda also connected her ability to direct her own studies in online classes with increased learning:

> I think I learn more--honestly because I can do it on my own time. I don't have to wake up at 9 o'clock and go sit in class and dread being there. Or if I have to go to class at 6 at night when all my friends are going to the movies, I am going to be sitting there mad because I am in class. It just--I don't know—it is just a personal thing. I can do it on my own time and I have all my assignments laid out. So that is an important thing to me, too, because I have my planner exactly organized. . . . I know what is expected of me, it is all laid out and I can get it done ahead of time if I need to. It works for my life, so. . . .

Table 11 provides the analysis of indicators for the concept of Self-Directness.

Table 11

Analysis of Concept of Self-Directedness

	Indicators	Transcript References
Self-Directedness	Self-paced classes Self-teaching Flexibility Observer before participant Working ahead Minimal interaction Paradox of freedom through deadlines and planning Get in and get out	A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P

The Concept of Personalized Course Site

In the conversations with participants, the course website seemed to be an issue just slightly below the surface much of the time. The respondents did not bring up the course website itself very often, but they spoke often of elements of it as essential to instructor presence: organization, detailed syllabus, personal touch in syllabus, instructor

information page with contact information as well as some personal information, a forum for course introductions, and instructor response on forum.

Organization was a concern to several participants. Olivia complained about a class in which lack of organization made finding assignments difficult. She remarked: "When it is organized, well, I feel like the teacher cares more and wants us to be able to use it better." Karin compared a poorly organized website to "having a pile of papers scattered across the entire room." Organization, she said, created an "environment where students can teach themselves."

Respondents' largest concern related to organization was the syllabus. Caitlin praised her class because it had a syllabus that was "very clear and concise about what you need for the course, what expectations are, the grading system, testing policies, oh, everything." Erin agreed about the need for "clear expectations, clear guidelines going in," and added "especially in the first couple of days." Helen explicitly connected the syllabus with instructor presence: "I could tell the difference between a syllabus where the instructor was present in it and very detailed in how it was written versus one that had been copied from last semester. And that to me, that instructor was not present." She wanted current due dates, semester work load, assignment weights, number and type of tests, essay topics, policies, and standards. She said that when she found such information all laid out, she could see that the instructor was "going to be a more engaged professor." Other respondents (Madeline, Nick, Larry) also spoke of the importance of detail in the syllabus and in instructions. Nick said that a well-done syllabus showed great presence but that a syllabus with spelling errors made it appear that the instructor did not care.

Respondents wanted a website to be inviting—whether through organization or aesthetics or attractiveness. Karin remarked that she thought an instructor who did not put effort into a syllabus would then "not put the effort into the website." And for her, organization and the completeness of the syllabus were partly an issue of aesthetics. One respondent, Erin, was not concerned about attractiveness, saying that "fancy colors or pictures" would not make much difference. But she did find it important that a website not be "cluttered" or have "problems with navigation." On the other hand, Fonda greatly appreciated an attractive and organized website with "color coding" as opposed to another class that was all black and white and "dull." Caitlin found attractiveness in funny YouTube videos embedded by an instructor. Olivia associated disorganization with unattractiveness. Several respondents (Belen, Fonda, Erin, Patti) also perceived a personal touch as an element that makes the course website more inviting. Some found that personal touch in the opening page of the website, some in an instructor's information page. Nearly all respondents spoke highly of an introductory forum in which students introduced themselves. Nick spoke of creative use of visuals from a Spanish teacher he found to be engaged: "She would put up these funny pictures, and it would be like pictures of cats in sombreros and like Elvis with Spanish words over it. . . . She took her time and got into Photoshop and did this and showed me she is interested and invested. . . ." And Karin spoke eloquently and enthusiastically of a well-done front page:

> I had a Spanish professor, one of the good ones, who put on the very first page you opened up and it says, "Bienvenidos!" and there is a picture of a lady sitting in Mexico with a Mexican flag flying high and it is beautiful and below she has this wonderful little blurb about Mexico City, and it just invited you in. And you just wanted to say, "Bienvenida, professora!" Because it just kind of drew you in. And there are ones that there is nothing there. There are no announcements, and you kind of open up the page and oh nothing still, still nothing. I think it is kind of a letdown to not have anything, but I don't think that it needs to be that it took

> you a million years, but maybe something that you think is funny, like a funny cartoon to start off right. One of the math professors had found a corny little newspaper comic from the Sunday paper that said something about how math was crazy. I would have been so amused I would want to go to the math page all the time. Those little goofy things draw people back; it shows that you took the time.

Respondents wanted a personal touch on the instructor information page. Nick wanted more detail about the teacher in order to "get sort of a more personal feel." He said this humanized the instructor and helped him to get a feel for the instructor's personality. He also liked having an instructor picture to enhance the instructor's presence. Olivia also wanted an information page with a picture: "It is just nice to picture somebody. That gives a better sense of instructor presence." And she wanted a bit more detail— "just a little bit of the outside of their lives"—in order to see the "real person." Other respondents (Belen, Larry, Helen, Jan, Patti, Fonda) also wanted to see a picture of the instructor. Caitlin said that the instructor's introduction was "like you were in an actual classroom," and Madeline said that she used an instructor's biography to determine how to relate to the instructor in assignments. Jan liked the idea of a short welcoming video from the instructor, with an overall view of the course and expectations. Alison, of course, wanted "personal stories." Larry explained how attractiveness and an instructor page all relate to the inviting nature of the course website:

> Yeah I think that it is great whenever professors tell you a little about themselves. They put in a picture and even decorate the page in a fashion that would fit the subject. So I think that it is great when they do that. It makes the class more inviting and the subject more inviting when they do something like that.

Respondents saw the instructor page as a place to begin showing expertise needed to see the online experience as complete. Belen wanted to see an instructor's résumé, Fonda wanted to know something of educational background, and Isabel wanted to know where her instructors had gone to school, their majors and degrees, and why they were

teaching those classes. Caitlin perceived the issue from a different angle, perceiving the instructor introduction as an opportunity to express a "love for their course material."

Students spoke positively of a welcome email from an instructor at the beginning of the course, especially if it had a personal touch. Though not really part of the course website, students saw a connection because of its nature as an invitation to the website. Karin liked the email reminder of the first day of class and the instructor's personal introduction. She said, "For me personally, I love the first day of class email." Helen actually mentioned the welcome letter that comes through email or on the course website.

Nearly every student mentioned the importance of the welcome page for students, but they also insisted upon the importance of some kind of response from the instructor. Patti explained that 'It gives the students a chance to kind of try the water before they have to turn an assignment in, because it is so much stress with the first assignment in any semester." The instructor's response was important in creating a connection between instructor and students, and in beginning to establish the instructor as someone with expertise in the subject. Deana says that an instructor response is great, if only a thank-you for being in the class or for doing the introduction. And Caitlin spoke of instructors as "very present" when they responded to students on the introduction forum. Erin spoke of a specific introductory forum that gave her a stronger feeling of instructor presence:

> This one Humanities professor was one of the professors that I remember. We had this assignment to think about a gift that we would give to one of the ancient figures and I said that I would give Buddha a hug because he was not materialistic, and this professor responded back and said that he liked that, he thought that was funny. So school interactions like that have been helpful and give reassurance that you are going in the right direction and also help just to establish a good relationship between the student and professor.

Table 12 gives the analysis of indicators for Personalized Course Site.

Table 12

Analysis of Concept of Personalized Course Site

	Indicators	Transcript References
Personalized Course Site	Course design Organization Student organization enabled by course organization Syllabus Personality revealed by syllabus Aesthetics Information page Personal page Instructor picture Instructor profile Resume Instructor forum Instructor technological knowledge Troubleshooting More detail in written biography	B, C, D, E, F, H, I, J, K, L, N, O, P

Identification of Emerging Categories and Axial Coding

Axial coding involves identifying a final set of categories and relationships among them. In the case of this research process, axial coding was advancing during the open coding process through analysis and identification of problems with concepts as possible categories, the clustering of concepts, and the identification of relationships among concepts—all while searching for a set of unifying categories. Categorization involves an inductive building up from facts—the data—and identifying indicators and concepts and grouping them into categories that are of greater abstraction. As I worked through axial coding, five categories emerged from the process:

1. The Hotel in Tahiti—flexibility (the *why*)

2. Instructor Presence—the core category around which everything else revolves (the *what*)
3. Bienvenidos—inviting and welcoming students into the course (the *how*)
4. Cats in Sombreros—sustaining presence (interaction)
5. Kick It Up a Notch—self-directedness and self-teaching (consequences)

The Hotel in Tahiti

This category was not among those concepts first considered, but it underlay nearly every discussion. It refers to why students take online classes and even why instructors teach online—for flexibility. But flexibility is a deep category covering many kinds of flexibility. One of the respondents, Patti, provided the In-Vivo Code that I appropriated for this term when she spoke of the option that an instructor or student had to do online coursework from a hotel in Tahiti. She said: "It should not only be focused on what is easiest for the student because just like the students are able to work on their course at the hotel in Tahiti, the instructor should be able to do that, too."

The Hotel in Tahiti is not really so exotic for most. The respondents in these interviews had many different Tahitis. Some respondents were off at a senior college taking an online community college course because the course is cheaper or because they needed flexibility to squeeze another class into an already busy schedule, so that they could go to class during the week and do online classwork on the weekend. For Isabel, her Tahiti was her home 80 miles from campus, where she often listened to audios for class while preparing dinner—or perhaps it was a time when she studied Art Appreciation by teaching the course material to her children. For Deana, Tahiti was where she studied late at night after her 10-year-old had gone to sleep. For Jan, Tahiti

was her country home outside the community college town while she took classes from the University 100 miles away. For Erin, Tahiti was just the extra time she was able to take to re-read or research before responding on a discussion board.

The Hotel in Tahiti is the *why* of online education. Without the need to do classes from a position of flexibility, there would be no need for online classes. From the student perspective, that need underlies how an instructor should design a course and its curriculum—in such a way as to accommodate the student's need for flexibility. Patti remarked that a live chat session might be very interesting, but it also raised the possibility that it would interfere with her flexibility. Helen told of withdrawing from a class that required an online class discussion board each week, saying, That is not why I take online classes, I take them for the flexibility to fit into my life at this point in time."

Instructor Presence

Instructor presence is the *what* of online education, the core category of the study. I scoured the data for another term—for instance, some In-Vivo Code that might be applied to this category. But instructor presence is a term that students readily understand, and the term immediately conveys an understanding to others. Instructor presence in its dimensionality extends from no instructor presence to strong instructor presence to perhaps excessive instructor presence—or, as Karin explained, "the good, the bad, and the ugly." Some of the respondents acknowledged a value for classes without instructor presence—for instance, self-paced classes for which the instructor is more or less an absent landlord. But students who experienced what they perceived to be classes without instructors (Alison, Belen, Deana, Helen, Nick, Patti) generally had a negative reaction, a reaction that things were not right, or that the professors did not care about the

course. They wanted flexibility but did not want to be on their own. Even Gloria, who disdained student discussion boards, wanted an instructor active enough to be readily available to answer questions and offer clarifications and give explanations with greater detail. In the case of most students besides Gloria, they preferred a class with strong instructor presence.

Strong instructor presence for these respondents, however, did not mean a presence in which the instructor is, as Deana phrased it, holding the students' hands—that is, a level of presence that encouraged overreliance upon the instructor. Nor did it mean an overbearing presence in which the instructor becomes the unavoidable dominant force in everything. For example, Deana, Gloria, Jan, and Patti were all interested in synchronous chat—but apparently as an option rather than as a requirement. None of them had actually participated when given a chance. Similarly, Helen had withdrawn from a course with required synchronous chat because the chat did not fit her schedule.

Anderson et al. (2001) argued for shared responsibility between instructors and students and said that the instructor must be the most active participant in discussion. But they were suggesting that the instructor work to move students toward greater active learning, and they did not urge instructors to dominate in any area. The students in this study spoke favorably of learning self-directedness and taking responsibility for their own work in a course.

The instructor and the students are the *who* of instructor presence. The term may seem to concern mainly the instructor, but the question is how community college students perceive online instructor presence. Neither instructor presence nor student perception is a discrete entity. Rather, they are interrelated parts of interaction in a larger

process. Instructor presence is a phase of process—a relationship among instructors, students, and course material. The instructor creates a virtual space, a classroom to be populated with students. Students perceive and experience within the larger context of their interactions within the course. Respondents in this study were willing to give instructor presence credit not only for overt instructor activity—but also for course design and for populating the classroom—that is, for enabling student relationships, as in "an actual classroom," to quote Caitlin.

Bienvenidos

"Bienvenidos" is Spanish for welcome. I took it as In-Vivo Code from the example given by Karin, whose Spanish instructor had so impressed her with a front page that shouted "Bienvenidos" against a backdrop of an attractive scene in Mexico. As a category, Bienvenidos is closest to the concept of establishing instructor presence. It differs, however, in some important aspects. First, it is more abstract: a process focusing on an invitation to shared presence, a hearty greeting, and an assurance of good will. Second, it is narrower than Establishing Instructor Presence, focusing primarily on the first slice of activity to establish presence. Finally, it cuts across disparate types of activities and aspects:

- welcome email or welcome message on website,
- instructor information page with educational background and picture,
- introductory discussion forum with instructor participation,
- some demonstration of expertise,
- personal story,
- personalized course website,

- organization of website,
- syllabus with personal touch,
- detail and clarity in instructions,
- notification of availability (posting of contact information), and
- creative use of technology (visuals, video, audio, PowerPoint with voiceover, links).

Bienvenidos is the *how* of instructor presence, the condition that enables it. It is the first phase of the larger, intertwined process of establishing and sustaining instructor presence. Instructor presence as perception depends upon both instructor activity and active reception from the student. Thus, Bienvenidos is an invitation to the student to become engaged actively in the course—watching, listening, reading, interpreting, making meaning out of varied experience. It is a hearty greeting of welcome and an expression of good will. In a deeper sense, Bienvenidos is a promise, even a commitment from the instructor to remain engaged in the class.

Cats in Sombreros

"Cats in Sombreros" is another In-Vivo Code for a category that refers to the ongoing activities by which an instructor establishes and sustains a perception of presence. This category is a continuation of the *how* of online presence. The term comes from Nick's description of his Spanish instructor's creative use of Photoshop to create a memorable and entertaining visual. It is a continuation of some of the activities of the Bienvenidos phase: email updates, continued detail in explanations and instructions, continued creative use of technology (at least a few of them instructor-created), and encouragement of active learning. Furthermore, it is a fulfillment of the promises of

Bienvenidos. For example, availability is fulfilled as instructors respond in a timely fashion to students through the announced venues: email, ask-the-instructor discussion board, phone calls, office visits.

In the Cats in Sombreros phase, the instructor shows ongoing engagement, playing two roles that have been seen as either/or alternatives. As suggested by Arbaugh (2010) and by respondents to this study's interviews, the instructor plays both the role of "sage on the stage" and the role of "guide on the side." The instructor plays the former role through direct instruction—perhaps an occasional original video or podcast or PowerPoint with voiceover—and through instructions and responses and occasional adjustments to the course appearance and content. In the sage role, the instructor also does grading in a timely fashion, with some commentary.

An example from Karin demonstrates an instance of an instructor's having provided timely expert instruction in response to a student cry for help. Karin showed appreciation for her instructor's long, detailed response:

> I had another Spanish instructor, and I had gotten so twisted around and confused about some of the grammar portion that I sent her an email that probably amounted to an essay asking her where I was wrong because I was doing it all incorrectly. I had gotten consecutive 0s and 10s on this homework assignment. I can't figure out where I'm going wrong—I don't understand. And the poor woman had to—I don't know how she got through the email—but the same day I received a response and she addressed every single point in that email. I don't know how she did it because I am so scatter-brained, and I read the email and confused myself even more. So I don't know how she got each and every point in my email, but she did. She listed out things and I am a list person. I love lists. She listed the answers to all of my questions and then she sent me to a website. . . . It was a beautiful website, and it was a wonderful list. And the question that she asked me was what got me the most, and she showed that she cared and that she was there and in that classroom even though it was virtual. She asked, "Did that really answer your question? Do you understand it better now? Is there a better way that I can explain it to you? She had explained it perfectly, but the one sentence—it made the difference.

The Cats in Sombreros phase, however, also allows the instructor in many ways to be less the sage and more the guide on the side. Respondents focused much of their attention on the beginning part of the class and expressed a greater willingness to direct themselves increasingly as the course progresses. Having welcomed the students into class and invited them to active learning and having established credibility and expertise and engagement—that is, having established presence, the instructor is able to move toward lesser involvement.

Respondents stressed the importance of instructors' posting a self-done video before posting videos by others, but they embrace the Guest Speaker concept as well. The Guest Speaker concept came from Caitlin, who enthusiastically expressed the notion that tapping information available on the internet could make a class "come alive." Caitlin opined: "The internet, I think, exposes us to resources that just add so much. It is almost like having guest speakers come into the classroom." The respondents appear to have embraced the idea that the instructor can transition from direct instruction to indirect instruction through posting videos and audios and other media that are not self-created. They have expressed a strong appreciation for links to YouTube videos, pertinent websites, papers, and research sources. Use of such indirect instruction can be built into the course ahead of time, but students have expressed appreciation for some spontaneity, as in an email to a link to a news story that the instructor has just discovered.

Another means of indirect instruction that emerged unexpectedly from the interviews was the teaching that takes place in interaction between students—primarily on discussion forums. The concept of students' teaching each other was not a surprise. That idea is, after all, part of the Community of Inquiry theory of Teaching Presence

(Anderson et al., 2001), which stipulates three features: facilitation of discourse, design and organization, and direct instruction. In addition, Coll et al. (2009) used the term "distributed teaching presence" for the teaching function as it is performed by participants at any point in a class—primarily on a discussion forum but also any other place where students make connection as well (p. 534). Moreover, several respondents remarked that they learned from other students on discussion boards (Caitlin, Helen, Olivia) and through email groups (Belen, Isabel, Jan). Jan even mentioned that she had been in an email group that became a telephone group that participants would use to ask and answer questions about what they were studying.

Facilitated discourse and direct instruction had been identified in the literature and in my thinking as discrete parts of teaching presence. The surprise came, however, in the emergence of the concept of indirect instruction, consisting of a fusion of facilitation of discourse and use of guest speakers and in perceiving the relationship between the concepts of indirect instruction and direct instruction. Indirect instruction is then perceived conceptually as a twin of direct instruction, and the two are seen as closely linked parts of the even more abstract concept of Instruction.

Regarding discussion boards, the respondents demonstrated a belief that the instructor needs to be partly sage, partly guide, transitioning more to guide as times goes on. Regarding instructor activity on discussion board, Anderson et al. (2001) have said that the instructor needs to be the most active person on a discussion board. Respondents in this study did, in fact, express a desire for instructors to be active in discussion—especially at the beginning. For instance, Helen noted favorably "interjections" from an instructor who let the class know that she was "virtually there" on discussion board, and

Karin praised her "fantastic" Government instructor who engaged in discussion board conversations in response to a self-created video lecture that required active-learning responses during and after the lecture. Such ongoing instructor activity in instruction is a means of sustaining presence in the course; it is instruction that entails both direct instruction—in the initiation of discussion and in interjections—and also indirect instruction through facilitating continued discussion in which students teach each other and learn from each other.

Still, community college respondents (Patti, Erin, Nick) were realistic in that they did not expect full participation from instructors on discussion board at all times. Instead, they expressed a desire for instructors to sustain presence by occasionally participating on discussion board—in the same way the Spanish instructor made her presence known throughout the class by posting visual aids to instruction like the Cats in Sombreros example.

A final important point to be made about the Cats in Sombreros phase is that it is a good demonstration of the processual nature of the entire category of instructor presence. It is consequential, following on the heels of the Bienvenidos phase in the instructor's fulfillment of commitments and in the enabling of students to become active and self-directing learners. It is also interactive—with interactions between promise and fulfillment and between instructor and student. Finally, it is conditional in that it further enables students to be engaged in the class and to develop skills in self-direction and self-teaching.

Kick It Up a Notch

The category Kick It Up a Notch refers to the long-term goal of enabling students to direct their own studies and to be active learners. The community college respondents often used the term "self-teach" or they talked about teaching themselves. The term for this category involves another use of In-Vivo Code. It comes from Alison, who noted the importance of getting graded assignments in order to be able to adjust and improve: "Of course, knowing your grades always helps because you know to kick it up a notch, to get those extra two points to have an A or whatever that might be." Erin, Karin, Patti, and others spoke of the importance of comments on papers so that they could know what they had done wrong and what they needed to do to improve.

The issue of self-directedness is an important one, and the respondents have said that their ability in that area is fueled by strong instructor presence. However, Nick spoke about how difficult it was to be engaged in a class in which the instructor was no more than a moderator, and Larry spoke of the difficulty of being engaged with an instructor who appeared to be teaching a class created by someone else. Erin, Olivia, and Madeline added that strong instructor presence was more necessary for students just beginning to take online classes. Others added that classes lacking strong instructor presence, classes that were not organized well, and classes that did not give clear instructions were difficult to become oriented to. In sum, respondents saw strong instructor presence as most important for inexperienced online students, but they also perceived it as important for all students at the beginning of a semester. Thus, Bienvenidos and Cats with Sombreros are categories designed to enable students to develop in self-directedness and self-teaching. Moreover, students like Patti and Madeline iterated that as they became more

experienced in online coursework, they gained in ability to do well even in the face of weak or unestablished instructor presence.

Respondents discussed self-teaching as a concept in a way that was both disparaging and highly positive. Four students (Alison, Nick, Erin, Helen) were negative when they spoke of the necessity to teach themselves when instructor presence was lacking, as in the case of self-paced courses or courses like the Alison's English class where she was alone with her readings and several instruction documents. On the other hand, Deana, Fonda, Patti, and Isabel were quite positive when they spoke of learning the process of navigating online courses and using strong instructor presence to gain the ability to actively direct their own studies and teach themselves. Therein is the key to instructor presence and its organizing relationship with the other categories.

The concluding chapter will present an analysis of these organizing relationships and a substantive theory regarding how experienced community college students perceive instructor presence.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
--T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding"

As Eliot knew, the end must always return to the beginning for reflection and consideration. The purpose of this study was to generate a substantive grounded theory of online community college student perceptions of online instructor presence. The primary research consisted of 16 in-depth interviews with experienced online students from a community college in Texas. The qualitative study's design relied upon the Straussian grounded-theory model and the active interviewing model.

This chapter reviews the research questions and what has been learned. Then it reviews the categories that emerged from the interview study, discusses the relationships among those categories, and presents the substantive theory that emerged. Finally, it provides an evaluation of validity, an assessment of the significance of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

What Was Learned

The research was driven by two questions:

1. How do community college students describe their perceptions of instructor presence in the online classroom?
2. What aspects of an online class do community college students perceive as essential to an instructor's presence in an online class?

Perceptions of Instructor Presence. This study revealed much about this group of community college students and their perceptions of online education and instructor presence. One student in the study, Karin, described her experience of online instructor presence as covering a range of "the good, the bad, and the ugly." Most respondents held similar views, citing unpleasant experiences in self-paced classes and in classes with low to no instructor presence. Students identified two kinds of classes in this latter category: (a) those that consisted almost entirely of automatically graded assignments, and (b) classes that appeared to have been created by a course designer and then given to someone else to monitor. Most respondents reported a strong correspondence between instructor presence and their own level of engagement. They said that they found themselves less engaged, less serious when instructor presence was low. And they said that they were more engaged when instructor presence was high. One student, Olivia, noted that an unusual interest level or higher ability in the subject could make up for some of the lack of instructor presence, and another, Madeline, noted an increasing ability, due to greater experience, to work well even in a situation where instructor presence is lacking. She also expressed an opinion that strong instructor presence was especially important for less experienced online students. In fact, most students expressed the idea that greater instructor presence was needed for inexperienced students and for students generally at the beginning of a class. Madeline, even though she had taken 25 online classes, pointed out that she still preferred to feel that the instructor was there.

The study also revealed that most students were pleased with their online classes and the levels of instructor presence. They were most pleased that online classes met their needs for flexibility in arranging their schedules to accommodate family, travel, and work

situations. Students also noted that even though they generally would like greater instructor presence, their need for flexibility is paramount. Students may like the idea of a synchronous discussion or a Skype conference call or an on-campus meeting with a class, but they lose interest when such events interfere with events in their lives outside class. One student, Helen, expressed the sentiment succinctly: “That is not why I take online classes—I take them for the flexibility to fit into my life at this point in time.”

Students defined online instructor presence in terms of their experiences involving the following:

- Their own perceptions of the instructor as a human, not a robot;
- Availability (through email, telephone, Skype, office visits, discussion board);
- Use of discussion board to get to know classmates and instructor;
- Timely, clear, detailed responses to questions;
- Detailed and clear instructions and explanations;
- Grading and comments on graded work;
- Instructor responses on student discussion boards;
- Instructor information page with picture and biography;
- Instructor use of personal stories to relate to course material;
- Welcome page;
- Organization;
- Syllabus;
- Use of media—video, audio, PowerPoint; and
- Provision of links to media, to interesting websites, and to research.

This group of respondents had given much thought also to experiences they would like to have that they had not yet encountered in an online class. Students who had seen pictures of their instructors online appreciated that experience, and the others expressed a desire that instructors post pictures. Students also expressed a desire to see greater use of technology, for instance, original videos or audios. Again, they were interested in seeing their professors and getting a greater sense of who they are. Students wanted to see instructors join in discussions on discussion boards—at least occasionally.

Essential Aspects of Instructor Presence. Community college students in this study identified a handful of elements as "essentials," features that must be a part of online classes if they are to see the instructor as present. What they identified most readily and most often are availability and instructor responses—elements seen as so closely related that they are often considered the same. They wanted the responses to answer their questions, first, in time for them to do whatever assignments they were working on, and, second, in detail and clarity that would enable them to do assignments properly. Next, they wanted an instructor to do timely grading and to include comments on papers. Then they wanted a course website that was organized and attractive, with a thorough syllabus, detailed instructions, and a personal touch. Finally, they wanted the instructor to disclose enough to establish expertise and to show the instructor as human—including instructor experiences or "personal stories" that could help them to relate to the subject content.

What Was Not Learned

Because the study is a study of perception, it does not provide hard and fast evidence. For instance, in regard to the issue of instructor presence as a factor in their

success in or satisfaction with an online class, we know that these participants indicated in their responses a perception that they perform better in classes in which instructor presence is greater. But a different kind of study would be needed to demonstrate such success conclusively. Similarly, the study did not reveal conclusive evidence regarding students' preferences about instructors' participation on a discussion board, students' reactions to ungraded papers, students' ability to learn more when provided with video lectures, the effectiveness of short video lectures over longer ones, or the effectiveness of students' pausing a video to engage in other activities before responding on a discussion board.

One sub-question was asked regarding the importance of an instructor's ability to give technical assistance, but the interviews provided thin data on this topic, presumably showing that students did not consider technical assistance as of great importance. One student, Patti, did say that instructors need to be able to troubleshoot technical problems because students who call tech support may "get put on hold for days to try to fix the problem." Another student, Helen, spoke highly of a Speech instructor who had set up problematic technology for submitting recorded speeches but switched to a student-friendly form of technology utilizing YouTube. Nick explained that he was impressed with a Spanish instructor's ability to embed videos and Photoshopped pictures. Other students spoke about posting of pictures, videos, and links as more or less expected skills, but no one besides Patti seemed to expect instructors to be doing more in the way of providing technical assistance.

The Emerging Categories and Relationships

On the other hand, those sorts of questions, while important, are not the final goal of qualitative research. The purpose of qualitative research is exploration, and an interview provides much more than requested information; it provides thoughtful responses from active participants engaged in "collaborative conversation" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49). Those responses constitute the data of qualitative research—data to be explored at and below the surface. The researcher analyzes and interprets the concrete data to generate more abstract categories, themes, and theory. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) argued that the active interview is not intended to provide "a pipeline for transmitting information" (p. 3). It is, rather, a process by which the interviewer and interviewee collaborate in making meaning. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that the data collected is important not so much for its immediate information as for its providing a means for the researcher to discover emerging concepts, categories, meanings, and theory. They argued that the purpose of qualitative research is to gain understanding of "theoretical purpose and relevance" and to discover theory—not to verify facts (p. 48). The purpose of the active interviewing process, according to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), is by giving respect or assigning "competence" (p. 8) to the respondent, to enliven or activate him or her as someone engaged in making meaning.

Thus, the most important understandings for me lay beyond the answers to research questions—and were accessible only in my listening to respondents as they pieced together their stories in a way that would allow me as researcher to discover emerging categories (presented in Chapter 4), and the emerging relationships among the

categories. For herein were the keys to developing substantive theory in regard to community college student perceptions of online instructor presence.

The categories were surprising to me in that what emerged emphasized processes over anything else. In my original conception of instructor presence, I had thought of a set of actions—what an instructor says and does—as instructor presence. And I envisioned these actions as constituting a state of being that students tapped into. The emphasis upon the process, however, reveals the theme that instructor presence is a relationship—that it requires not only the actions of an instructor but the act of perceiving by students. The emphasis upon process also reveals another theme regarding the dynamic of instructor presence: it is different at different times in an academic term. Instructor presence also varies according to the perceiver and the perceiver's levels of interest or experience. What may suffice as adequate instructor presence for most students may not be enough for one student and may be more than another student is interested in.

The categories that emerged are phases of a larger process of conditions, interactions, and consequences. They included the core category of instructor presence and four categories/phases linked closely to it:

- The Hotel in Tahiti—This category refers to the *why* of online education, the conditions that underlie the need for online classes, both the circumstances and the requirement of flexibility—the *when*—as related to the *who* of online education, the students and instructor.
- Bienvenidos—Constituting the *how* of instructor presence, this category refers to the phase of inviting/welcoming/establishing presence, which relates, first,

to the Hotel in Tahiti in the instructor's responses to his or her own needs, students' needs, and course objectives (consequence) and, second, to the conditions that result in the students' responses of interacting or not interacting with instructor, other students, and course materials.

- Cats in Sombreros—This category is a continuation of the *how* of Bienvenidos. It is the phase of sustaining presence, which relates, first, to Bienvenidos, in the instructor's continuation of activities and fulfillment of promises implied in the activities that established presence and, second, to the ongoing interactions of students with the instructor, with others, and with course content (consequences).
- Kick It up a Notch—This category refers to the consequences of the previous conditions—the resulting levels of self-directedness and self-teaching experienced by students. It is the student side that parallels instructor presence, the student responses necessary to a perception of online presence.

Instructor Presence is the *what* of online education, established or not established at the confluence of these phases.

The Hotel in Tahiti. The Hotel in Tahiti category was suggested by Patti when she spoke of the reason for online classes and the need for flexibility. This category involves the first conceptions of a virtual classroom as it occurs to students and instructors. The Hotel in Tahiti is the *why* of online education—for students and instructors alike—and instructor presence is the *what*. Students take online courses because of a need for the flexibility to work around other commitments or rigid schedules. Students may need flexibility to work around a fulltime job or full load of

classes on campus, to avoid time that would otherwise be spent on a long drive to campus, to be able to take care of children, to meet the rigors of a student-athlete's schedule, or to work outside the demands of a serious illness. Students also bring to the online situation their level of experience with online instruction, their level of maturity as a student, and their level of willingness to engage. All these impact their perceptions of instructor presence and its importance.

Instructors may have similar needs that make them candidates for online instruction, or they may have a fascination with the possibilities of technology, or they may simply be needed to teach online to meet student demand. In the Hotel in Tahiti phase, the instructor makes choices regarding the means and methods and limits of engagement in the prospective class—that is, the actions that will lead to student perception of instructor presence. The instructor's reading of future students will determine many of those choices.

An emerging theme is that The Hotel in Tahiti is not just a pre-condition of online classes, however. It continues all the way to the end of a class. One student, Helen, reported that she was interested in a required synchronous chat, but she withdrew from the class because of her schedule. "That is not why I take online classes," she said. "I take them for the flexibility to fit into my life at this point in time."

Bienvenidos. Bienvenidos is the *how* of instructor presence, both a consequence of The Hotel in Tahiti and a condition that enables instructor presence. The term is taken from a student's reaction to having felt a great welcome from a Spanish instructor whose opening page sported a "beautiful" picture of Mexico and an impressive welcome ("Bienvenidos!") that made the student want to reply "Welcome!" to the instructor. In

this phase, the instructor is doing three things: (a) inviting students into the class, (b) welcoming students in, and (c) establishing presence. Erin explained that "the student can sense that they are right away welcome and available."

This phase commences in the design of the course and the building of a course website—before the first day of class. It extends into the first days of a class as students are settling in. For instructors, this phase begins before the class—perhaps years before the class. Students, however, know only what they see upon opening the website for the first time. An emerging theme from student responses in this study was that this phase is the most important part of establishing instructor presence, creating a common classroom that spans the distance by calling students to interact with the instructor, other students, and the course material.

The students explained the importance of a well-organized and attractive website. Karin spoke of a "cluttered" appearance as a deterrent to her feeling of instructor presence and to her own engagement. Karin associated attractiveness with organization, and other respondents specifically desired color and interesting or funny visuals. An emerging theme is that a well-organized website is essential to instructor presence, and aesthetic appearance is an enhancement of that feature.

Students said that they prefer a welcome email that comes before or at the beginning of class, but they are satisfied with a welcome on the website. They also prefer to see an instructor page with some or all of the following: educational background, instructor biography, picture of instructor, and some "bits and pieces" of instructors' lives "without being too personal," as one respondent, Caitlin, explained. Students also like a welcome forum on the website where they can get to know other students, but they want

the instructor to participate somewhat in discussion also. Another emerging theme is that after welcoming students and inviting them to become engaged participants, the instructor who interacts with students in the early days—through email or discussion forum or some other means—has made strong progress in establishing instructor presence with those students who are willing to be drawn in.

Bienvenidos is an invitation to the student to become engaged actively in the course and also a promise or commitment from the instructor to remain engaged in the class. An emerging theme is that students perceive a correlation between their engagement in an online class and the instructor's online presence. Alison, who believed she had seen limited instructor presence in her classes, spoke eloquently of the process of "establishing instructor presence" as achieved in those instances in which she had perceived it. Just as tellingly, she spoke despondently of instructors with an "unestablished presence." She used the term in discussing monitoring of her progress later in the class; thus, one would infer that she was addressing primarily her perception that the instructor did not do enough at the outset of the class to convince her of instructor presence.

Interestingly, Helen did say that she was more engaged when the instructor had established presence, but whether she was very engaged or less engaged depended also upon factors of interest level and her need for flexibility. Apparently, she is harder to convince, preferring to "observe" until she is sure of the instructor's involvement and her own interest level. She said that she likes to "kind of size them up" (her instructors) to learn expectations. She adds: "When you start communicating, you are like 'Oh, okay, I need to be real diligent about turning things in in this class,' and in this class they just

want the basics." Another student, Madeline, also remarked that she was "somewhat" engaged in her online courses inasmuch as she was often the first participant in discussion as part of an overall practice of submitting work early. It was not that she disliked discussion or did not want to do her best. She pointed out that she was often "the first one to post something on the discussion board or the first one to start replies" because she did not have a "lot of time to get it done." She wanted to "get it done and out of the way." The emerging principle is that even when students are inclined to be strongly engaged, their actual engagement level is nonetheless determined somewhat by the student's original need for flexibility. The hotel in Tahiti is an ongoing concern.

Cats in Sombreros. The term for this category originated in Nick's description of what his instructor did to continue enlivening the course through posting of entertaining visuals related to course content. This category is a continuation of the *how* of online presence, a continuation of some activities used to establish presence in the Bienvenidos phase: email updates, continued detail in explanations and instructions, continued creative use of technology, and encouragement of active learning. It is also a fulfillment of the promises of Bienvenidos—for instance, when instructors respond to communications from students, thus fulfilling the availability promised by the posting of how to make contact. These include email, questions on an instructor forum or on a student forum, phone calls, office visits, and other possibilities. Closely related is grading and comments on graded papers. Participants believed these activities to be necessary parts of the role of instructor. Students are difficult to convince of an online instructor's presence without grading.

An emerging theme is that students want instructors to play the dual role of sage on the stage and guide on the side. This theme squares with recent research from Arbaugh (2010). A related theme is that students want instructors to show expertise because they "know more on the topic," as one student, Belen, worded it. Anderson et al. (2001) have written of the importance of the instructor's having a command of subject matter and sharing that knowledge with students. It is also important to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge through grading. Students desire the sharing of expertise in many forms: detailed responses to emails and in discussion on forums, detailed instructions, and even lectures (delivered by video or audio or PowerPoint, especially with voiceover, or even written lecture). Students do not necessarily want all of these, but they want some, and they want some of them to be original works. However, they do not necessarily want lengthy works. Helen noted, for instance, that in the technology age, what seems to work best is "the snippets: text, quick email, the short information." Few, for instance, want lecture of the length that frequently takes place in the classroom.

A surprising theme points to an interesting relationship between the role of guide on the side and the role of sage on the stage. This theme is that when an instructor uses the Bienvenidos phase to establish a strong online presence, students are willing to accept a lesser role from the instructor in the Cats in the Sombrero phase. A corollary theme is that an instructor who has played the role of sage on the stage suitably will then be more accepted by students in a guide on the side role. For example, participants indicated a desire for direct instruction, especially when enhanced by technology, like a video lecture. In the case of video, students said that they wanted instructors to do their own, but afterward they could use the works of others. Belen stated a preference that

instructors provide their own videos first and then "supplemented with external links." Respondents were very willing to accept and even embrace "Guest Speakers"—a concept that I adapted from one of Caitlin's responses. She was quite enthusiastic about information to be received in multiple ways through the internet. The concept is one of indirect instruction, wherein the instructor gains credit for instructor presence by choosing others to teach. The concept extends, therefore, to instructor postings ranging from video to instructor papers and from there to the posting of links to video, interesting websites, and other information on the internet, such as works of research. Another theme is that student-student teaching in discussion constitutes further indirect instruction which students perceive as an enhancement of instructor presence.

The sage-first-guide-second theme extends to other aspects of the online class as well. The role of guide on the side is commonly seen as best suited to facilitation of student interactions, or discourse. But students in this study were insistent in their desire to have an instructor respond to discussion not only on an instructor board but also within the context of student-student discussion. This concept is consonant with the principle set forth by Anderson et al. (2001) that the instructor should be the most active person on a discussion board. Karin reported that she participated more on discussion board when she had two Spanish instructors who projected strong instructor presence: "I engaged more with other students as well," she said, "but I did that because the professors were engaging." A key, however, is that students were not wanting the instructor to dominate conversation—just to participate visibly, at the first mainly and thereafter in occasional comments or "interjections" to re-direct the conversation. An excellent example is in the case cited by Olivia, in which her "fantastic" Government instructor did an original video

and included instructions to pause the video to go to a website and then carry on conversation on the discussion board. She indicated that the instructor showed up on the discussion board but not as a dominant participant. Instead he was demonstrating that he was there as a participant, reading and considering. Most importantly, he was using a sage on the stage approach to get students to engage with the material, with links, and with other students; but after brief participation, he transitioned more to a guide on the side. Still, he was credited with instructor presence even in backing away from the conversation.

Kick It Up a Notch. This category comes from Alison, who argued emphatically that graded assignments are essential if a student is to see where improvement is needed and how to improve. Kick It Up a Notch is a phase that coincides with the time period marked by Cats in Sombreros; it is the consequence of all the identified categories. On one hand, it is the culmination of student engagement and a mirror of Instructor Presence—it is the *what* of perception that enables students to perceive instructor presence fully and to direct their coursework with increased confidence. On the other hand, it is also the culmination of the *how* of The Hotel in Tahiti—the intersection between the need for flexibility and the need to perform in the class and to learn. In this regard, it is the sum of student activities to achieve self-directedness and self-teaching.

An emerging theme is that instructor presence is important in students' development as active learners, as self-directed students, and as self-teachers. In the Kick It Up a Notch phase, students are able to use instructors' examples and instructor grading as a means of creating a mirror of self-teaching and self-improvement. Instructor presence is most important for the least experienced and least independent students. It is

less important for the most experienced and most independent students. But student respondents in this study have indicated a need for instructor presence in any circumstance. Those who are least in need of instructor presence want it anyway in the phase of Bienvenidos. Organization and clarity and strong initial teaching enable the least experienced and least independent to begin learning self-directness and self-teaching, and they enable the more advanced students to thrive under a guide on the side more quickly. As Patti and Madeline explained, they eventually learned to cope and do well even when instructor presence was unestablished or weak. As they became more experienced in online coursework, they gained in the ability to do well even in the face of weak or unestablished instructor presence.

It remains to provide a final link between The Hotel in Tahiti and Kick It Up a Notch. Students begin in their own Tahiti: their need for flexibility and even their other needs for effective learning; they also use what fits their needs from the instructors' activities in the phases Bienvenidos and Cats in Sombreros to adapt their needs to the demands of the class and determine how engaged they will become in the class, how and to what extent they will direct their own schedules, and what they will do, if anything, to teach themselves. Regarding the importance of self-teaching, Karin said that "the grand scheme of it all is that you have to be able to really take that information and use it and if you cannot use it to teach yourself, you are not actually learning anything and retaining information." Self-teaching is where the best of self-directedness and instructor presence converge.

Now it is possible to view the core category, online instructor presence, through the relationships among the categories—in the Theory of Establishing and Sustaining Presence to Enable Student Learning.

The Theory of Establishing and Sustaining Presence to Enable Student Learning

Online Instructor Presence for community college students is an emergent perception within the larger process of interaction between an instructor and students within the medium of a computer-mediated course. The process requires both the activity of an instructor and active response by students. Neither instructor presence nor student perception is a discrete entity. Instead, they are interrelated parts of interaction in the larger process. Instructor presence is a phase of process—a relationship among instructors, students, and course material. The perception of instructor presence emerges in student response to instructor activity that begins before the course commences and in relation to a student's own reasons for being in the class, especially flexibility.

Student perception of online presence varies during an academic term, but it depends largely upon the student's early readings of who the instructor is and the instructor's level of engagement as experienced. Two early phases of instructor activity are critical: (a) the Bienvenidos phase, the all-important initial activities designed to invite students to participate, to welcome them into the course, and to establish instructor presence through course design, welcoming activities, availability, self-disclosure, and early forum activity; and (b) the Cats in Sombreros phase, the continuing activities designed to sustain presence, such as responding to questions, participating strategically on forums, providing direct instruction first and indirect instruction afterward, and fostering active learning, self-directedness, and self-teaching in students.

A student's perception of online instructor presence is determined first by the student's initial needs and then throughout the course as the student adapts those needs to the demands of the course and awareness of instructor engagement. An instructor who is seen as welcoming and available and plays the role of sage on the stage early in a term can evoke an initial student perception of strong instructor presence that can carry throughout an academic term even as the instructor transitions into a more behind-the-scenes role of facilitator, or guide on the side. Most importantly, students perceive themselves as more capable of becoming active and self-directed learners in an environment with strong instructor presence. Furthermore, as a result, they are generally more willing and at times even eager to take responsibility for their own learning after strong initial guidance from an instructor.

Discussion

Online Instructor Presence, when it exists, is the context within which online study in a course is conducted, the atmosphere through which the online student moves. When it does not exist, it is the vacuum that sucks out the dynamics of the course. As Anderson et al. hinted in their 2001 research and as Arbaugh concluded in his 2010 research, students want instructors to play the roles of both sage on the stage and guide on the side. They even want some direct instruction, possibly even lecture. They like to have some creative instructor-produced use of technology. A theme that emerged from this research gives new understanding to the dichotomy between the instructor roles of sage on the stage and guide on the side. This study revealed a relationship between these seemingly opposed roles inasmuch as students want to see an instructor in the sage role early, but then they are satisfied to have the instructor recede into a facilitator role with

more indirect instruction and even student-student instruction. The sage role is the precursor to the guide role, the precondition for its success. This seems to be largely true even for students who prefer less instructor presence overall. They want the instructor to organize and clarify at the outset and then be available for further explanation. Interestingly, students find greater freedom when instructor presence is initially strong and then less so, because they have greater confidence in their understanding and their preparation for the tasks ahead.

A corollary theme is that students prefer to see evidence of instructor expertise and some direct instruction as a precondition for accepting indirect instruction in the form of readings, lectures or Youtube explanations from others, and links to outside websites. Strong instructor presence enables the distribution of what Anderson et al. (2001) called teaching presence.

The respondents in this study of community college students perceived strong instructor presence when an instructor paid attention to the two phases before and at the beginning of a class: Bienvenidos and Cats in Sombreros. They placed great emphasis upon early instructor activity—in course preparation, design, and activities to welcome students into the online environment. Bienvenidos is very similar to the concept of establishing instructor presence, but it is different in that it is more abstract, focusing on an invitation to shared presence, a hearty greeting, and an assurance of good will. It is also narrower, focusing primarily on the first slice of activity to establish presence: a welcome message before or on the first day, an inviting homepage, a demonstration of availability. Bienvenidos is the instructor's invitation to the student to become engaged actively in the course and a hearty greeting and expression of good will. Even more, it is

a promise, even a commitment from the instructor to remain engaged in the class. An emerging theme from student responses in this study was that this phase is the most important part of establishing instructor presence, creating a common classroom that spans the distance by inviting interaction with the instructor, other students, and the course material. Another emerging theme is that a well-organized website helps to create strong instructor presence, and aesthetic appearance works to enhance it.

The Cats in Sombreros phase is the instructor's response to his or her own welcome and the carrying out of, the fulfillment of, the promise to remain engaged. In this phase, the instructor responds to student queries, participates in discussion boards, steps in to redirect discussion, grades and comments on papers, sends out email updates, provides continued detail in explanations and instructions, continues creative use of technology, utilizes Guest Lecturers or indirect teaching, and encourages active learning. After welcoming students and inviting them to become engaged participants, the instructor who interacts with students in the early days—through email or discussion forum or some other means—has made strong progress in establishing instructor presence with those students who are willing to be drawn in.

Another emerging theme is a surprising one—that The Hotel in Tahiti phase, the set of needs leading students and instructor to an online class, is not only a pre-condition of online classes but also a determining factor even to the end of a class. A student desiring strong instructor presence may become a reluctant participant if instructor activity or course demands are perceived as intruding upon the student's need for flexibility. In this study, one student, Gloria, was extreme in reluctance to participate in group activities, finding most such activities to be "busy work." Moreover, other students

such as Helen and Jan spoke of their occasional choice not to participate based on their needs for flexibility. This finding is consistent with the findings of Beaudoin (2002). This researcher conducted a study of lurkers, online students who remain more or less invisible during discussion activities. He found that such students have lower mean grades but that they spend significant time online in course activities. Beaudoin conceded that such students, especially extreme cases, are "vexing" to instructors who build a course around student discourse (154), but he points out that such students can be learning "off camera" (155). In a study of "student non-posting participation behavior," Dennen (2008) found that about half of lurkers read and learned through discussion boards without posting and in many cases learned more than students who participated just enough to reach minimum posting requirements (1624).

Evaluation of Validity

Glaser and Strauss (1967) concluded that a "focus on the emergence of categories solves the problems of fit, relevance, forcing, and richness" (p. 37). The qualitative researcher is working to generate a "theory that 'fits or works'" (pp. 29-30). A key, then, in deriving theory is its grounding in data as opposed to speculation, common sense, or logical assumptions. The researcher's purpose, they say, "is not to provide a perfect description of an area, but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (p. 30). The researcher's job is to identify categories and themes in order to generate theory beneficial to current scholarship or suggestive of further research. The categories and theory in this study were generated from and built on the data collected through in-depth interviews with 16 respondents. These were students who had taken at least four online classes at a Texas community college, at least one of which had been in

the previous year. The theory accounts for student behavior across a wide range of experiences.

Negative Case. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the qualitative researcher remains on the lookout for a negative case that could invalidate the results of a study. They also point out that at times what seems to be a negative case is actually an indication of "a dimensional extreme or a variation on the conception of data" (p. 263). One student, Gloria, presented what appeared to be a negative case. At the outset it appeared that she saw instructor presence as not important at all in online study. She prefaced her remarks by saying, "Taking online classes requires the student to be able to read and follow instructions and complete assignments on time." Apparently, she believed that online classes required greater competence or self-directedness on the part of the student instead of instructor involvement. She objected to the idea that instructor presence might involve a "feeling" that the instructor was present, stating emphatically, "Online instructors merely serve as facilitators." She then punctuated her objection by answering, "No," when asked whether she had found instructor presence to be an important part of her online experience.

However, even though she answered negatively, Gloria went on to explain when instructor presence is important: "It is critical that online instructors be available to answer questions and further explain the requirements for the assignments." The word "critical" here is key, for it demonstrates that although Gloria was not interested much in feelings and probably not much interested in such concerns as what Erin called "fancy colors or pictures," she was interested, nonetheless, in timely response and direct instruction in the form of clarification and authoritative answers. Gloria, it seems, was

someone of strong independence and a no-nonsense approach to her studies. She called herself "engaged just as much as necessary" and indicated a distaste for discussion boards and YouTube videos. Her lack of engagement did not mean lack of interest in the course, however; in fact, she seems very much on top of things, an independent, self-directed learner who was not in need of what Isabel and others called "hands on" instruction. She was looking for the simplest and most efficient means of doing her work and learning what was needed. Interestingly, she spoke positively of an instructor's use of Skype phone conferences but explained matter-of-factly that she did not participate because she did not have any questions: "Everything I needed I could get from questions for the instructor or my own research. It's a valuable tool, but I had no need for it."

Gloria did not like discussion boards because they were "busy work," she said. Apparently, she was learning all she believed she needed without student-student discussion. Regarding the YouTube videos, she said they were instruction videos prepared by someone other than her instructor and that some helped and others did not. Unfortunately, most of the videos resulted in what she perceived as more busy work in the form of discussion and testing, presumably because she had sufficient understanding already. It appears, however, that she might have liked a video done by the instructor, especially if it were more necessary to help her to understand. In this case, she remarked: "In that regard, we didn't even need an instructor."

Gloria seems to be at the farther end of the dimension of the hotel in Tahiti, but her responses are consistent with the theory. Apparently she does prefer weaker instructor presence, because of her needs for flexibility and because of her perceived ability to thrive on her own. Moreover, she may be cautious about the possibility of an overbearing

level of instructor presence that would intrude on her time. As a student Gloria does not quite fit the category of "free loader" (Dennen, 1632) inasmuch as she does required posting, but her preference is clearly to remain something of an outsider during discussions.

Rigorous Adherence to Research Method. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the most important means of assuring validity of qualitative research is rigorous adherence to research method, including adequacy of data for generation of theory, theoretical sampling to enable the saturation of categories, the careful analysis and constant comparison of data, and the generating of theory that is intimately linked to and grounded in the data. They have argued that valuable research can be used for generation of categories and theory from a small sample size, even from the case of a single person. The key to theoretical sampling is that it be adequate to provide saturation of categories. This study utilized a sample of 16 students and obtained a rich volume and depth of data that saturated the categories generated. The research seemed to demonstrate saturation of categories in that the last few interviews, though ample in information related to the categories, did not yield much in the way of new information. The researcher listened to interviews several times and read the transcripts through many times in order to code for concepts and mine for relevant details that could generate new categories and theory. The emergent categories and theories are closely linked to the data.

Morse et al. (2002) identified five verification strategies to ensure reliability and validity—all built on the notions of rigor and investigator responsiveness. This research study strove to satisfy the demands of each strategy. Regarding methodological coherence, this study employed a strategy that maintained a careful and constant linkage

between the interviews and the research questions. Regarding appropriateness of sample, this study collected data from subjects who had considerable expertise in the subject, all having taken at least five online classes, with an average of about nine. If anything, the study may have benefited from interviewing some students who had taken only a few online classes and perhaps some who had not had much success in online classes. Regarding concurrent collection and analysis of data, this study involved open coding and axial coding and constant comparison done simultaneously from the beginning of data collection. The researcher continually returned to the data for the purpose of grounding the research in the data. Regarding theoretical thinking, this study used the data as a constant stimulus to the generation of categories and in a search for theory confirmed in the data. Regarding theory development, this study was conducted according to the grounded-theory method and provides sufficient data in its presentation to be used as secondary data by other researchers.

Respecting "People" with a Story to Tell. A key test set forth by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) was that respondents studied be respected as "people" with a story to tell and that they be enlivened or activated to become competent narrators of their stories and collaborators with the researcher (p. 29). Similarly, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) argue that the researcher must understand the objective of "researching people," in an attempt to get the respondents to tell stories that will make it possible to see from the respondents' perspectives. This study did, in fact, seek and achieve the respondents' stories. The interviews stand as a testimony that the respondents felt respected, even as experts, and were willing to share their experiences in an attempt to collaborate with the researcher in making meaning.

Internal Consistency. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also argued that the research study must demonstrate internal consistency. Data collection, theoretical sampling, coding, and generating of theory must proceed by induction without contamination by preconceived theory. Evidence that this study meets this standard is that it has generated categories and theory characteristically different from previous research, though consistent with findings from other researchers. For example, Anderson et al. (2001) have analyzed the concept of teaching presence and have identified three roles: facilitation of discourse, design and organization, and direct instruction. The research in this study identified the same concepts but explored the relationships among what Anderson et al. saw as three discrete roles. Moreover, it identified design and organization as part of Bienvenidos, as part of the task of establishing presence; and it identified facilitation of discourse as indirect instruction and similar to use of guest speakers in the classroom. This research also presented a finding, validated by Arbaugh (2010), that students are looking for instructors to play the roles of both sage on the stage and guide on the side. Furthermore, it went a step further to identify a relationship between the two roles, concluding that the role of sage is used to establish presence and enables the role of guide to be accepted by students. These themes were emergent and did not exist in the researcher's head or in any literature considered by the researcher.

Reliability. The need for reliability entails a need for accuracy as well. Kirk and Miller (1986) suggest assessing reliability by the truthfulness of responses. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data collected. Three other factors should be considered as well: (a) there is nothing to suggest that the respondents in this research were not telling the truth about their own perceptions;

(b) there is congruence in the responses provided so that overall they provide a full, coherent story; (c) the summary of findings and theory was submitted to the respondents themselves to find out if they could see themselves in the results and if they saw the results resonating with their ideas about instructor presence. Eight of the 16 responded and gave enthusiastic approval to the findings.

Audit trail. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail is important in the evaluation of the consistency of the researcher's inferences from the data and their congruence with the emergent concepts and theories. Dr. Diane Allen served as auditor; she was privy to the research materials and has provided a signed statement (See Appendix 5) that the data collected is consistent with the categories and theory generated from the data.

Assessment of the Significance of the Findings

This study was written for current or prospective instructors and administrators engaged in or supervising higher education online, particularly at the community college level—and for the higher education community in general. I believe the findings with examples from the interviews provide rich information for perusal. The categories, themes, and theory presented offer a markedly different way of looking at online instructor presence. In offering a delineation of the process of the development of online presence, the study provides something new in the scholarship in online education, particularly a new explanation of how instructor presence originates conceptually, how it is established and sustained, and how the needs that lead a student to online education relate to the student's adaptation to the need for self-directedness. The categories and theory offer new possibilities to the instructor searching to enliven an approach to online

teaching. Finally, the concepts identified offer a wealth of information to consider in developing instructor evaluations that aim to examine the attainment of features of online education that really matter to students today.

Suggestions for Future Research

One of the benefits of this research project was that it met the goal of finding students who held expertise as online students. That expertise also presents a problem in that none of the students show evidence of having dropped out of classes or of having been unsuccessful in many such classes. Thus, it might be useful for someone to identify students who have withdrawn from or failed online classes in order to research their perceptions of what led them to be unsuccessful in online college classes. Since this study takes place at a single community in Texas, similar studies at other community colleges in Texas and outside Texas could help educators to generalize beyond this single group. Other research might study student perceptions of the process of the development of instructor presence. Additionally, research into instructor perceptions of instructor presence might provide an interesting comparison of student and instructor perceptions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

IRB Participant Consent Form

University of Nebraska Lincoln

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Informed Consent

BEING THERE: AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT PERCEPTION OF INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Research Participant:

Please read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before deciding whether to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research. You are also free to stop your participation at any point.

GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of experienced online students at a community college in Texas regarding instructor presence and to identify emerging meanings and categories in the perceptions of online students. You are invited to participate in this study because you are a community college student who has taken four or more online classes. In addition, you must be 19 years of age or older.

Online instructor presence is whatever an online instructor says or does or presents that leads students to perceive the instructor as an active participant in the course—that is, as someone present in an online classroom. The interview process seeks to describe and explore students' perceptions of instructor presence.

PROCEDURES

a. You will be asked to respond to interview questions about your experiences, preferences, perceptions, and judgments regarding instructor presence in online classes.
b. The interview will be audio-recorded.
c. The interview should take 30 to 60 minutes and will be conducted at the Allison Fine Arts Building at Midland College in Midland, Texas, or via telephone.
d. It is possible that you may be asked for a brief (five-minute) followup interview.

Sample questions include the following:

a. Tell me about a time when you were most aware of an instructor's presence in an online class and how the instructor created that awareness
b. Take one class with strong instructor presence and describe the elements that created that impression.
c. Please tell what happened one particular time when you most perceived yourself as part of a learning community.

POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

OWNERSHIP AND DOCUMENTATION OF SPECIMENS

Recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be kept by principal investigator and will remain confidential

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

a. There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant.
b. Your participation is intended to benefit instructors who will gain greater understanding of students' experiences in and perceptions of online education.
c. There is no financial cost or consideration for this project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for 7 years after the study is complete. The information obtained in the study may be published for educational purposes or presented at academic conferences but will not give your name or include any identifiable references to you.

COMPENSATION:

There is no compensation associated with this research.

OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS

Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in the study or at any time during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW FROM STUDY

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or Midland College or in any other way receiving a penalty.

CONSENT, RIGHT TO RECEIVE A COPY:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Participant Name (Printed or Typed): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Names and phone numbers of investigators:

Name: William G. Feeler
Phone Number: 432-528-3873

Name: James O'Hanlon
Phone Number: 402-472-5310

Appendix 2

IRB Approval Letter

University of Nebraska Lincoln

September 11, 2012

William Feeler

Department of Educational Administration

5 Neta Pl Odessa, TX 79762

James O'Hanlon

Department of Educational Administration

147 ANDN, UNL, 68588-0443

IRB Number: 20120911907 EX

Project ID: 11907

Project Title: Being there: A grounded-theory study of students' perception of instructor presence in online classes

Dear William:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 09/11/2012.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;

* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;

* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;

* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or

* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP

for the IRB

Appendix 3

Recruitment Letter

Dear current or former Midland College online student:

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, and I am doing research for a dissertation about online education. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research specifically because you are something of a student-expert, in that you have taken at least four online classes. Your participation would involve a 30- to 60-minute interview to be conducted either at the Allison Fine Arts Building at Midland College in Midland, Texas, or via telephone.

This is purely a voluntary project and would have no bearing on any of your college work. The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions of experienced online community college students such as you in order to find out how you view instructor presence.

In essence, online instructor presence means whatever an online instructor says or does or presents that leads students to perceive the instructor as an active participant in the course—that is, as someone present in an onlin classroom. The interview process will be used to discover, explore, study, describe, and explain students' perception of instructor presence.

I believe that my research will help to improve online education so that students have more satisfying experiences in online classes. It will help instructors to understand better how students view their instructor's presence in an online class and perhaps even enable students to see better how the online classroom works.

Here is how the interview process will work:

- You will be asked to respond to interview questions about your experiences, preferences, perceptions, and judgments regarding instructor presence in online classes.
- The interview should take 30 to 60 minutes, either at Midland College or via telephone.
- It is possible that you will be asked for a brief (five-minute) follow-up interview.
- Interviews will be conducted as soon as possible, no later than October 15.
- Your identity will be kept in strictest confidence during the research process and in all writings that arise fron this research.
- You will need to sign a consent agreement, and you can back out of the project at any time, for any reason.
- At the end of my study, I will send you a summary of my findings.

Here is just a sample of questions that I will be asking:

1. Tell me your story as an online student.
2. In your experience taking online classes, how important have you found it for you as a student to feel as if the instructor is actually present in the online classroom? Describe what an instructor can do to establish presence in the online community.
3. What stands out when you think of one class with strong instructor presence and the elements that created that impression?

If you are willing to participate, please write me back as soon as possible and give me the following information:

1. A phone number at which I can reach you to make interview arrangements.
2. The number of online classes you have had.
3. How many of your online classes have included discussion forums.
4. How many of your online classes have included creative use of technology.

Thank you very much.

William Feeler
Midland College
University of Nebraska—Lincoln
432-528-3873

Appendix 4

Interview Questions

BEING THERE: A GROUNDED-THEORY STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IN ONLINE CLASSES

Interview questions:

a. How would you characterize yourself as a student in an online class? (actively engaged, somewhat engaged, engaged just as much as necessary, reluctant to engage, preferring to observe and submit work)
b. Tell me your story as an online student.
c. In your experience taking online classes, how important have you found it for you as a student to feel as if the instructor is actually present in the online classroom? Describe what an instructor can do to establish presence in the online community.
d. What stands out when you think of one class with strong instructor presence and the elements that created that impression?
e. Tell what happened one particular time when you most perceived yourself as part of a learning community in which you were interacting with other students, such as a discussion forum or real-time chat or a group project. Was the instructor's presence a factor in that experience?
f. Describe what you see as most important in the design of a course to create the impression of the instructor as an engaged participant in the course--for instance, posting of instructor information; email; telephone contact; instructor's picture, teaching experience, and interests; creating original assignments; providing for student-led discussion; assigning individual and group projects.
g. Tell what you have observed in an instructor that takes away from the student's sense of instructor presence.
h. What stands out when you think of how an instructor's presence is revealed through website design or course organization or how lessons are planned out? Is evidence of the instructor's expertise an important element of course design?
i. How important do you find an instructor's personal presence? Can you recall powerful examples of any of the following? A welcome email to start the class, email updates on course progress, quick responses to emails, friendliness in communicating, instructor participation in discussions, instructor availability via telephone, feedback on graded papers, instructor's awareness of you personally, instructor's providing personal and educational background and posting a picture.
j. How important is direct instruction? Explain when you want direct instruction (recorded classroom lecture, mini-lectures or podcasts, posted papers and explanations, responses to student questions, graded work, email responses).
k. Would the courses you have taken be improved by the addition of any of the options we have discussed? Which ones and in what ways?
l. What stands out in your memory of a class in which instructor presence or lack of presence made a difference in your maturity as a learner or your desire to excel in a class?

Appendix 5

Auditor's Report

Midland College

November 2, 2012

William Feeler
Dean, Fine Arts and Communication
Midland College
Midland, TX 79705

Dear Mr. Feeler,

I have studied the transcripts of the interviews that comprise your study, "Being there: A grounded-theory study of student perceptions of instructor presence in online classes." I have also read your dissertation in its entirety.

My purpose was to observe the process of analysis of the participant responses in order to evaluate the authenticity of the presentation of their voices in your dissertation. Particularly, I was interested in your analysis of data into themes, sub-themes, and categories to ascertain whether the respondents' views were presented accurately. I selected five of the participant records by choosing every third transcript (Allison, Deana, Gloria, Jan,and Madeline) and reading each carefully.

Structure. Each interview was structured around a similar pattern. Each began with a brief overview of the student's experience as an online student, followed by a discussion of the definition and importance, according to the student, of instructor presence. While each respondent was asked a pre-ordered set of questions, opportunity for amplification and elaboration was provided with probing follow-up questions.

Coding. In addition to complete transcripts, an accurate array of individual words and phrases arising from the interview is reported in each case. The subsequent coding of these words and phrases is accurate and comprehensive. The categories that emerged from the respondents' stories and the relationship among those categories accurately interpret and represent the voices of the respondents.

Integrity of the data. I have reviewed these data – the interview records and coding along with the analysis of themes and categories. I found an apparent, appropriate, and accurate correspondence among the transcripts, the words and phrases selected for analysis, and the proposed model, "The Theory of Establishing and Sustaining Presence to Enable Student Learning."

Sincerely,

Diane Allen

Diane Allen, Ph.D.
Chair, English Department

Appendix 6

Sample Interview

Interview with Helen

R - It is Thursday September 20, 2012 and I am talking to Helen. Helen, the concept that I am working on is online instructor presence, but I intentionally defined it somewhat vaguely because I want to generate a definition based on what I hear from students. So we are going to be talking about online presence, mainly regarding your perspective of it and insights that you can come up with for me today. Let's start by having you tell me your story as an online student.

H – Ok. I first started taking online classes probably 2 ½ to 3 years ago and discovered that it actually was better for my schedule as a stay at home mom who is quite busy with 4 kids and my husband is out of town quite a bit. So it enabled me to study while the kids were at school and then be a mom when they came home and still keep up with everything else involved in that. So far it has worked out great. I got my Associate's degree in 2011 from this college in English and I am now starting my Bachelor's degree through another University. It's University Studies online.

R – So you started out primarily for convenience and you did pretty well from the start.

H - Yes.

R - Were there any things that were kind of rocky at the beginning? Did your feelings about online classes change over time? Or did you like them from the start?

H – I think my biggest problem was just getting used to the operating system, the Blackboard system and how it is used. The many different areas that you can go to. The areas that the instructors actually utilized, figuring out where my grades were, and where the assignments were. And in addition to that I think that the time you need to be very disciplined about, not being on the telephone during the day, or not having lunch with friends or you know, you have to let the laundry go. You have to let a lot of things go in order to get it done. You have to be very disciplined with your time. Those are probably two of the biggest things for me.

R – All right. Well, in terms of how you approached classes online from the start to now, how would you characterize yourself as a student in terms of your level of engagement? And let me just give you a few choices: actively engaged, somewhat engaged, engaged just as much as necessary, reluctant to engage, or preferring to observe and submit work?

H – I think at the beginning of each class that I have taken I like to be an observer just to see where I need to be in the class, and then after I have made some observations, I like to actively participate because that is just my personality. I would prefer to be in a classroom and interacting with people, but my life at this point just doesn't make room for that. There are a lot of forums, like discussion boards, that are required for most of the classes that I take, so it is easy to get involved with the give and take like a regular classroom setting. It is mandatory in a lot of the classes, so in that respect I am able to get what I need emotionally out of a regular classroom setting from an online setting.

R- So the learning community of an online class is pretty important to you?

H – It is. Yes, I personally need feedback. So when you have to do a discussion board, most of the instructors require that, so it is automatically built in to the online classes.

R – So when you are talking about feedback, you are talking about feedback from both professors and from students?

H – Yes.

R – I want to come back to the discussion board topic just a little bit, but before we slide along too far, you talked about observing at first in each class you have, and I was just wondering: what kind of things are you observing?

H – Well, I have known in the back of my head, I was able to see, like this past week was in one of the online classes. I am taking nonverbal communications class, and part of the lesson was to start a conversation with somebody, but interrupt

them every single time they started talking. It should be something they were interested in, but you would interject and cut them off, and then you would write your response, write a response on how you felt they reacted to it and why you thought they were called regulators and why you thought regulators were important in conversation and friendship socially with your family and all aspects of your life. And I was reading—some people posted before I did, so I got an opportunity to read what they had written on the discussion board and it dawned on me, you don't have to be a genius to go to college. I mean the way the person wrote—and I don't know if this was just because I personally thought everybody needs to write in complete sentences, and they need to use all the words in the sentence when you are in a written environment, where you are going back and forth and the person that I noticed was. . . . Of course, I can't see these people, I don't know what they look like, but I think this person might have been deaf because at the beginning of the class—we have to interview ourselves, write a little about ourselves. Write a little bit about yourself. I did not have an opportunity to go back and look, but that one particular person, there was a disconnect. That immediately made me think,1 well, you don't have to be a genius to go to college, but then on the other hand, did they have a special impediment and I just remembered that there was one person that was deaf and that she had been talking about that in her introduction and either that or was not educated to put the "and" in between words or use pronouns or just the way that it was written just seemed disjointed a little bit. I was able to understand it, but then I thought, "That is rude of me to think that everyone needs to be a genius to go to college," but then, aha, hey, I can do as well as anybody else so.

R – So do you do that kind of observing in every class?

H – No, that was just me, just bold in my face when I started reading, there is something wrong with this writing, it's like it doesn't flow like we are speaking. And a lot of the students on the discussion boards are, well, they write like they talk.

R – So, are you observing the instructor also when you start a class?

H – Yeah, actually I do and there are a lot of different instructors out there.

R – So what are you looking for as you observe instructors in the beginning of term?

H – I think like all students, you want to kind of size them up, to see what are my expectations and what are his or her expectations for the class? And sometimes you can see it in a syllabus, and sometimes you cannot. And, you know, when you start communicating, you are like, "Oh ok, I need to be real diligent about turning things in in this class, and in this class they just want the basics. And I have one instructor right now who doesn't interact through Blackboard—he sends out emails. So I have to be very diligent about looking out for or checking my email every day through the college that I normally wouldn't check every day, but he is constantly putting information on that. So I have to check it and keep doing that.

R – So you would relate all these things to instructor presence?

H – Yeah, I would. There is this one particular instructor who would go through each—well, on one discussion board she would look—which is good to know--at everything that is written on the board, like for my human resources, and she will respond and say, "Let's discuss this as a class." And I am like, "Well, that's kind of a nice interjection to let us know that she is virtually there and talking with the students and interacting with the students. And in another class it is just discussion among yourselves. In another class there is no discussion. So, yeah, you can definitely tell there is a presence in my human resources teacher versus the sociology versus the persuasion teacher, who does things a little different.

R – So you mentioned the syllabus earlier. Can you detect instructor presence in the syllabus that is put forth by the instructor?

H – Yeah, coming from the college perspective because I have worked in the Health Sciences division here at this college and working on some of the syllabuses, I know certain things about a syllabus that need to be there, and I can tell—since I

have been working in the community college—I could tell the difference between a syllabus where the instructor was present in it and very detailed in how it was written versus one that had been copied from last semester. And that to me, that instructor was not present. None of the dates were changed and that was the same on blackboard. The dates had not been changed, and so when you went to take an exam that said that it was due in February so it would not open. You were like "Where is that guy?"

R – So sometimes the instructor is present and sometimes the instructor is not.

H – That's correct—in my opinion.

R – Well, your opinion is what we are talking about. What things do you see that an instructor can do to establish instructor presence in an online class? Other than the things you have already mentioned.

H – Well, effective communication of course within the discussion board and I think having it be a requirement is a good thing. I mean in three of my classes I feel like the instructors are very present, and in one of them I feel like he is present but in a different way. And I feel like I am more involved in the course when the instructor talks back to me on the discussion board. But, I know, like in one of my classes there are 53 people online—and that is just one class. So I think that might be kind of difficult for every situation, but I think those, well, like I said, you said that I said yes, but those are the things that I find important.

R – You mentioned the instructor who used email a lot.

H – Yes.

R – Did you find that as a mode of creating instructor presence?

H – Yes, but not in the way I expected, and I guess because we use Blackboard as a facilitator for the interaction between the students and the instructor. I expected that there would be more interaction on the blackboard portion of it, but we only take tests. And he will post an assignment, but in everything else all the communication done with the instructor is online through an email account.

R – You mentioned discussion boards in which the instructor did not participate at all. Is there any instructor presence in those in how the instructor facilitates discussions among students—in other words, just the setting up of the board?

H – The setting up of the board, like there will be a question prompt and in the other 3 classes there is generally a question prompt and two of the classes there are 2 questions prompts. So there will be 2 conversations going on in each of those 2 classes. So 4 conversations in two classes and then one in another class and so how they word the questions can feed into, I guess, their presence. How they would word it first would be how a student would word it.

R – You are talking about like gauging who the instructor was. I was just wondering if that gave you clues as to what the instructor looks for, expects.

H – Yeah, well, between that, there is always presence in your grades. So when I got a few of my grades, I was like, "Oh, ok, now I know what they expect." So whether it was a poor grade or good grade, I was like "Ok, I did the right thing. I need to change up a little bit."

R – Have you had any classes that used something like real time chat?

H – Yes, in fact I have had 3—and one of them was here at this college—and it worked out really nicely, but not a lot of students participated. It was mostly for having a problem. To me I didn't feel like it benefited me personally. It might have benefited some of the other students who did it, but again there was not a very high participation rate in it.

R – Was it used more for consultation on how things were going in the class?

H – Kind of. It was used like that, but it was not like, "Ok, here is a topic, the instructor asks a question, and let's discuss it." It was more like, "How is everything going, do you have any questions about what we are working on this week and it was fine."

R – Something like a troubleshooting conference?

H – Kind of. Yeah.

R – Do you find that your learning has increased in the online discussions that work well? Are you learning from your fellow students? Or is it mainly creating camaraderie?

H – I think it does a little of both. Actually in the creative writing classes that I took here at this college, I probably learned the most from those classes because we actually had to put our work up there and have all the other students look at it, read it, tell us what they thought about it. And so I think I learned more in that kind of environment than I have in a discussion board and feel like I am learning more right now because of the way it is set up. And in all the classes that do have discussions, you have to respond to at least 3 of your peers on the discussion board. Most of the students you are not supposed to say, "I like that, I agree with you, great job," and it specifically tells you that in the syllabus at the very top.

R – But they do it anyway.

H – They do it anyway and I think, "Well, it's fine," —but I am not antagonistic—"but, well, I don't agree with that thought and here's why. And so far I have done really well in that class. But, you know, I am thinking we don't learn anything by just agreeing with them, like, "I love your writing—it is so awesome."

R – But you hope that it is true anyway. I know just exactly what you are talking about. Can you think of one particular time in which you were interacting with other students, and you really felt strongly that you were part of a learning community that really was working? And people were exchanging ideas and that progress was being gained?

H – Yes.

R – Can you tell me about that?

H – Yeah. It was again in creative writing class. You know, everyone has different ways of writing obviously and when someone who writes about science fiction critiques something from someone who writes about the Middle Ages. I mean you do get different perspectives, and it makes you think differently about how you would have written it or how they view it. And you know they give good ideas. Like "Wow, I never thought that they can still be alive or that magic does really happen." That kind of thing. I'm just thinking of a few stories that I was reading.

R – So is this a Fiction class?

H – Yes, it was a Fiction class. That so far has been one of the two classes that have been the most interesting. I have learned the most about writing. And about how people perceive things and you talk about getting your laptop out and typing in it in a story and somebody points out, "Wow it was 1984, they did not have laptops back then." And you are like, "Oh, yeah, I forgot!" So, it goes to continuity and other aspects of it like technology of course, but I don't know, I just feel like I learn the most from that. I took a speech class through this college and I took it twice because the first time I just could not get it done. So when I took it the second time they used different technology the second time around, and I found it much easier, and I felt like I learned more doing it because of the way she had it set up the second time I took it than I did the first time.

R – So how did you do speeches in that class?

H – Well, the first time I took it and I had to withdraw after probably 3 or 4 weeks. We would have to do our speech. We had to do it in front of 3 adults, 18 or older. We had to show them on the video and then we had to mail her a DVD or CD. And the second time I took it, she had set up everything through Youtube, and that was so much easier. We were assigned like, I think there were like 4 of us in each group and everybody posted their video and depending on what the speech was about. We had to critique them just like in creative writing, but in a nice way of course. You would say, "More eye contact," "you talk too fast," "you read too much," "you were looking at the paper the whole time," "you needed to look up and look at your audience." So, but those things, I feel like I learned a lot from them. It was interesting. I felt like I learned a lot from this class as well.

R – Those are good examples. Is there anything that you have observed in an online class that detracts from the student's perception of instructor presence?

H – Detracts--I am not sure I am understanding you.

R – Well, you gave one example that you talked about where the instructor that didn't participate at all in the discussion board, and it seems that like you said that created like kind of a sense of distance. I guess part of what it seems like you are saying about instructor presence is it's a bringing together as opposed to separating. In fact, you used the phrase, I believe, "virtually here." And so I guess I am asking, Are there particular things that an instructor may do in a class or that you have seen an instructor do in a class that kind of created distance as opposed to. . . .

H – Yes. I think of one. I was taking an online class here and I ended up changing instructors because they just put like the lessons up and almost expected you to do it yourself like a correspondence course and finish at your own pace. And then like probably more than halfway through the semester emailed me, even after I withdrew from her class, and I was like "I guess you weren't really there." There were no discussion forums. I didn't feel like there was any feedback from the beginning and not having any feedback from your computer…

R – So feedback is a pretty strong component of instructor presence?

H – I believe so, yes.

R – And feedback in what form?

H – I don't think it really matters as long as you either get an email. . . . Well, I do think it matters. Just giving you a grade—that really doesn't tell you much. It's like a couple of seeds on the ground, but those are good ones and they can still grow, but you still need to have somebody chat with you. And maybe tell you that you maybe need to look at this differently. One of the instructors, well, I sent her a report and we do MLA here at this college, but at the university they do APA style, so I had to do a little bit of research on APA style, and I did it and I was not sure about it, but I turned it in, but she went back and did feedback on the report that I had turned in, which was nice. To me that again was like I felt her presence. I was like, "Oh she did pay attention to what I wrote." A grade is fine, but giving me back my paper was more important, and there are some teachers, instructors, professors, that don't give you back your paper.

R – You just get a grade in the grade book?

H – Yeah, I would prefer to see what I did, and how am I going to do it better next time if you don't tell me what I did wrong or what I did right? I felt like that is part of the learning process.

R – What about just course design? By design I mean—you talked about it a little bit in syllabus—just the way the course is organized and the way it progresses from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester. Does instructor presence play a part in that? Let me tell you about how I'm thinking about this. You know one person could put a course on the internet and several different people teach that class. I don't know that that would show you much about the

instructor's presence, but have you seen in your classes that instructors designing their classes were really showing you something about themselves in how they designed their courses?

H – Oh yeah. I think especially when, taking the communication and English classes, the readings they choose. I mean you can write a syllabus and you can have an outline for a class, but depending on what readings are chosen, I think the choices give insight to the instructor and how they are thinking. Definitely, yeah, the reading portion of the structure of the class especially because you have to do a lot of reading when you take an online class. It is because you don't get the lecture portion. And what lecture portion you do a lot of times is Powerpoint. There was one class , that I started taking at another university and again that did not work out, but the instructor had like a little video that we watched of him. and so that definitely gave you his character for the class. I wasn't impressed by it, but again because when you are taking an online class you want to be able to do part of the structure yourself. You want to give it a little of your personality because if it is an online class you want to have the flexibility to read it at midnight, or whatever, but when a teacher lectures on a video and you have no way of talking back to them. I suppose on how. . . . This particular guy was just kind of dry in the subject matter and I was just not really interested in it either.

R – So the lecture was the primary mode of …

H – Yeah. It was like, "Come here and click on this video, and I will lecture you. And I am like, "Well, I would rather be lectured and be able to raise my hand."

R – And there was no feedback area for the lecture.

H – I don't recall. There might have been, but I just was like, "I just don't like the way this was set up."

R – Was it like a long lecture, or was just a short podcast?

H – Maybe like 10 minutes. It might have been a little longer than that, but the subject matter did not draw me in either.

R – More like a required course?

H – Yeah. So I decided to go to a different route.

R – So recorded lectures might not be your favorite mode of ….

H – No, I just don't feel like that benefits me as a student. It may. Sometimes reading is kind of a required lecture in my brain, but I can go back and read, and do I really want to go back and watch someone talk all over again? I suppose that the interest level that I had was not there, but maybe if it was interesting….

R – Have you had any instructors who gave you a writing that was something like a written lecture?

H – Yes. I did not mind that because I could go back through and highlight what I thought was important in it, and generally in all my online classes I print everything out. I like to look at the paper and be able to mark through stuff or be able to highlight.

R – We have talked about the importance of instructor presence for a long time. How important do you find that in your success as a student in the class?

H – Again, it goes back to feedback. How do I know that I am doing the right thing? I guess I am the type of person that appreciates that "A", appreciates a pat on the back: "Good job!" Keep doing that," or "That was not really what I was asking for." So the instructor presence is in the feedback that they give me. And the other students, too, because on those discussion boards, they might not be talking to you, but somebody else could have written something that I had thought about but didn't write. And the instructor caught onto that and said something to them, and so it was almost like being in a

regular classroom, like I was going to say that, but I didn't, but she mentioned it and then the instructor tapped into that comment and was able to either elaborate or agree/disagree on it. To me that helps me as a student.

R – So how would you compare how much you have learned in an online class versus how much you have learned in a face to face class?

H – Well, it would depend on the class.

R – So what has your experience been?

H – I cannot do Math online. I have tried it. Maybe I can do it now since I have had so many—nine or ten—online classes, but Math I could not do online. I did take a lot of classes here, on campus, and it just really depends on the class like for the sciences. I feel like I definitely benefited from being in a classroom. And having the lab go along with it. And the same with math. You have the lab there, either for your requirement or leisure or depending on what level of math you are at, but it is still available to you, not that it would not be online. Accounting, I notice that we don't have accounting here online, and I did take an accounting class and I sat there in the class. I said it would be nice to have an accounting class online, but the way that it is taught and the amount of information that you need and to get it right I think it's better to have on campus, and I suppose that again it depends on the teacher. I think economics might have been 50/50 and I took those two classes, thinking, "Well, I don't know what I want to be when I grow up, so I will just take them." A lot of them are hybrid classes anyway because you do your homework online, but then you come to class and you do them. You have a lecture in class, but then you go and do your homework, and it is automatically graded.

R – So does the lecture face to face work?

H – A little bit better because then they can see when we are yawning back here or I am losing you.

R – At least you get to provide feedback. You can raise your hand.

H – A lot of it is like the sound of what we have to say: "Well, we are interested in what we have to say just as an instructor would, but not everybody is interested at the same level." And when you take a class just because you need it, it's different from when you take a class because you want to be there and you want to learn.

R – So the lectures that you have seen, were those lectures to classes where maybe students would be there and raise a hand, or were they just in front of a camera?

H – They were in front of a camera. Actually, there was one instructor here at this college that she would talk over the Powerpoints. That was interesting to me.

R – Did that work?

H – Yeah it did. I know some people are auditory, and some are visual learners, and some people are kinesthetic learners. All those different kinds of learners. So I think that it is beneficial to just students in general if you give them more options. Rather than just reading, just the lecture, and having a combination of them would be helpful I think.

R – How important is writing in how much you learn in online classes? Does it matter that you write quite a bit more than you do than in other classes?

H – To me it does not because I like to write. It is just a matter of time. I did specifically try to take one writing class at a time versus some other kind because I knew that I would not have time to get everything done if I took that many writing courses at the same time. So I tried to break it up because we had the option to do it a certain way, but I think writing is another part of that how different people learn.

R – Is posting of an instructor page that important? I am talking about a page where the instructor maybe posts a picture and tells about his or her interests.

H – I do. I think that is important. For me it is important so I know where they are coming from. Like the instructor is, "Oh, I've lived all over the world, but I choose to live in West Texas." Wow, I don't know what that would say about you, but if you choose to or you had to or like if they are married, love dogs, etc. I think that says something about what they are, and most instructors have different likes and dislikes. I might change some things that I might say depending on what they say about them. Probably the more classes I take the less I would change about what I would say about them.

R – Can you think about any powerful examples of the following in your classes and are they related to instructor presence: welcoming email to start the class, emails on course progress, quick response to emails, friendliness in communication, instructor availability by telephone, the instructor's awareness of you personally?

H- A welcome email—I think that is nice. Everyone does that and every instructor that I have ever had sends a welcome—not necessarily an email, like on Blackboard just a post or an announcement.

R – Any powerful examples that made a difference in instructor presence?

H – No. I cannot think of any.

R – What about use of course or email updates or again maybe an announcement with an update on how the class is going or even on how you are doing as an individual?

H – I don't think I have ever had anybody, any instructor do that. Most of them will tell you on a paper.

R – Friendliness in communication?

H – Yes, there has been, well I think that it is important. You can tell the tone of a teacher's voice when they are writing something. I think that most of them choose their words carefully. I am just thinking about the one instructor who I have that emails like us 2-page emails. They are to the whole class, you have to read them carefully, and I have noticed that he's having to say things over and over. Like, "Did they not read that the first time?" But I think in our technology age the snippets, text, quick email, the short information….

R – Sometimes do you think that we need longer things to help us build our reading attention?

H – I don't know if that would help. Obviously, it has not in the classes that I have taken. I am going to the university now and there are going to be a lot more students in classroom or in the classes I think. There are quite a few more students in the online classes up there, but giving them more information does not make them better readers or better listeners or better comprehenders.

R- So maybe they need shorter messages?

H – I guess, but then my message box would be full: do this, do that.

R – How important is direct instruction? You talked about it in lectures and the lectures that you had online did not seem to work too well, but the ones you had in class somewhat did, when you had feedback, but beyond that, what about the use of posted papers from an instructor? You have talked about email, but have you had actual direct instruction in the emails? Is that important—for instance, if you have a question on how to do something?

H – Yeah.

R – Or are you getting instruction mainly from books?

H – No, I think that the instructors that I have had , have been mostly pretty good at guiding though either like online directions or email and when you are in and out of class, I have noticed that you have to be very direct and very specific in your directions. You cannot have any ambiguity. It has to be black and white. "This is how I need it done and maybe that is what has been easier for me" —because I will read and will read it again just to make sure that I didn't miss any of those directions and so far have been successful in that. But that is one thing about the instructor presence that is in the actual instruction on how they want you to write like a paper. Or MLA versus APA and how they want everything done. Most of them have been very explicit, so that has been very helpful.

R – Let me ask you one more question. What stands out in your memory from one single class in which instructor presence or lack of instructor presence made a big difference in the class in terms of your own maturity as a learner or your desire to excel?

H – Well, in my own maturity as a learner and my desire to excel. I am still in that group of people who can withdraw and not be penalized for it. Thank God, because I will just drop a class because I don't have time for somebody that is not going to be present for me, and honestly I have gotten a lot of scholarships and it is not even me who is paying for the majority of my college, so I don't want to waste my time or the donor's time or money on somebody who is just going to throw up stuff and not participate with me in my learning process as a student.

R – Well, I think that is a pretty strong statement on your part about how important you think instructor presence is. It sounds like it is a deal breaker: If they have it strongly, then you are willing to jump in the middle and if it is just kind of there, then you will sit back and observe until you decide, and if it is not there, you will not most likely stay with it.

H – Great. What do I benefit? What do I learn? What do I end up contributing to society if I don't make that choice?

R – So a self-paced class, where the assignments are there, you send them in, you get a grade….

H – If I know that from the front it is one thing, but if the teacher is there and they are lazy about giving the feedback. They are people just like me and you and they're just regular people. Some teachers are going to be great, and some are not. And I am at a time in my life that I don't want to waste my time with lazy teachers who are just collecting a paycheck and complaining. Not that any teacher that I have taken that I know personally has complained , but I do know teachers that I have not taken that complain all the time and their job performance shows and they don't want to participate. They only want the students that do really well, but then they are not willing to help everybody to do really well.

R – I understand. Is there anything else that you would like to say about online learning or instructor presence that maybe I haven't asked you about?

H – Yes, I signed up for an online English class through the university not realizing that we had to meet on a certain day and that's the way the class is set up.

R – So it was a hybrid class?

H – No. It was an online class, but you had to meet online in an online forum, and I couldn't do it because of a personal conflict every Thursday night that I have this semester. In a way I was disappointed and in another way I was, "That is not why I take online classes—I take them for the flexibility to fit into my life at this point in time." And I was kind of put out by the fact that we had a choice between Saturday or Thursday and the rest of the class picked Thursday, and I was like, "Well, maybe next time." That would be my last word on the online thing, and there are so many ways to do it and I thought that was interesting and I probably will end up still taking the class, but when it fits better in my schedule.

R – Well I thank you so much, Helen. Would you mind if I were to call you again just to throw an idea back at you?

H - Any time, sure.