INNOVATIVE ONLINE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: A NARRATIVE STUDY
EXPLORING THE SOCIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my sister who sadly did not live to see me complete this capstone project for my doctoral degree. She always said I was a lifelong student and seemed to be enrolled in some college course or college program throughout my adult life. I am sure she would have loved to see me finally obtain my doctorate. My life is a little sadder without you.
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Abstract

The landscape of higher education is changing by the increased offering of distance education courses in addition to traditional, face-to-face courses at many colleges both in the United States and around the world. The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process. Specifically, the study sought to discover the learning experiences of these instructors as they sought to adopt innovative instructional practices to enhance students' social learning. The framework for this study was based on Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. The researcher conducted a qualitative narrative study of a two-year college located in the southeastern United States (U.S.) that is in the process of expanding its distance education course offerings. Five faculty members were interviewed to answer the research question of “How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?” Instructors who transitioned from the “on ground” to the “online” environment faced a learning curve. Part of the learning curve in the transition from teaching face-to-face to online consisted of instructors having to learn about emerging technologies and different forms of communication. One important piece of the puzzle for instructors was learning how to incorporate social learning in the virtual environment. It seems to occur naturally in the face-to-face classroom, but faculty had to learn how to integrate social learning in the online classroom. Collaboration with other faculty members helped promote best practices in designing and delivering quality online education.

Keywords: Social Learning, Social Cognitive Theory, Higher Education, Distance Education, Online, Hybrid, Qualitative, Narrative
Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................ 11
   Statement of the Problem ......................................................................................................... 13
   Practice ....................................................................................................................................... 14
   Theory ......................................................................................................................................... 15
   Research ...................................................................................................................................... 17
   Research Question ...................................................................................................................... 18
   Purpose Statement ...................................................................................................................... 19
   Significance of Research Problem .............................................................................................. 20
   Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................................. 20
   Overview of Research Plan ......................................................................................................... 23
   Key Terms/Definitions ................................................................................................................. 23

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................... 25
   History of Education .................................................................................................................... 28
   History of Social Learning .......................................................................................................... 29
   Social Cognitive Theory ............................................................................................................. 30
   Social Learning Environment ....................................................................................................... 30
   Self-Efficacy ................................................................................................................................. 31
   Distance Education ...................................................................................................................... 35
   History of Distance Education .................................................................................................... 35
   Online Learning ........................................................................................................................... 36
   Emerging Technologies ............................................................................................................... 38
   Online Instructor Roles ............................................................................................................... 41
   Summary ...................................................................................................................................... 42

CHAPTER 3: A QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE INQUIRY .......................................................... 44
   Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 44
   Overview of Study ....................................................................................................................... 44
   Positionality Statement ............................................................................................................... 45
   Trustworthiness .......................................................................................................................... 45
   Protection of Human Subjects ..................................................................................................... 47
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 90
Interpretation of Primary Findings ....................................................................................... 92
  Theme 1 ............................................................................................................................... 93
  Theme 2 ............................................................................................................................... 95
  Theme 3 ............................................................................................................................... 96
  Theme 4 ................................................................................................................................ 98
Implications for Theory ........................................................................................................ 99
Implications for Practice ....................................................................................................... 100
Recommendations ................................................................................................................ 102
Future Research .................................................................................................................. 103
Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 104
References ............................................................................................................................. 106
Appendix A Request for Consent ......................................................................................... 116
Appendix B Recruitment Email ............................................................................................ 118
Appendix C Interview Questions with Probes ..................................................................... 120
Appendix D Coding Tables ................................................................................................. 122
List of Tables

Table 1 Learning and Teaching Theories ................................................................. 27
Table 2 Timeline of Distance Education ................................................................. 36
Table 3 Trustworthiness ....................................................................................... 47
Table 4 Participant Demographics .................................................................... 51
Table 5 Codebook ............................................................................................... 57
Table 6 Alignment of Research Design ............................................................... 78
Table 7 Key Themes ............................................................................................ 81
List of Figures

Figure 1. Teaching and Learning Platforms ................................................................. 19

Figure 2. Triadic Reciprocal Elements ........................................................................ 21

Figure 3. Online Instructor Roles ................................................................................ 42

Figure 4. Data Collection Phases ................................................................................ 52

Figure 5. Participant Story Profile .............................................................................. 85

Figure 6. Relationship of Triadic Reciprocal Elements & Three-Dimensions ............... 92
Noted Psychologist Albert Bandura (1986) wrote, “Of the many cues that influence behavior, at any point in time, none is more common than the actions of others” (p. 206).
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Colleges are offering more distance education courses to meet the demands of students, to save classroom space, and to save money. In 2013, Allen and Seaman stated, “The number of students taking at least one online course increased by over 570,000 to a new total of 6.7 million” (p. 4). Online courses are competing with face-to-face courses for college student enrollment. Students are enrolling in more online courses, instructors are teaching more online courses, and college administrators are discussing the need to increase distance education course offerings at colleges nationwide. In a ten-year study of distance education, Allen and Seaman (2013) reported, “The proportion of chief academic leaders that say online learning is critical to their long-term strategy is now at 69.1 percent – the highest it has been for this ten-year period” (p. 4). There is much discussion today about whether online learning in higher education is equal in quality to learning in the traditional classroom.

Distance education has been around for a long time. Saba (2011) wrote, “Ideas and practices as far back as Colonial times have influenced conceptualization, growth, and practice of distance education” (11). Perceptions toward distance education have not always been favorable though. Much of this negativity in the past may be largely due to the delivery methods of distance learning. Correspondence courses and radio and television broadcasts were not considered as highly reputable forms of learning as was the learning that occurred in the traditional college classroom (Saba, 2011).

The stigma of distance education as being inferior to traditional education seems to be changing over time though with the advances in distance education delivery modes. Since the introduction of computers and other technologies in the late 1980’s and 1990’s, a more stable environment for distance education has developed (Saba, 2011). Emerging technologies are
changing the way instructors and students view distance education. Saba (2011) noted, “If the tendency to use information technology for teaching and learning continues in coming years, distance education will become the dominant form of education in the foreseeable future” (14).

In Georgia, technical college students are registering for online courses in record numbers (Newell, 2007). According to the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), “71,978 students enrolled in courses through the TCSG’s Georgia Virtual Technical Connection in 2013. They received more than a half million credit hours of online instruction in a wide variety of programs” (TCSG, 2014, p. 6). There are an increasing number of students pursuing college degrees in Georgia. The University System of Georgia (USG) proposed a higher education completion plan in 2012. Part of the plan includes delivery of more online courses. The USG (2011) wrote, “Courses should be delivered through a mix of blended in-person and online experiences” (p. 20).

The USG (2011) “will address the mismatch between the needs of today’s students and the current delivery models in five areas” (p. 20). One area is distance education. Within this area, the USG (2011) noted, “One key to greater student success and college completion is building and sustaining teaching pedagogies that engage the student learner” (p. 20). There has also been an articulation agreement formed between Georgia’s University System and Georgia’s Technical College system. This allows for “a restructuring of delivery, providing options for students to earn a degree through coursework outside a single institution or system” (USG, 2011, p. 21).

Distance education allows students the flexibility to take college classes from anywhere and at any time. Students can be in another region of the United States or on the other side of the world and still be able to obtain college credits. Distance education allows instructors a flexible
teaching schedule and allows colleges to be flexible with class schedules. This new demand for distance education has changed our social, economic, and global economies (Saba, 2011).

**Statement of the Problem**

Distance education has been around longer than most people may think. According to Anderson and Simpson (2012), “We think of preachers, early itinerant storytellers, wandering minstrels, and groups of performers as early teachers. Great thinkers also gathered around them people who were keen to listen, to debate, and to share ideas” (p. 1). An older form of distance education was the so-called correspondence courses that allowed students to use the post office for delivery of learning materials (O’Lawrence, 2006). The Internet now allows a technological basis for delivery of learning resources (O’Lawrence, 2006). Allen and Seaman (2013) reported, “The proportion of all students taking at least one online course is at an all-time high of 32.0 percent” (p. 4). This is expected to grow in the future.

The conversation in higher education is that of distance education and how it is affecting the learning environment. Jonassen and Land (2000) wrote, “Within discourses, people can exchange thoughts and explanations” (p. 69). Emerging technologies, social media, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), flipped classrooms, etc. seem to be leading the way in changing the higher education landscape. According to the TCSG’s Georgia Virtual Technical Connection (2001), online learning continues to grow because it is convenient and flexible. “The ivory tower as it was once known has now firmly established itself as a digital one” (Fish & Wickersham, 2009, p. 283). There seems to be a shift in how higher education is delivered, but many instructors may be unsure of how to transition from the traditional educational platform to a virtual one while maintaining a quality social learning environment for students. “Teaching in
online courses is an extremely complex and challenging function” (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 3).

Practice

Many instructors are familiar with traditional classroom teaching but are not as familiar with teaching in the virtual environment. Many college instructors are now being asked to teach online in addition to or in place of teaching face-to-face. Instructors need to understand how to best transition from the traditional classroom to the virtual environment. Organizations and the roles of employees within organizations are constantly changing in today’s global marketplace (Mohrman & Lawler, 2012). The reshaping of teaching and learning platforms is one cause for discourse in higher education today. Some instructors may be unsure of how to transfer their face-to-face courses to online courses. Distance education is not just about placing face-to-face courses online and then using technology in the courses (Easton, 2003; Fish & Wickersham, 2009; King & Arnold, 2012).

The scrutiny of distance education’s worth will only increase with the continued popularity of this learning format. Fink (2007) wrote, “Online instruction has significantly impacted higher learning. Online learning opportunities are expanding rapidly in higher education to meet the changing demographics of the post-secondary learner” (p. 17). Thus, it is important for instructors to understand how to best design and teach an online course that would yield the best possible student learning outcomes. It is also important to understand how instructors transition into teaching in the virtual world if they had previously only been teaching in the physical classroom. “Instinctively, when we think about distance learning for the first time, we may have a tendency to assume that it lacks an interaction aspect. We are inclined to
think about classroom interaction as something that exists primarily face-to-face” (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006, p. 300).

Online learning continues to be assessed to determine whether it is meeting the educational needs of students. Instructors are continuously improving course designs by integrating technological advances. Hopefully, these improvements will promote a more collaborative online learning environment. “If online learning is to rise to the level of its promise, it is necessary to create a pedagogical model or models that enable educators to capitalize on the potentials afforded by online learning technologies” (Norton & Hathaway, 2008, p. 476).

Emerging technologies may be contributing to the growth and changes in higher education online courses. “The trend in higher education shows a continual rise in the use of Internet/web-based technologies to facilitate learning. Driven by student demand and the availability of these technologies, increasing numbers of traditional, campus-based universities now offer online courses” (Coccoma, Peppers, & Molhoek, 2012, p. 148).

Theory

Moore’s (1972) seminal work on transactional distance theory was among the first theories that related to the growing educational phenomenon that was outside the normal realm of traditional education and was described as distance education. Moore (1972) described the teaching and learning process involved in distance education as one in which the teacher and learner are separated as opposed to traditional education where the teacher and student are in the same physical classroom. Communication can occur quite easily when the teacher and learner are face-to-face in the traditional classroom. To be able to communicate in the virtual classroom,
electronic devices may be used (Moore, 1972). Thus technology and communication may be two very important factors in distance education.

Other important names in the field of distance education in recent years include Siemens, Downes, and Dede. George Siemens and Stephen Downes are two professors at the University of Manitoba and teach a course called Connectivism & Connective Knowledge (Downes, 2008).

“Over the last twenty years, technology has reorganized how we live, how we communicate, and how we learn. Learning needs and theories that describe learning principles and processes, should be reflective of underlying social environments” (Siemens, 2005). Both Downes and Siemens have published articles (Downes, 2008; Siemens, 2005) on connectivism and online learning in the technology age. Chris Dede is a professor at Harvard University and specializes in emerging technologies. Dede (2007) considers information and communications technologies (ICT) to be an important part of education in the 21st century.

“More engaging, socially-based models for teaching and learning are needed to replace the traditional, “closed classroom” models, which place emphasis on the institution and instructor” (McLoughin & Lee, 2008, p. 16). A learning theory that focuses on social learning could relate more to the changing world of the virtual classroom. Marquardt and Waddill (2004) wrote, “Social Learning Theory (often referred to as Social Cognitive Theory) focuses on the social context in which people learn; i.e., how they learn through interacting with and observing other people.” (p. 4).

Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory helps shape the social and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning in distance education. Social cognitive theory declares learning is a mental and social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment with all three affecting one another mutually (Bandura, 1986). The concept of self-
efficacy is introduced in Bandura’s (1977a) seminal work and is also included in his later work on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3).

Research

Even though there has been much literature related to distance education over the last 20 years, there is still much to learn about this teaching and learning platform in higher education. There have been many improvements in technology, learning management systems, course design, and course delivery. Some instructors simply move their face-to-face course over into a learning management system when preparing to teach hybrid and/or online courses. Other instructors need to learn new technology when beginning to teach online.

The current literature consists of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies and peer reviewed articles on distance education in post-secondary institutions. The diverse backgrounds include two-year community colleges and four-year universities, private and public institutions, undergraduate and graduate level courses, studies from the United States and in other regions of the world, various ages and educational levels of both students and faculty, and both male and female participants. “There is a strong need to study the qualitative nature of online interaction in terms of teaching and learning approaches” (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005, p. 145). Much research has been conducted on student learning outcomes and student perceptions of online learning. More studies need to focus on the perceptions of instructors concerning teaching and learning platforms due to the paradigm shift from the traditional classroom to the virtual environment. “Although several studies have been conducted on the topic of online teaching, little research has been published on the lived experience of online
educators that has utilized a hermeneutic, interpretive approach in gathering data” (De Gagne & Walters, 2010, p. 357).

A qualitative study exploring the experiences of instructors who are teaching online would provide more textual information about the factors reshaping the learning platforms in higher education today. Many college instructors are being asked to teach online in addition to or in place of teaching face-to-face. “Higher education faculty can and do teach courses delivered in a variety of ways. But, to date, little research has been done on the effectiveness of different delivery modes” (Koenig, 2010, p. 17). Distance education has been studied mostly from the perspective that many instructors are just transferring their traditional classroom materials to an online format (Grandzol & Grandzol, p. 12).

According to Fish and Wickersham (2009), “The concept of delivering instruction online is one that is not going to fade away. It is not an educational fad or the latest buzzword used to impress our stakeholders” (pp. 282-283). Distance education is becoming a major player in the way courses are offered at higher education institutions in the United States. Online courses are in direct competition with face-to-face courses for student enrollment at the post-secondary level of education. Baker (2010) stated, “The prevalence of the Internet has profoundly affected many aspects of society, including higher education, where the demand for online learning is growing exponentially” (p. 2).

**Research Question**

The main question to be answered in this narrative study was as follows.

1. How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?
Purpose Statement

The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process. Specifically, the study sought to discover the learning experiences of these instructors as they sought to adopt innovative instructional practices to enhance students’ social learning. The researcher conducted a qualitative narrative study of a two-year college located in the southeastern United States (U.S.) that is in the process of expanding its distance education course offerings. The researcher obtained stories from college instructors who are transitioning from traditional classroom instruction to distance education instruction. The researcher sought to understand how instructors perceive social learning in the virtual environment and to understand their level of self-efficacy related to their capabilities to instruct using emerging technologies in different platforms. Figure 1 depicts various teaching and learning platforms.

Figure 1. Teaching and Learning Platforms
Significance of Research Problem

The problem is significant to any higher educational institution that provides distance education courses or is considering providing distance education courses. A potential contribution of the study could be to help faculty learn best practices when transitioning from the traditional classroom to online formats. The researcher could implement new teaching strategies that would provide improved learning experiences for students enrolled in distance education courses at the college where the researcher teaches. The implications for improved teaching and greater learning satisfaction in online courses could be enormous and could lead to wide-spread best practices at higher educational institutions locally, nationally, and globally.

Another potential contribution of the study may be the collection of emerging technologies considered important to the virtual learning environment. Teaching online may require instructors to master computer software and various other technologies. A basic Learning Management System (LMS) such as Blackboard may be used to host the course offerings at a college, but an instructor may need to be able to incorporate other technology such as Web 2.0 tools to make a college course part of an interactive social learning experience for students.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study was based on Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Social cognitive theory helps shape the social and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning in distance education. Social cognitive theory declares learning is a mental and social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment with all three affecting one another mutually (Bandura, 1986). Figure 2 depicts what Bandura (2001) described as a reciprocal relationship among the three elements (p. 266).
Bandura (1993) wrote, “The impact of most environmental influences on human motivation, affect, and action is heavily mediated through self processes. They give meaning and valence to external events. Self influences thus operate as important proximal determinants at the very heart of causal processes” (p. 118). The triadic reciprocal elements of online learning are personal factors which include self-efficacy, environmental factors which include emerging technologies, and behavioral factors which include self-direction (Puzziferro, 2008; Pituch & Lee, 2006; Liaw, 2008; DeTure, 2004; Miltiadou & Savenye, 2003). All of these elements are included in what Bandura (1986) referred to as Social Cognitive Theory. The concept of self-efficacy is introduced in Bandura’s (1977a) seminal work and is also included in his later work on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3).
The concept of self-efficacy is important to the student. In 1993, Bandura wrote, “Students’ beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determine their aspirations, level of motivation, and academic accomplishments” (p. 117). This ties back to the three areas of behavior, personal factors, and the environment that are important to the concept of social cognitive theory. These all contribute to the process of each student’s unique learning experience. If a student believes that he/she can achieve academic success, he/she will be motivated to learn and will try to overcome any behavioral, personal, or environmental factors that may stand in the way (Bandura, 1993).

The concept of self-efficacy is also important to the teacher. The teacher must believe in his/her capabilities as a teacher. In the digital age that is upon us, the teacher must also believe in being able to master computer technology to be successful in teaching an online course. Teachers create social learning environments within any learning platform which allow students to succeed. Bandura (1993) indicated teachers have a strong hold on what kind of social learning environments are created. This affects the cognitive development of students who are placed in that environment (Bandura, 1993). There is room for collaboration among students in the online learning environment and instructors can help promote the social learning aspect of this environment (Easton, 2003).

Bandura (1993) stated, “Teachers’ beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve” (p. 117). It is important for the teacher to provide the guidance necessary to motivate students to learn in a positive social learning environment (Bandura, 1993). The teacher can change student behavior by modeling good behavior (Bandura, 1993). Personal factors come into play when students believe they can master learning tasks (Bandura,
With every successful endeavor, a student’s self-efficacy is improved (Bandura, 1993). Online courses need to be designed to motivate students and promote engagement in the learning process (King & Arnold, 2012).

**Overview of Research Plan**

This was a qualitative study exploring the experiences of instructors who are teaching online at a technical college in the southeastern region of the U.S. A qualitative study is used to provide textual information (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry was used for this study. This approach is appropriate for a study that sought to understand the perceptions of college instructors transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. A narrative study tells the story of a participant’s lived experiences in chronological order (Creswell, 2012).

Since enrollment in distance education courses is growing at many higher educational institutions in the United States and globally, many instructors are being asked by administration to move from the traditional classroom to the online environment or teach using both platforms. This narrative study was viewed through the lens of Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. The researcher explored a college campus to understand how instructors view the changing shape of the higher education environment today and the impact technology and/or other factors may have on the future of higher education.

**Key Terms/Definitions**

Education—“Education is an activity undertaken or initiated by one or more agents that is designed to effect changes in the knowledge, skill, and attitudes of individuals, groups, or communities” (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 10).
Web Facilitated—“Course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course. May use a course management system (CMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments” (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007, p. 5).

Blended/Hybrid—“Course that blends online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has some face-to-face meetings” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 5).

Online—“A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically have no face-to-face meetings” (Allen et al., 2007, p. 5).

Distance Education (DE)—Educational theorist Michael Moore (1972) defined distance education as, "The family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from the learning behaviours ... so that communication between the learner and the teacher must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical, or other devices" (p. 76).

For the purposes of this study, distance education, hybrid/blended, web-enhanced, and online were used interchangeably to describe the virtual teaching and learning environment. Face-to-face (f2f), traditional, and on ground were used interchangeably to describe teaching and learning in the physical classroom. Education, teaching, and learning were used to describe the educational process.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces a relevant literature the researcher reviewed that aligned with the theoretical framework of the study. The literature covered included adult learning theories, social learning theories, self-efficacy, and distance education. The theories considered for the conceptual framework originated from diverse areas including education, sociology, psychology, and organizational change. Researchers and practitioners should work together and review theoretical frameworks from different areas when conducting studies on organizational change (Mohrman & Lawler, 2012). The transition from a traditional classroom environment to a virtual environment is part of the changing landscape of higher education today and will continue to be so in the near future. Cercone (2008) wrote, “Instructors will need to adapt, change, and continue to learn about how this "electronic" environment can be used to foster a social atmosphere, and they will need to recognize their role as change agents” (p.152). Theories of learning describe how an individual (student) learns and theories of teaching describe how an individual (teacher) influences the learning of another individual (Knowles, et al., 1998).

Several teaching and learning theories were contemplated as possible theoretical frameworks for the study including the behaviorist, cognitivist, and constructivist theories. According to Professor David Schwandt of The George Washington University (2005), the theories of behaviorists, cognitivists, humanists, social learning theorists, and constructivists could all be applied to adult education. Behaviorists think learning involves changes in behavior due to the environment (Schwandt, 2005). Cognitivists agree with behaviorists with the environmental factor, but also add the cognitive dimension to the learning process (Schwandt, 2005). The humanists think affective and cognitive elements are needed for learning (Schwandt, 2005). Social learning theorists think that individuals need to interact with and observe others as
part of the learning process (Schwandt, 2005). Constructivists also rely on the social aspect of learning and think that reality and knowledge are intertwined in learning (Schwandt, 2005). Table 1 depicts some of these learning and teaching theories that were considered for the conceptual framework.
Table 1

**Learning and Teaching Theories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar Last Name, Year</th>
<th>Premise</th>
<th>View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Lave & Wenger, 1991     | Social Context  
  • Community of Practice | Social constructivist |
| Schön, 1987             | Reflective practitioner  
  • Reflection-in-action | Social psychology  
  Constructivist |
  • Making meaning of experiences | Psychosocial  
  Cognitive |
| Kolb, 1984              | Experiential learning  
  • Learning Styles | Constructivist |
| Vygotsky, 1978, 1981    | • Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)  
  • Scaffolding | Social constructionist |
  • Behavior  
  • Personal factors and Cognition  
  • Environment | Psychology  
  Sociology  
  Self-Efficacy |
  • Adult Learners  
  • Six Assumptions | Humanistic psychology |
| Maslow, 1954            | Maslow’s hierarchy of needs  
  • Intrinsic motivation  
  • Extrinsic motivation | Humanistic psychology |
| Erikson, 1950, 1959, 1968 | Identity Concept  
  • Developmental stage in adolescence  
  • Social roles of adulthood | Psychosocial |
History of Education

The purpose of this section is to review the history of education. The teaching process of old was one of engaging learners in mental inquiry (Knowles, et al., 1998). The Chinese and Hebrew prophets were teachers of adults and used the case method. The ancient Greeks also taught adults and used the Socratic Method (Knowles, et al., 1998). Then the European school system was developed for the education of children (Knowles, et al., 1998). The term “pedagogy” was coined and defined as “the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, et al., 1998, p. 36). Learning is described as a process in which knowledge is acquired thus leading to behavioral changes (Knowles, et al., 1998). Pedagogy is described as the teaching of children (Knowles, et al., 1998). The pedagogical model places the responsibility of the learning process on the teacher and assumes that learners only have the need to know what the teacher wants them to know and that a learner has a self-concept of dependency on the teacher (Knowles, et al., 1998). Pedagogical models relate more to the K-12 school environment.

The recent study of adult learning started to gain popularity after World War I in the United States and in Europe (Knowles, et al., 1998). “Andragogy” is the term used for adult education (Knowles, et al., 1998). The andragogical model places the burden of the learning process more on the learner rather than the teacher (Knowles, et al., 1998). This form of education also differs from the pedagogical model in that it assumes adults want to know why they are learning something and how the knowledge will affect them and that adults are more independent in their acquisition of knowledge and do not rely almost entirely on the instructor to gain that knowledge (Knowles, et al., 1998). There are four more assumptions that are included in the andragogical model which are not included in the pedagogical model (Knowles, et al., 1998). These include the experiences of the adult learner, the readiness of the adult to learn, the
orientation to learn, and the motivation to learn (Knowles, et al., 1998). Andragogical models relate more to the higher education environment.

**History of Social Learning**

This section will describe the history of social learning. Julian Rotter, Robert Sears, and Albert Bandura all contributed to social learning theory. The social learning environment and online instructor roles will also be examined. Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study since it can relate to adult learning and higher education.

Rotter first introduced his theory of social learning in 1954 and studied the personality of an individual and the behavior changes of an individual in different social situations (Rotter, 1990). He stated, “The effects of reward or reinforcement on preceding behavior depend in part on whether the person perceives the reward as contingent on his own behavior or independent of it” (1966). Locus of control is part of his theory and is the internal versus external control of reinforcement that allows individuals to control outcomes in their lives based on their behavior (Rotter, 1990). Rotter believed people have control over their behavior and their lives instead of chance or luck being involved in what happens to them (1990). Rotter (1966) wrote that college students and adults have more educational experience than children so they should strive at a higher level for academic achievement.

According to Grusec (1992), two more contributors to the theory of social learning are Robert Sears and Albert Bandura. In 1941, Sears used a psychoanalytic approach in the development of his social learning theory and sought to understand how the environment in which children grow up in affect the way they learn socialization processes (Grusec, 1992). Sears decided parents play an important role in the development of values, attitudes, and behavior of
their children by the behaviors they themselves portray (Grusec, 1992). Sears focused mainly on the three areas of aggression, dependency, and identification (Grusec, 1992). In 1957, Sears contributed to the field of research by using structured interviews as a methodological tool and paved the way for the social cognitive theory that Bandura would embrace (Grusec, 1992).

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory helps shape the social and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning in distance education. Social cognitive theory declares learning is a mental and social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment with all three affecting one another mutually (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1993) wrote, “The impact of most environmental influences on human motivation, affect, and action is heavily mediated through self processes. They give meaning and valence to external events. Self influences thus operate as important proximal determinants at the very heart of causal processes” (p. 118).

Social cognitive theory helps shape the social and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning in distance education. Social cognitive theory declares learning is a social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment which influence one another thus playing a role in a student achieving academic success (Bandura, 1986). The researcher examined Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory to determine if it was appropriate to use as the theoretical framework for the study.

**Social Learning Environment**

There is a social learning environment present in higher education today. This includes teaching and learning in both the traditional classroom and the virtual platform. Online learning in higher education is modeled more toward adult education and social learning. Cercone (2008)
wrote, “Interaction and collaboration should occur in the learning environment to facilitate adult learning” (p. 152).

Social learning theory applies to online learning because learning happens in a social environment where instructor and students interact with each other (Liaw, 2008; Francescato, Porcelli, Mebane, Cuddetta, Klobas, & Renzi, 2006; Miltiadou & Savenye, 2003). Interaction and collaboration should occur in the social learning environment too (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). Social learning also includes imitation, behavioral changes, and reflection (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). The learner is more than just a person who cognitively processes information, but instead is an individual who uses mind, imagination, and beliefs to learn in a social environment (Cercone, 2008). In social learning, the instructor becomes more of a mentor by modeling good behavior and guiding the behavior of students and a facilitator by allowing students to interact and collaborate with each other while they are participating in the learning process (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004).

Group learning is part of the social role of education which is described in Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Group learning can be used in the traditional classroom and similar electronic group discussion boards can be used in distance education courses (Easton, 2003, Morris et al., 2005). Social interaction and engagement among students in a distance education course usually occur through a discussion forum which an instructor may need to monitor (Rovai, 2007). Instructors have different roles to perform in distance education with one of those roles being that of a social facilitator.

**Self-Efficacy**

This section will introduce key scholars who studied the concept of self-efficacy and then discuss the concept in more detail. Julian Rotter and Albert Bandura are two key scholars who
contributed to the concept of self-efficacy. Rotter (1954, 1966) and Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) both contributed to social learning theory and mentioned the construct of self-efficacy even though they each looked at it in a different way. Rotter (1992) discussed the concepts of locus of control and self-efficacy as part of social learning theory. He disagreed with Bandura in that people who have a high degree of expectancy to succeed will also have strong self-efficacy beliefs and think their efforts contribute to their success in a situation (Rotter, 1992). Locus of control was more important to Rotter as everyone is responsible for his/her behavior whether he/she is a success or a failure at learning certain tasks. Rotter (1992) believed expectancy is subjective and self-efficacy remains the same whether outcomes are positive or negative. Rotter focused more on locus of control and less on self-efficacy in his social learning theory. Bandura considers self-efficacy to be an important concept in his social learning theory.

The concept of self-efficacy is introduced in Bandura’s (1977a) seminal work and is also included in his later work on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). The concept of self-efficacy plays a part in the triadic reciprocal elements of Bandura’s (1986, 2001) Social Cognitive Theory. These elements are described as personal, behavioral, and environmental (Bandura, 1986, 1993). Self-efficacy is important to a student when trying to master an educational task. If a person has a high level of belief that he/she can perform a task, the chances are much greater that he/she will achieve success (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1993) recognized self-efficacy beliefs to be more than just saying that something will happen. An individual has to believe that he/she has the capacity to learn and change his/her behavior and then act on this belief (Bandura, 1993). According to Bandura (1993), this self-persuasion relies on information that is transmitted through vicarious and social means. Bandura (1977) proposes a model of self-efficacy that is based on four sources which
include “performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states” (p. 191). He states that an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs can change depending on different situations thus also causing behavioral changes in the individual (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura (1993) acknowledged that self-efficacy was part of the cognitive development and functioning processes of an individual. In the educational environment, this applies to both the student and the teacher (Bandura, 1993). Cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection are the processes related to perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993). Students who have a high level of perceived self-efficacy will be motivated and ready to take control of their own learning and achieve their academic goals (Bandura, 1993). Teachers who have a high level of perceived self-efficacy will be able to motivate their students and create a learning environment that will help their students meet their academic goals (Bandura, 1993).

Many articles stressed self-efficacy beliefs and strong technology skills as successful components that led to a student’s success in distance education (Puzziferro, 2008; Pituch & Lee, 2006; Liaw, 2008; Francescato, Porcelli, Mebane, Cuddetta, Klobas, & Renzi, 2006; DeTure, 2004; Miltiadou & Savenye, 2003). “Various researchers have established that self-efficacy is a strong predictor of academic performance in traditional face-to-face classrooms” (Miltiadou & Savenye, 2003, p.7). Studies show self-efficacy is important to the student taking online courses (Sun, Tsai, Finger, Chen, & Yeh, 2008; Liaw, 2008). Online learning in higher education is modeled more toward the adult education concept of teaching and learning. Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory also leans more toward a self-directed style of learning in which the learner takes more responsibility for his/her own learning experience.
Self-efficacy beliefs of both student and instructor are important in f2f and online teaching and learning platforms. Teacher self-efficacy leads to student self-efficacy as noted in the review of literature (Dibapile, 2012; Ryang, 2012; Ross & Gray, 2006; Cakiroglu, 2008). Bandura (1993) wrote that self-efficacy involves four components which include “cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes” (p. 117). In academics, the three levels of self-efficacy include the beliefs of individual students, the beliefs of individual teachers, and the collective beliefs of faculty as a whole (Bandura, 1993).

Bandura (1993) stated, “Teachers’ beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve” (p. 117). Bandura (1993) found that teachers who have a high degree of self-efficacy concerning their teaching abilities provide more help for students who may be struggling with certain learning concepts in the classroom and also provide more praise for students who perform well. Teachers who do not have a high degree of self-efficacy when it comes to instruction in the classroom do not provide that positive classroom social environment in which a student can strive (Bandura, 1993). A teacher with a high degree of self-efficacy will provide a learning environment that allows students an interactive social environment in which to learn (Ross & Gray, 2006; Dibapile, 2012; Ryang, 2012). Teaching online may require an instructor to think differently about the educational process though and definitely requires the instructor to have technical skills (Fish & Wickersham, 2009).

An instructor must have a high degree of self-efficacy to be able to transition from the traditional classroom to the online classroom. Students must have a good deal of self-efficacy to be able to succeed in the online environment. The overall success of a distance education
program at a college will be affected by the beliefs of both students and teachers. According to Bandura (1993):

There are three different levels at which perceived self-efficacy operates as an important contributor to academic development. Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determine their aspirations, level of motivation, and academic accomplishments. Teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve. Faculties' beliefs in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools' level of academic achievement. (p. 117)

**Distance Education**

This section will discuss the history of distance education and then move into the online learning environment of today. It will discuss some of the emerging technologies and social media that have helped shape distance education in its present form. It also helps explain how technology and communication can be used to provide a social learning environment with this educational platform. Roles of online educators will also be explored.

**History of Distance Education**

Distance education from its early beginnings used printed material and was much different from what distance education looks like in the present with the advent of emerging technologies. Distance education began with correspondence courses delivered by U.S. mail and progressed into the online course management systems such as Blackboard, etc. that are commonly used today (Casey, 2008). Table 2 depicts a timeline of methods and the year they occurred with the progression of distance education.
Table 2

*Timeline of Distance Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>United States Postal Service correspondence course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Satellite television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>World Wide Web</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>WebCT and Blackboard online course management systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Casey (2008)*

**Online Learning**

Online learning is another term for what distance education has morphed into in today’s higher education environment. Online learning consists of completing courses online through the Internet via a learning management system such as Blackboard, Moodle, Desire2Learn, etc. Many younger students today are well equipped with the latest technology and are considered technologically savvy. Other students may be of a different generation and did not grow up with the latest technologies. Das (2010) refers to the former as digital natives and the latter as digital immigrants. Both groups of students are enrolling in higher education online courses at colleges in the United States and worldwide.

According to Prensky (2001), the term “Digital Natives” (p. 1) refers to today’s students that have grown up using technology. The term “Digital Immigrants” refers to anyone that did
not necessarily grow up with technology but have learned how to use it at some point (Prensky, 2001, p. 2). Digital Natives are the students who probably use social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, etc. They like being connected to others through electronic communication forms. Social networking tools can help provide the social learning environment needed for interaction in distance education.

Using technology in an online course is important as it allows communication to occur between instructor-student and student-student (Steinbronn & Merideth, 2008). With the advances in technology, electronic communication has been enhanced in distance education courses. “During the past 15 years, the rapid spread of the Internet has made it possible for distance education students to interact daily with each other if desired” (Watson, 2010, p. 64).

Email, discussion boards, chat rooms, etc. are used as important communication tools in distance education (Grandzol & Grandzol, 2006; Steinbronn & Merideth, 2008; Fabry, 2009; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2010; King & Arnold, 2012). Communication is important in both the traditional classroom and the virtual classroom. Bandura (2001) applied his social cognitive theory to communication. It can be applied to distance education. Bandura (2001) wrote, “The Internet provides instant communicative access worldwide” (p. 288). Bandura (2001) acclaimed people are able to build social networks and achieve desired results of change by using the electronic communication technologies that are available today.

“The expanding lexicon of Web 2.0 applications (podcasts, web logs, wikis, mashups, etc.) signal changes in the learning landscape, where learners are active participants, creators of knowledge, and seekers of engaging, personal experiences” (McLoughin & Lee, 2008, p. 10). “The progression of distance education over the past decade can be attributed mostly to factors related to technology, including the proliferation of the Internet and other digital and networked
learning tools” (Milheim, 2012, p. 159). Technology plays an important function in the distance education environment (Easton, 2003; Beldarrain, 2006; Fabry, 2009; De Gagne & Walters, 2010; Wikeley & Muschamp, 2010; King & Arnold, 2012).

Bandura stated, “Advocates of new technologies and ideologies create expectations that they offer better solutions than do established ways” (p. 289). Students taking online courses and instructors teaching online courses have to be familiar with emerging technologies. Studies (Sun et al., 2008; Liaw, 2008) indicated students are more satisfied with their online courses when the technology is current, is working properly, and is easy to use. Students get frustrated and may drop out of online courses if they are having issues with the technology used for the course.

Emerging Technologies

Several studies mentioned technology as a contributing factor in distance education courses (King & Arnold, 2012; Coccoma et al., 2012; Milheim, 2012). King and Arnold (2012) noted that just by taking a face-to-face course and placing the latest in emerging technologies into an online course will not necessarily make it a suitable teaching and learning environment. Teachers must take into account best practices using their pedagogical, social, and managerial roles in addition to their technological role (King & Arnold, 2012).

Emerging technologies in education are the devices and methods that are used to allow educators and students the opportunity to teach and learn in new and different ways (Ball & Levy, 2009). They may be new technologies or they may be technologies that just have not yet fully realized their potential worth in the classroom (Ball & Levy, 2009). Many of these emerging technologies are used in the online learning environment where the instructor is not interacting with students in the traditional face-to-face classroom. Savery (2006) noted that “In a
completely online instructional environment, instructor visibility is absolutely critical” (p. 143). Instructors need to be creative and need to be on the cutting edge of incorporating technology into the distance learning course. Students should be able to interact with the instructor and should be able to collaborate with other students using these emerging technologies.

Some emerging technologies (blogs, podcasts, etc.) are tools that an instructor can use to create a collaborative learning environment in today’s online courses (Beldarrain, 2006). The instructor has many more tools with which to create engaging learning environments for students than when older technologies (email, discussion boards, etc.) were the only tools at hand (Beldarrain, 2006). Of course email and discussion boards are still used in online courses for communication purposes, but they are not the only tools at hand for many instructors.

There are two basic types of communication methods used in the online learning environment. They include asynchronous and synchronous methods. Synchronous occurs in real-time and asynchronous happens during offline time. Asynchronous communication tools include discussion boards, email, and announcements. Synchronous communication tools include web conferencing and social media tools. Synchronous communication may be perceived as promoting more of a social learning environment than asynchronous communication because of the “real-time” connection (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

The following paragraphs describe other emerging technologies that are being used in distance education to help connect instructors and students. They help to create the teacher presence in the virtual classroom and to create the social bonds between classmates. Some of the tools being used include blogs, video-logs, wikis, webcasts, podcasts, virtual worlds, and twitter. These and many other forms of technology are used to create improved communication and to create a more social learning environment in an online course.
**Blogs.** A blog is a web log. It is a written account by one individual on a specific subject (Wood, 2010). Other people can read the blog and reply to the author’s postings. It could be used in a distance learning environment as a form of communication between students that need to collaborate on a group project.

**Video-Logs.** Video-Logs are another way for students to share information and are similar to blogs. One difference between blogs and video-logs is that a video-log contains video where a blog usually only contains text (Wood, 2010). These could be used by both teachers and students in an online course.

**Wikis.** Wikis are also similar to blogs, but are not just the writings of one individual. Wikis can be used by students to share information and can be authored and updated by many individuals (Wood, 2010). Wikipedia is a popular example of a web based wiki. Wikis may be very beneficial to students working on a group project in a distance education course.

**Webcasts.** A webcast is a video that students can view on the web (Wood, 2010). Teachers could use webcasts to present lectures to students in an online course. Students could view the webcast in real-time or at a later date since the webcast could be saved for later viewing (Wood, 2010). This would also allow students to review the material again as needed. This provides flexibility for educators for delivering the lecture and flexibility for students for viewing the lecture.

**Podcasts.** A podcast is a prerecorded audio file that can be listened to at the student’s convenience (Wood, 2010). It could be used by an instructor in a distance education course to record class lectures. The instructor would then make it available in the course. A student would be able to listen to the file on a computer or through a mobile audio player such as an MP3
player (Wood, 2010). The student would be able to listen to the podcast at various times, if needed, to reinforce the information provided in the lecture.

**Virtual Worlds.** Virtual Worlds are 3D settings that model the real world (Wood, 2010). Students can use the virtual world to interact with others and for self exploration. Students can take virtual field trips, learn foreign languages, and visit museums by teleporting to the different areas they wish to explore. A popular virtual world is the one created by Linden Lab called Second Life.

**Twitter.** “Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read short messages (a maximum of 140 characters) known as tweets” (Moody, 2010, p. 3). Tweets would allow students in an online learning course to send each other messages about important topics or send each other links to web pages that could be used in the course. This provides sharing of information between students. It also makes students feel connected to others in the course which is sometimes a huge hurdle to overcome in distance learning.

**Online Instructor Roles**

Upon further examination of the responsibilities of educators, it appears there are four areas that instructors need to take into consideration when performing their roles in distance education. These include pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological (Easton, 2003; Liu, Lee, Bonk, Su, & Magiuka, 2005; Morris, Xu, Finnegan, 2005; Bawane & Spector, 2009). These roles appear to be similar to instructor roles in traditional education as well. The role of facilitator can be used in face-to-face teaching as well as in online teaching (Easton, 2003). Figure 3 illustrates the four main online instructor roles.
Consequently, preferences with regard to instructor roles and competencies may change and vary with respect to time and advancements made in technology” (Bawane & Spector, 2009, p. 394). Technology may be the factor that makes distance education different than traditional education. That is not to say that technology is the only factor that matters in distance education though as can be seen by the other roles (pedagogical, social, and managerial) that are referred to in the literature (Easton, 2003; Liu et al., 2005; Morris et al., 2005). The literature suggested the roles of instructors teaching online have some similarities and differences to the roles of instructors teaching face-to-face (Easton, 2003; Morris et al., 2005). Cercone (2008) wrote, “Online learning will continue to grow in importance for adult learners. The challenge for educators is to learn how to provide a positive ‘social’ environment using an electronic medium. Technology will continue to change as new technologies are developed” (p.152).

**Summary**

The main focus of this literature review consisted of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods empirical studies and peer reviewed articles and literature reviews on distance education
in post-secondary institutions. The diverse backgrounds included two-year community colleges and four-year universities, private and public institutions, undergraduate and graduate level courses, studies from the United States and in other regions of the world, various ages and educational levels of both students and faculty, and both male and female participants.

The learning environment should basically be similar whether occurring in the physical classroom or the virtual classroom. Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory stresses the social role of education. Personal, behavioral, and environmental factors contribute to the educational experience. Self-efficacy of the student and instructor are also important pieces in the educational process. A high level of perceived self-efficacy in the student will provide him/her with the motivation to succeed in the learning process. A high level of self-efficacy in the instructor will allow him/her to become comfortable teaching in the virtual environment.

The literature suggested there may also be differences in how courses are designed and delivered from one platform to another. College instructors need to understand these differences and how they may affect them when they transition from one delivery mode to another. The roles of an online instructor include pedagogical, social, managerial, and technological roles. Technology may have a huge impact on distance education and may be the main difference in educational platforms. Communication is important in both the traditional classroom and the virtual classroom but may be delivered differently in the virtual classroom via technology.
CHAPTER 3: A QUALITATIVE NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the study including research method, data collection processes, and data analysis and interpretation. A qualitative (Creswell, 2009) research approach using narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) was used for this study that was conducted at a two-year technical college located in the southeastern region of the United States. The college has been in the process of expanding its distance education course offerings. The following chapter begins with information on the background of the researcher. Then the specifics of the research process, design, and techniques will be examined. Merriam (2002) wrote, “The design of a qualitative study focused on interpretation includes shaping a problem for this type of study, selecting a sample, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the findings” (p. 11).

Overview of Study

The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process. Specifically, the study sought to discover the learning experiences of these instructors as they seek to adopt innovative instructional practices to enhance students’ social learning. The research question to be answered in this qualitative narrative study was “How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?”

The study was conducted at a two-year technical college located in the southeastern region of the U.S. The college is continuing to offer more distance education courses and instructors are teaching more of these courses. Five instructors were interviewed for this
qualitative narrative study. The instructors are realizing teaching online is a little different than teaching face-to-face. The content may be the same for comparable courses, but the design and delivery methods may be different.

**Positionality Statement**

Since the researcher had professional and personal knowledge and experience in both online teaching and online learning, bias on the researcher’s part could have come into play when conducting the study. The researcher also works at the college where the study was conducted and had an emic (insider) research approach. The researcher minimized researcher bias and looked at the study objectively to produce findings that are trustworthy. Merriam (2002) stated it was more important to identify and monitor researcher biases rather than completely eliminate them. Keeping biases in check helps the researcher know how and if they may be affecting the data (Merriam, 2002). The researcher is the instrument in qualitative research so researcher bias was kept in check during the study (Merriam, 2002; Creswell, 2009). The strategies used to ensure trustworthiness also helped to minimize researcher bias.

**Trustworthiness**

The study was conducted at the researcher’s workplace and at what Creswell called the researcher’s “backyard” (2009). Thus several validity strategies were put into place to ensure data was both reliable and valid. Using more than one strategy is called triangulation. “In short, ‘within-method’ triangulation essentially involves cross-checking for internal consistency or reliability while ‘between-method’ triangulation tests the degree of external validity” (Jick, 1979, p. 603). Interviews were used as the main source of data, but triangulation occurred as a result of the researcher making observations while conducting the participant interviews. Other strategies used in this study to maintain trustworthiness included double-checking interview transcripts,
member checking, clarifying researcher bias, and providing rich, thick description of data (Creswell, 2009).

Merriam (2009) considered the data analysis to be a comparative process that produces rich, descriptive data. The process is also known as an iterative process which means the collected data is analyzed over and over until the list of new themes or categories is exhausted, the research questions are answered, and the theory has been proven (Grbich, 2007). The data analysis and interpretation process allows the researcher to answer the research questions. The research questions will link back to the theoretical framework. The researcher also asked a colleague to review the coding and data analysis process to help with trustworthiness. This person is called a peer debriefer (Creswell, 2009) and provided feedback to the researcher after reviewing the alignment of the theory, research question, and data analysis.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several methods to provide reliable and valid data from qualitative research. To promote credibility, constant comparison of data was used in addition to double-checking interview transcripts, and using member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was addressed through purposive sampling of participants in the study and thick description of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help with confirmability, an audit trail was used and consisted of a pilot study, handwritten field notes, observations, and a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Table 3 shows some of the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness.
Table 3

Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Transferability</th>
<th>Confirmability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant Data Comparison</td>
<td>Purposive Sampling</td>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Checks and Double-Checking Transcripts</td>
<td>Thick Description of Data</td>
<td>Interviews Audiotaped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Debriefing</td>
<td>Clarifying Limitations</td>
<td>Handwritten Field Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying Researcher Bias</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflexive Journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985

Protection of Human Subjects

Ethical considerations were taken into account. According to Creswell (2009), the “gatekeeper” gives permission to gain access to review documents, conduct observations, and interview participants at the site where the study is conducted. In the college setting, the college president was the gatekeeper who gave permission for the researcher to conduct the study at the college. A researcher obtains permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before conducting the research. The Institutional Review Board at Northeastern University gave permission to begin the study after the researcher submitted the official IRB form.

Instructors who were willing to participate in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. They understood their participation in the study was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. The participants were informed that no monies or any other incentives would be given as rewards for their participation. Participants have access to the final report if they wish to read it.
Limitations

As with any study, there will be limitations. The study was conducted at a two-year college located in the southeastern region of the United States. Findings with qualitative research are not always generalizable (Creswell, 2012). The findings may not be able to be generalized within other two-year higher education institutions in other geographic areas or within four-year colleges in general. Also, to take into consideration would be that a state university operates differently than a for-profit university. The findings may be similar to other two-year colleges in the southeastern region of the United States if conducted again using similar conditions. These conditions would include using similar sample sizes of instructors with the same teaching credentials and with the researcher using the same interview questions with the participants. Also, the findings for the online classroom may not be able to be generalized to the face-to-face classroom. Finally, the study was conducted at a post-secondary institution. The results may not necessarily be the same if the study was conducted in the K-12 school environment. Therefore the findings may not be generalizable to other institutions due to different circumstances, but if the study was conducted at a similar post-secondary institution with similar conditions, the results may be transferable.

Research Design

This was a qualitative study exploring the experiences of instructors who are teaching online. A qualitative study was used to provide textual information (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry was used for this study. This approach was appropriate for a study that sought to understand the perceptions of college instructors transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. A narrative study tells the story of a participant’s lived experiences in chronological order (Creswell, 2012).
The unit of analysis was individual instructors involved in both face-to-face classroom teaching and distance education for a minimum of two years. The data collection occurred in three phases. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five (5) college instructors who had transitioned from traditional classroom delivery to online courses. A narrative approach was used for the study to obtain stories from the individual instructors. “Narrative analysis focuses on stories told by participants” (Grbich, 2007, p. 124).

Research Site

The research was conducted at a two-year technical college located in the southeastern region of the United States. Distance education is growing at the college. The college only offered face-to-face courses in the past. Now the college is also offering an increasing number of web-enhanced, hybrid, and totally online courses. Student enrollment in distance education courses at the college is increasing at a steady pace. This is changing the structure of the educational organization. Instructors who had only taught in the traditional classroom in the past are now also teaching online.

Sample Design

Purposeful sampling was used as the strategy to obtain the participants for the study (Creswell, 2012). Maxwell (2005) used the term purposeful selection and stated, “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Merriam (2002) stated the researcher does not use random sampling in a qualitative study because he/she is not trying to find quantities, but is trying to understand a phenomenon by obtaining a narrative from the participants of the study.
Criteria for Selection

Merriam (2002) wrote, “To begin purposive sampling, you first determine what criteria are essential in choosing who is to be interviewed or what sites are to be observed” (p. 12). The college was a two-year college located in the southeastern region of the U.S. A pilot study was conducted with one female instructor who teaches in the Business Administrative Technology program. The participants involved in the study were college instructors who have taught both on ground and online courses for at least two years. There were varying degrees of years of instructional experience in both the traditional and virtual environments. Five full-time instructors were interviewed for the study. There were two female instructors and three male instructors. The instructors’ areas of instruction included Computer Information Systems, Business Administrative Technology, Medical Coding, Business Management, and Psychology.

Recruitment and Access

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University gave permission to begin the study after the student researcher submitted the official Northeastern University IRB form required. Also, the college president gave permission for the researcher to conduct the study at the post-secondary institution site. No data were collected without IRB approval from Northeastern University and the approval from the president of the college where the research was conducted. The college president was considered to be the “gatekeeper” that allowed permission for the researcher to gain access to the study site. The college has five campuses with approximately 100 full-time instructors. The proportion of male to female instructors is estimated at a ratio of 50%-50%. The participants represented four of the five campuses.

Instructors who were willing to participate in the study were asked to sign a Northeastern University informed consent form. They understood their participation in the study was
voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Minimum risk was involved with participation in the study. The participants were informed that no monies or any other incentives would be given as rewards for their participation in the study. The president of the college where the study was conducted was considered the “gatekeeper” and had to give permission to the researcher to conduct the study. The president of the college and the participants in the study are able to read the report now that the study is completed.

Demographic information of the instructors was used to verify they met the required criteria for participation in the study. The criteria were that the instructor had taught at least two years in the traditional classroom and had taught at least two years in distance education either in the form of web-enhanced, hybrid, and/or totally online. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Table 4 below shows the demographics of each participant.

Table 4

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th># of years at this College</th>
<th># of years teaching f2f</th>
<th># of years teaching online</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Credentials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor B</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Business Administrative Technology</td>
<td>M.S.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Instructor G</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>B.S.</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6.5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor L</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Medical Coding</td>
<td>A.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

The data collection for the study occurred in three phases. The interviewer was familiar with the study site and knew the participants. Therefore rapport with the participants had already been established before the interviews were conducted. A pilot interview was conducted, the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the audio-taped interviews were transcribed. These will be discussed in more detail. Figure 4 depicts the three phases.

Phase I
- Pilot Study
- Participant Recruitment
- Preliminary Interviews
- Journal for Memos and Reflection

Phase II
- Semi-Structured Face-to-Face Interviews
- Audiotapes
- Handwritten Field Notes
- Journal for Memos and Reflection

Phase III
- Transcriptions
- Member Checks
- Creating participant story profile
- Journal for Memos and Reflection

Figure 4. Data Collection Phases

Phase I

A pilot study of the interview questions was conducted in May 2014. The researcher interviewed one instructor who had been working in higher education for over 40 years and had been teaching online for over 10 years. The researcher deemed the interview questions answered the research question and did not need to be modified after conducting the pilot study. The data collected from this pilot interview were not used in the actual data reporting, and this instructor was not interviewed as part of the overall study.
A recruitment of participants based on certain criteria resulted in five (5) full time technical college instructors being interviewed. Adjunct instructors were not interviewed for the actual study. Purposeful sampling was used as the strategy to obtain the participants for the study (Creswell, 2012). The research site was a two-year technical college located in the southeastern region of the U.S. The participants involved in the study were five college instructors who teach or have taught both on ground and online courses for a minimum of two years. A small sample size was appropriate for a qualitative narrative research approach (Creswell, 2012). There were varying degrees of years of instructional experience in both the traditional and virtual environment. The college has five campuses with approximately 100 full-time instructors. The proportion of male to female instructors was estimated at a ratio of 50%-50%. The participants represented four of the five campuses.

**Phase II**

An initial interview with each participant was conducted to gather demographic information. This information included the participants’ number of years in higher education, number of years at the institution where the research took place, and number of years teaching in the classroom and online. The criteria to participate in the study included the requirements that an instructor had at least two years teaching in the traditional classroom and two years teaching in distance education. A time and place for the semi-structured interview were also set up during this time.

The face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted at a two-year college located in the southeastern region of the U.S. during the months of May and June 2014. Each participant was interviewed individually using a set of semi-structured interview questions. Pseudonyms were used for the instructors to provide confidentiality.
The interview questions were asked to answer the research question. According to Maxwell (2005), “Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding” (p. 92). The interview questions follow (the interview questions with probes are included in Appendix C).

1. Describe any specific event or experience that triggered your decision to start teaching online.

2. Describe some of the learning processes you used when you first started teaching online.

3. You have now been teaching online for 2+ years, can you describe any instructional practices that you’ve adopted since starting teaching online?

4. The notion of engagement and presence has become an important concept for the virtual environment. Can you describe any adjustments or instructional practices that you have made in order to enhance the students’ social learning?

5. Assume it is 5 years from now and you are featured as one of the premier online instructors because of your innovative practices for enhanced student engagement and ability to continuously learn to use strategies for enhancing your presence. What would the headline be? And what would the features of the story include (who, what, where, when, how, why….did it all happen)?

The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face environment which allowed the researcher to also make note of personal observations about the participants. The researcher noted that the participants appeared to be comfortable with the interview process and seemed to answer the interview questions truthfully and fully. The interviews were recorded via audiotape and the researcher also took handwritten field notes to keep in a journal. The researcher also used
memos to record important information throughout all three phases. Reflection and writing notes are important parts of data analysis (Creswell, 2012).

**Phase III**

After each interview was conducted, the recording was transcribed. Data should be analyzed as it is being collected instead of waiting until all of the data is collected and then starting to analyze (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). The researcher transcribed the interviews instead of sending the recordings out to a professional transcription service. The researcher transcribed each participant interview as a way to “hear the interview, become closer to the data, and record any final memos or journal entries for analysis” (Matheson, 2007, p. 556). The average interview was 45 minutes, and the number of hours to transcribe the interviews was 20 hours. Five participants were deemed an appropriate sample size for the study as data saturation started to occur. Saldana (2009) described data saturation as the point where no new information is emerging.

The transcripts were typed into a Microsoft Word document and examined by the researcher for accuracy. After transcription, the researcher gave the participants a copy of the transcripts so each participant could verify the accuracy of his/her data. This is known as member-checking (Creswell, 2012) and helps with credibility. One participant made notes to change a few words after reviewing the transcript. The researcher made the revisions to the transcript.

**Data Storage**

The participants were informed that the information they provided during the study were coded and kept in a secure environment. This included all interview data. The interview sessions were recorded with their consent. The interviews were transcribed, and the information was de-
identified in a Word document. The data were kept in electronic form on password provided devices. Precautions were taken to maintain confidentially of information provided from participants in the study. Only the researcher had access to the stored data. Pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings of the study to protect the participants. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2010) states that IRB records should be kept for a minimum of three years after the study is completed.

**Data Analysis Process**

**First Cycle Coding**

Coding is part of the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher read the interview data over and over. Text was highlighted and notes were written in the margins. Part of coding and data analysis can include highlighting, writing in margins, and bolding text (Saldana, 2009). In Vivo coding was used for first cycle coding (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) suggested using manual coding to start the process instead of first using a computer aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). This inductive coding process used a combination of hand-coding and *in vivo* frequency.

Codes were developed from the words that occurred in the transcribed text (Creswell, 2012). Codes were counted and were listed according to the number of times the participants used the words for a “frequency” count (Creswell, 2012). These “words” appeared often in the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These were labeled as *in vivo codes* (Creswell, 2012) and written in a codebook (Miles & Huberman, 1994). “The compilation or integration of a number of codes in a study is often called a *codebook*” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). A sample of the codebook follows in Table 5.
Table 5

*Codebook*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORDS</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online coordinator</td>
<td>“We get a good bit of our information from our online coordinator.” (Instructor B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Curve</td>
<td>“Definitely, there is a learning curve when you transition from doing classes in the f2f environment as opposed to online.” (Instructor G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>“As much confidence as I normally have, I don’t have it like I would like to online.” (Instructor B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>“I go through the Discussion questions every day.” (Instructor C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>“They have to proofread each other’s work and basically engage in a lot of interaction to be able to do everything that needs to be done.” (Instructor L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>“Well, I answer Emails several times a day …” (Instructor C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message</td>
<td>“That’s one of the things that I have taken big pride in in my classes is that I respond to messages from the students throughout the day …” (Instructor D)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Second Cycle Coding**

Saldana (2009) suggested continuing the In Vivo process by analyzing the data further using different methods. After first cycle coding, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was used for second cycle coding. Constant comparison of data was also used during the coding process. Creswell (2012) stated, “This process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories is called the constant comparative method of data analysis” (p. 86). The researcher also asked a colleague to review the coding and data analysis process to help with trustworthiness of the data. “The themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw
information or generated deductively from theory and prior research” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). The second cycle coding used a deductive process using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) and Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory.

**Narrative Inquiry**

After first cycle (in vivo) coding and second cycle coding (thematic analysis), the researcher used narrative inquiry as the overall writing structure for the findings. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry using Dewey’s foundation and the terms of “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (p. 50). For this study, the place (situation) was a technical college in the southeastern region of the United States. The personal and social interactions were the personal relationships instructors developed with colleagues and the social interaction activities the instructors introduced in their online courses that promoted social learning. The past, present, and future (continuity) element narrated the story of the individual instructor’s past and present teaching experience and his/her view of what the future holds for distance education.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports the stories of the instructors and the primary findings of the study. This was a qualitative narrative study exploring the experiences of instructors who transitioned from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. A qualitative study was used to provide textual information (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2002) wrote, “The design of a qualitative study focused on interpretation includes shaping a problem for this type of study, selecting a sample, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the findings” (p. 11). This approach was appropriate for a study that sought to understand the perceptions of college instructors transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. A narrative study tells the story of a participant’s lived experiences in chronological order (Creswell, 2012).

A qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry was used for this study. Narrative analysis focuses on stories told by participants” (Grbich, 2007, p. 124). The unit of analysis was individual instructors involved in both face-to-face classroom teaching and distance education. The data collection occurred in three phases. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five (5) college instructors who had transitioned from traditional classroom delivery to online courses. The researcher used a continuous process to start coding, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Interpretation of the data was the last phase of the research and is presented in the final chapter of the report.

The Narratives

Creswell (2009) noted, “Narrative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide studies about their lives. This information is then often retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology” (p. 13). The story of each instructor began with the past to understand why
the instructor started teaching online. Each instructor had a different story to tell. Each instructor’s past will be presented showing how he/she became involved in online teaching. Then, the present story of each instructor will be individually expressed relating to the role of the instructor in distance education. Finally, all instructors will describe what they think the future holds for them in distance education.

**The Participants**

Creswell (2012) wrote, “Narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals” (pp. 73-74). The participants involved in the study were college instructors who have taught both on ground and online courses for at least two years. Five full-time instructors were interviewed for the study.

Instructor B is a full time instructor with nine years of teaching face-to-face and four years of teaching online. She has an M.S. degree and teaches in the Business Administrative Technology program. The instructor started teaching in the traditional classroom at the technical college and then started teaching online because the program area courses are now being offered 100% online. Since students can take the program fully online, the courses must be offered online, and the instructors in that program area must be willing to deliver the courses in that format.

Instructor G is a full time instructor with 14 years of teaching face-to-face and 9 years of teaching online. He has a B.S. degree and teaches in the Business Management program. The instructor started teaching online after teaching in the traditional classroom at the technical college. The instructor realized that offering online courses in addition to face-to-face courses could be a way to increase enrollment in the program area. Online classes provided more of a convenience to the nontraditional students who were enrolling in the program.
Instructor D is a full time instructor with 35 years of teaching face-to-face and 11 years of teaching online. He has an Ed.D. degree and teaches in the Computer Information Systems program. The instructor started teaching online mainly for the convenience that this delivery method provides for both instructor and student. The instructor started out teaching web enhanced courses before moving to hybrid and totally online formats.

Instructor C is a full time instructor with four years of teaching face-to-face and four years of teaching online. He has a Ph.D. degree and teaches Psychology. The instructor started teaching online due to a transition in job duties. The instructor had taught before, but had currently been working in a staff position. The new position was that of full time instructor teaching courses face-to-face, hybrid, and totally online.

Instructor L is a full time instructor with 12 years of teaching face-to-face and 11 years of teaching online. She has an A.S. degree and teaches Medical Coding. The instructor started teaching online after teaching in the traditional classroom at the technical college. Online courses were being developed in the program area and instructors were needed to teach them. The instructor was qualified to teach in the program area and was asked to start with a specific course that was being developed for instruction in the online format.

All participants were full time instructors at the college where the study was conducted. The minimum number of years in higher education was 9 and the maximum number was 35. The minimum number of years at this college was 6.5 and the maximum was 14 years. The minimum number of years teaching face-to-face and online was four years. All instructors were currently teaching face-to-face and distance education courses.
Primary Findings

The Past

This section details why the instructors started teaching online. It describes the events that triggered their transitions from the traditional classroom to the online classroom. Some events were internal to the college, and some were external.

Instructor B started teaching online because the program of study was stated as being offered 100% online at the technical college where she teaches. The first class was one that she had been teaching face-to-face and was comfortable teaching. So she wanted to use it as one of the classes she taught online. She said, “We had other instructors teaching it, of course, but that was one of my primary classes, so I just decided to go ahead and take that myself and try it online.”

Instructor C started teaching online because his staff position was being eliminated due to a merger with another college. He was offered a teaching job and another position. He decided to take the teaching position after talking to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. He said:

Well the college merged and so my job was being eliminated and they offered to let me teach or do something else and teaching seemed like the best alternative. And so they got me started teaching online before I taught in class although I taught in class full time at another institution and I had been teaching part time for a number of years in class.

Instructor D started teaching online mainly because the students were asking for more of their courses to be offered online. He noted, “The students had asked about doing it more online.” The students needed a schedule that was more convenient for their needs. Online instruction seemed to fit the bill.
Instructor G started teaching online because the program of study he teaches in has a high number of nontraditional students. If a class did not have an acceptable number of students, it did not make and was canceled. He mentioned the convenience of offering online courses for these students so they could take classes during different days and times when they were not working. He stated:

In my particular program and the college where I taught, we had a lot of nontraditional students … worked during different hours and some people that were very computer savvy … and it was very neat at that time to start offering and for the students to start taking online classes.

Instructor L started teaching online after teaching face-to-face in the traditional classroom for a number of years at the college. She actually was “thrown” into the online environment and learned as she went along. She commented:

Once I started working at …, I started f2f in the classroom and the instructors that were teaching the medical classes, as SACS came in, they determined that they did not have the qualifications needed, and they had developed their first online class for the billing, coding, and insurance class, and needed someone to teach that. And so that was my first experience teaching in an online environment. I did not have a lot of preparation beforehand. It was, “Here’s the class and teach it.” So I had the opportunity to learn how to teach online as I taught online.

The Present

The instructors have faced some challenges when transitioning from the traditional classroom to the virtual classroom. The learning process is described below. After transitioning to the online environment with initial lessons learned, the instructors have continuously learned
instructional best practices to use in their online courses. They are also continuously searching for new and improved ways to promote social learning for their online students.

Instructor B described her adoption of instructional practices in the form of finding websites for the students to use. These websites add to her lecture material. She also uses the textbooks to reinforce student learning. She said:

So I basically do sort of a lecture type thing before I have them go to the websites and actually practice the material. So I am hoping they are going to get from the lecture what is in the textbook and then be able to apply it using these websites.

Instructor C thought communication was the key to enhance the social learning of students in distance education courses. He answers emails from students several times a day and participates in the Discussion Board postings. “Well, I answer emails several times a day and then the discussion I participate. I go through the discussion questions every day. So we are kind of in touch on those two points every day.”

Instructor D stated that there are a couple of ways the college encourages learning new instructional practices to enhance student social learning in online courses. The main way is through the use of the Discussion Board. “One of them, the one that is pushed the biggest is the Discussion Board. I’m not as big on Discussion Boards as a lot of people are. I’ve got Discussion Boards in all of my classes.” The use of the messaging system is where Instructor D says much of the student social learning occurs in his online courses. He noted:

Actually, the messaging tends to be more where their collaboration somewhat occurs. Students have figured out and know where they can actually send messages to just each other and stuff on there. Even though we don’t see some of their messages on that …
sometimes they will include me in on the messages, sometimes they don’t, or sometimes they’ll make a comment.

Instructor G started to make his online courses more engaging to the students. He did not want students to look at a boring course home page that looked the same way every time a student accessed it. He tries to provide a stimulating environment for his online courses. He said:

Well I think one of the things people that tend to take online classes share with one another is almost like impatience. It’s like when we all go to a Website and we look at it, this is the 4th time we looked at it and it hasn’t changed any at all. Then we’re apt to just move on and not come back to it, so I think that going in and visually changing it, making it look different often is one of the things that can keep you’re students engaged and coming back and looking again and looking for more material and trying to complete the material they are assigned to.

Instructor G also tries to incorporate social media in his online courses as a form of new instructional practice to engage students. He realizes students are using social networking tools at home. He thinks students may be more interested in a course if instructors use some of these tools in their online courses. He stated:

Well, I’ve tried to figure out some ways to incorporate some of the social media programs that are out there, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, to be able to just to engage students in some of those things that they like to do personally outside of school. So, you know, when they get home and they are at home and not doing schoolwork, they can get off their Angel or whatever and they go on Facebook or Pinterest and some of these different social media sites and they are able to spend hours and hours looking at Pinterest or things of their own interests and so I have tried to figure
out some different ways that we might be able to use that intense interest of some of our students or maybe even of all of our students and redirect it to our online classes.

Instructor L described her approach of including more interactive type activities for students in her online instruction. She is using more collaborative learning exercises and discussion posts in her online courses. Instructor L uses the Discussion Board in her online courses to enhance student social learning. She said:

In several of my classes that it is appropriate for, I’m working with more and more group activities, collaborative learning, the onset of Discussion Boards and the emphasis on those have required that I change some of my instructional strategies to incorporate more discussion within the class.

Most instructors used the Discussion Board to promote social learning in the online classroom. A few instructors mentioned using Websites as a way to engage students in an online course. Collaborative and interactive type activities were also used as instructional strategies to provide more social learning for students. One instructor used social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter to help students feel more like they were part of a social learning environment.

Instructor B tries to engage students in the virtual environment by staying in touch with them. This shows her presence in the online classroom and enhances the students’ social learning. Interacting with the students on a regular basis helps with the social learning process. Instructor B also receives encouragement from the online coordinator to use new instructional practices to enhance student social learning in her online courses. She stated:

I try to stay in touch with them as much as I can. Of course, that’s difficult sometimes to get students to respond to you in an online situation. You will have students that are
continually talking and then you will have other students that you never hear from. So I try to put different announcements and different type of exercises out there to get feedback from them to see what they’re doing.

Instructor C said communication was needed when trying to learn new instructional practices to enhance student social learning in online courses. He decided to adopt the practice of not assigning so many writing activities in his online courses. He also changed the point system on the writing exercises he assigned. He noted:

Well the writing seems like I was requiring too many writing activities. So I cut that back down to three and changed the points around so they were more evenly, it was initially the points for the first few papers were sort of not for a lot of points so students tended to ignore it so I bumped the points up on that and it seemed to work a little better.

Instructor D agreed with Instructor C about communication being important. He shows his presence in online courses through emails. He also incorporates Discussion Board posts into his online courses. He noted:

Probably a couple of things, because I make sure the students are aware that I answer stuff promptly and regularly. And that’s a constant complaint from students about different instructors, is that they write and ask and they don’t ever hear anything. I make sure that I respond to every Discussion Board posting and every message sent to me.

Instructor D said it was mostly about improving communication when teaching online courses. The students and instructor need to stay in touch with each other through email or the LMS mail system. He responds to messages from students on a daily basis. He stressed:

The first one is that I’ve done is learning to, and I already did this some, but trying to convince students to is getting them to email or use Angel messaging or whatever
messaging is in the LMS, getting them to write regularly on that. That’s one of the things that I have taken big pride in my classes is that I respond messages from the students throughout the day for sure every morning. The very first thing I do when I come into school in the morning, I tell the students the very first thing I do is answer all my emails, then I go through and answer all the Angel messages, and then I grade papers at that point.

Instructor G showed his presence in the virtual environment by using the Discussion Board. This helps to enhance students’ social learning. He also uses announcements to communicate with his students. He said:

As that’s evolved, it has become more “in vogue” so to speak, to make sure that the instructors engaged during the semester, during the week and the main way to do that, I suppose, is to go into the Discussion Board and talk to students and reply and give answers to questions and make comments on other folks’ comments and so forth and show that you are there through a presence, both on the Discussion Board and much to a lesser degree on announcements.

Instructor L uses the Discussion Board and other forms of communication to show engagement and presence in her online courses. She encourages interaction and collaboration among students. She said:

I have also incorporated work on the Discussion Boards. And this is not necessarily inside the class but I do encourage students to chat and email outside of the class and to use Google Docs and different technologies that will allow them to be more interactive with one.
Communication was also used in various forms by instructors in an online course to provide an engaging and social learning environment for students. All instructors mentioned communication as one of the most important parts of a successful online course. Instructors must communicate with the students and students must communicate with the instructor to avoid miscommunication and misdirection. Students should communicate with other students to provide the social learning educational environment. The Discussion Board was used for instructors to communicate with students, students to communicate with instructors, and students to communicate with other students. An email system was used for instructors to communicate with individual students or the entire class. Social media tools were used for social interaction between instructors and students. All instructors except one mentioned the Discussion Board as a way to promote social learning in an online class.

The biggest challenge initially for Instructor B was her uncertainty of whether her students were learning the material she was delivering to them using this new platform. She stated, “… My biggest challenge is making sure I am teaching these students.” Her comfort level had been weakened compared to that of the traditional classroom environment.

Instructor B recalled her learning curve when trying to learn new instructional practices that were suggested from colleagues and trying to formulate strategies on how to improve the process. She noted:

Yes, I did have a learning curve with that because going in the classroom and having all of my information right in front of me, talking to the students one-on-one. I knew it was going to be a whole different ballgame -- Going online.

This included using technology and using different ways of communicating to the students. She first had to learn the Learning Management System (LMS) that was being used for
online courses. Then she had to concentrate on how to deliver the content she had taught in the traditional classroom to online students.

The biggest challenge initially for Instructor C was basically the same challenge that Instructor B had. He was not sure if the students were learning the subject material when taking the class online. “Well I did ask myself, ‘How do I know whether they’ve learned any psychology?’ So that was a question I was trying to resolve. So I came up with the requirements of the class based on that.”

Instructor C recalled his learning curve when trying to learn new instructional practices that were suggested from colleagues and trying to formulate strategies on how to improve the process. His biggest concern was adding the Discussion Board to his course design after it was made a requirement for all online classes. He did not use it as much before it was made mandatory for online classes.

Instructor D has also been an online student and an administrator for the Blackboard LMS so he has seen all sides of the teaching and learning process associated with distance education. The biggest challenge initially for Instructor D was trying to make sure everything was set up correctly in the class. Students would complain if something was incorrect. He recalled:

Probably the biggest challenge was getting the dates all corrected in the classes. I had one student that if things weren’t there when I said an exam would be there at midnight for a week, if it wasn’t there at 12:30 a.m., she would send an email complaining to the president and vice-president about that stuff wasn’t available in my class at that point.

Instructor D recalled his learning curve when trying to learn new instructional practices that were suggested from colleagues and trying to formulate strategies on how to improve the
process. He basically just moved his material from the traditional classroom to the virtual classroom. He started teaching hybrid courses before going totally online. He noted:

I just moved it from the way that I had taught in person and just moved it. I already had things out there and it was organized. I had been putting it out there and it was organized weekly and stuff. And to start with, it was, I did some hybrid to start with and too, I did a hybrid or two, I did a session before that.

The biggest challenge initially for Instructor G was to make the classes more interesting for the students by designing them to be more visually stimulating. He did not want a class to be boring to students. He also did not want all of his classes to look the same. He wanted some variety to the appearance of his courses. He stressed:

We can have the information and people can learn how to do different processes and skills and they can learn how to practice and learn new things and so forth, but if it is all kind of a black and white screen that’s just text and writing, then pretty soon if you’re taking a bunch of online courses, you are running into the same thing over and over again.

Instructor G agreed with some of the other instructors that there was a learning curve in terms of learning new instructional practices. Online courses are designed and delivered differently than face-to-face (f2f) courses. The course material may be the same but the instructor presents it in a different environment. He said:

Definitely, there is a learning curve when you transition from doing classes in the f2f environment as opposed to online. Again, you want to have things so that people can understand them and know what it is they are required to do and for them to be able to do it without too much trouble if they’re inclined to do, but I feel like that online classes you
have to go put forth an extra effort to be able to have to be successful in them by making them visually stimulating, entertaining, for a better word.

The biggest challenge initially for Instructor L was communication. She wanted to make sure she was communicating with her students. She said:

> Communication was definitely one of the bigger challenges. Learning to divide the assignments in a way that would make ease of navigation for the students. So I would think, you know, that communication and just the ability to lay out the information.

Instructor L said she had a learning curve when trying to learn new instructional practices and trying to formulate strategies on how to improve the process. Instructor L used trial and error when trying to learn new technology and trying to improve the design and delivery of her online courses. Many of these improvements were due to feedback from the students. She said of having a learning curve, “Most definitely, I did.” She continued with:

> A lot of it was by trial and error, you know students saying “I don’t get this, I don’t understand this,” to let me know that I had to do something in a different way. Or, my computer won’t let me play this file. Again, to let me know and with technology, there was definitely some trial and error to get things like I wanted them.

A couple of the instructors faced the challenge of learning new instructional practices to use in the online environment. They were not sure if the students were learning the course content. Many of the instructors had to learn new technology. This included learning the Learning Management System (LMS) that was being used in the online courses. Communication was also an issue that instructors faced when transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to online.
Instructor B described her learning process when she transitioned from the face-to-face environment to the online environment. She said she talked to the online coordinator and other online instructors for suggestions on how to teach online. She also found many online resources and websites that she was able to use for her online courses from research. She said the other instructors provided her with the most information though when she was first starting to learn new instructional practices. She said:

I would have to say doing a little bit of research online as far as online sites but also from other instructors - that was the biggest source of knowledge there to me - that had been teaching online for a while.

Instructor B learned of new instructional practices for online teaching through a variety of ways. Some of it is self-taught and some of it is through the support and encouragement of other instructors. Best practices are shared with colleagues. She stated:

The main way we do it is just get together and look what we have been doing, let me show you what I have been doing, and the same thing with them, they will say let me show you how to do a different type of, you know, check this work and make sure we are not copying each other’s work and several different ways to process that. So, just getting together and personally working together.

The online coordinator is also responsible for instructor training and support for distance education. Instructor B said, “We get a good bit of our information from our online coordinator. Anytime, there’s new information out there, you know, she encourages us to look at new and different things.”

Instructor C described the learning process when transitioning from face-to-face classes to online classes. He said he took the LMS training and then basically started designing a class.
As far as collaboration with colleagues, he said the Division Dean did try to help out a little bit. He noted:

    So I just designed a class for myself, by myself, because I had taught other classes and I had always put the class together myself and I didn’t realize it was supposed to be with somebody else. I kind of put the class together myself and went with it.

Instructor C has learned about new instructional practices on his own, talking to other instructors, and through the Dean of his division. He said, “Well I did talk to other instructors especially the writing lab people about how many points, how many words one should use for assignments. So I got ideas from other people about the details of it.”

Instructor D described the learning process when transitioning from face-to-face classes to online classes. He said there was not much support in the beginning of the transition process. He was introduced to the LMS through the online coordinator, training, and learning from trial and error much like some of the other instructors. He also tried to improve his instructional practices through feedback from both students and other instructors. He relayed:

    Most of it has been purely hands-on and dealing with the problems that students have run into. And I’m constantly listening to suggestions from students and from other teachers and not just students in my classes but others on ‘what’s a better way to do things’ so that I am continuously changing.

Instructor D collaborated with other instructors about new online instructional practices. “I’ll share if I am talking to other instructors or somebody asks something about, I will give them some ideas.” For support or trouble-shooting, he goes to the online coordinator. Best practices are shared with colleagues.
Instructor G described the learning process when transitioning from face-to-face classes to online classes. He used a combination of support and training processes similar to what the other instructors had used. He talked to colleagues and used the “hands-on” approach. He said the online coordinator helped quite a bit. “She was very knowledgeable on it and could answer a question and quickly answered questions so when we posed problems and situations to her.”

Instructor G also used the Internet to find answers to some of his questions. “Also, anytime I have a question, I just, my first response is to Google it ...”

Instructor G learned new instructional practices for online teaching mainly through a “do-it-yourself” type attitude. He also attended training that the college offered instructors and stays in touch with the online coordinator. Best practices are also shared with colleagues. He recalled:

Well, I think overall, I feel like they’re self-taught but in the process of being self-taught, I seek out experts, I mean you just can’t figure it all out on your own even though you may lay the plans for your learning yourself, you just can’t think it all out on your own.

Instructor L described the learning process when transitioning from face-to-face classes to online classes much in the same way as some of the other instructors. She worked with other instructors and enrolled in training sessions. “I tried to stay in contact with instructors that I felt like definitely try to keep up with technology and are on the cutting edge ... I reached out to resources at the state level and sought opportunities for training.”

Instructor L has also used a variety of methods to learn instructional practices for her online courses. She talked to colleagues, attended training sessions, and learned by trial and error. “I definitely reached out to colleagues; I took advantage of training opportunities. I learned a lot by trial and error, and a lot by individual research.” Best practices are shared with colleagues.
Collaboration was used by instructors to give and receive support and training and for sharing new ideas and best practices among colleagues. Collaboration occurred in different forms. These included collaboration among the instructor and other instructors and collaboration between the instructor and the online coordinator. Instructors should communicate with other instructors to develop best teaching practices for distance education courses. Instructors may need to communicate with online coordinators and other colleagues for support, training, and trouble-shooting.

The Future

The future describes what the instructors think will happen or would like to see happen in the future with their online courses. They plan to continue to find innovative ways to improve engagement and interaction between instructor-students and students-students. The instructors expect to continuously learn new ways to promote social learning in the online classroom.

Instructor B was not totally convinced that online classes work as well as face-to-face classes. In five years from now, she hopes that she is convinced that online classes can be as effective in promoting the social learning of students. She will be trying to incorporate more innovative practices to provide an interactive learning environment. She stated, “So I will try to have things in there, interactive type exercises and assignments. Hopefully, more Power Points that they could read and see and then do work.” She would like to be able to say, “There’s a lot of action in this class.”

Instructor C thought critical thinking writing exercises on the discussion boards will continue to contribute to an online learning environment where students are more engaged. He will be trying to provide more announcements and instructions on critical thinking skills. Instructor C will also be trying to get students to use the discussion board on a more regular
basis. He said, “Well, I do write announcements where I tell them about critical thinking and what’s required for research and how to take advantage of the discussions. I write to them with instructions on how to do things and do it well.”

Instructor D is trying to make sure that communication is an ongoing, two-way process between instructor and students in his distance education courses. His evaluations from students reflect his constant communication and interaction with them. He noted, “…I am constantly messaging back and forth with the students, providing them with additional input, providing them quick and prompt input, and being concerned about other things in their lives.”

Instructor G thought the future will reflect the continuing improvements in technology. He suggested course design and delivery of online courses will continue to be improved with access to greater Internet bandwidth, etc. More students will be able to enroll in online courses and the courses will integrate more video and audio materials due to technological advances. He stated, “…I think that we can really make some breakthroughs if all our students have good bandwidth and can do streaming videos and also use video of lectures that post in the units of work as we go through the semester.”

Instructor L will continue to work closely with the textbook publishing companies to help develop interactive materials for her classes. She also plans to stay on top of new technology that will help engage her students in the learning process. She wants to continue to use simulations to provide a motivating social learning environment for the students. She said, “I think that would allow students a greater level of accomplishment, and be done in a fun environment, it would be done in a way that you get points or some type of positive reinforcement.”
Research Question Analysis

The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have recently transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process. Specifically, the study sought to discover the learning experiences of these instructors as they seek to adopt innovative instructional practices to enhance students' social learning. Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The main question answered in this qualitative narrative study was “How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?” Table 6 presents the alignment of the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, and the research question.

Table 6

Alignment of Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Study</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process.</td>
<td>This was a qualitative narrative study based on the theoretical framework of Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory.</td>
<td>How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?</td>
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The interview questions were asked to answer the research question. According to Maxwell (2005), “Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding” (p. 92). The interview questions were as follows.

1. Describe any specific event or experience that triggered your decision to start teaching online.

2. Describe some of the learning processes you used when you first started teaching online.

3. You have now been teaching online for 2+ years, can you describe any instructional practices that you’ve adopted since starting teaching online?

4. The notion of engagement and presence has become an important concept for the virtual environment. Can you describe any adjustments or instructional practices that you have made in order to enhance the students’ social learning?

5. Assume it is 5 years from now and you are featured as one of the premier online instructors because of your innovative practices for enhanced student engagement and ability to continuously learn to use strategies for enhancing your presence. What would the headline be? And what would the features of the story include (who, what, where, when, how, why…did it all happen)?

The research question was “How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?” The research question was answered by participants through the interview process. Instructors were using a variety of methods to learn how to implement emerging technologies to enhance the social learning process within their virtual classroom to include trial-n-error, benchmarking, and
updates from the online coordinator. Instructor G stated, “… we have an online coordinator who’s also very helpful too.” Instructors were using a variety of practices to learn new strategies to enhance their students’ social learning: e.g. attending conferences, web-search, reaching out to textbook publishers, and in-house training. Instructor L noted, “And like I’ve said I’ve shared it with book publishers and given some of my ideas there on how to make learning more collaborative.” To overcome personal and technical challenges, instructors used a range of learning tactics including trial-n-error, interfacing with coordinator, independent web searches, and discussions with colleagues. Instructor B searched the Internet to learn more about distance education. She said, “There are of course online resources and websites that I did use and do use for my online classes.” Collaboration was the most significant learning strategy and included sharing best practices and lessons-learned from the things that don’t work and the things that do work. Instructor D shares best practices and lessons-learned with colleagues. He said, “I’ll share if I am talking to other instructors or somebody asks something about, I will give them some ideas.”

The data analysis process included first cycle and second cycle coding. Second cycle coding included thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). There were four key themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The four themes with evidence from the participants are depicted in Table 7 shown below.
Table 7

Key Themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscious effort to Leverage platforms to</td>
<td>Instructor G remarked, “But I think there’s ways that you can engage students and have certain assignments or whatever to be done and posted or some way facilitated by use of Pinterest or Facebook or something like that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>enhance sense of learning community</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Communication to demonstrate “presence”</td>
<td>Instructor C commented, “Well, I answer Emails several times a day and then the Discussion I participate. I go through the Discussion questions every day. So we are kind of in touch on those two points every day.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; technical challenges transitioning</td>
<td>Instructor B said, “My biggest challenge is making sure I am teaching these students.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>classroom management &amp; content to DE platform</td>
<td>Technical challenges included learning the LMS platform. She recalled, “And I had to spend some time to start with learning the online component, the Angel system.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to seek out best practices &amp; collaborate</td>
<td>Instructor D said, “And I’m constantly listening to suggestions from students and from other teachers and not just students in my classes but others on ‘what’s a better way to do things’ so that I am continuously changing.”</td>
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**Theme 1: Conscious effort to Leverage platforms to enhance sense of learning community**

Instructors have to learn how to incorporate social learning into the online environment. They need to be able to design and deliver an engaging and interactive course for students. Social networking may be a way to do this. Instructor G said, “Generally, I think the overall feeling up until recently was that maybe instructors shouldn’t engage students on Twitter and Facebook. And I think that can have its dangers if you’re not careful.” He is trying to find ways
to use social media in the online classroom to promote social learning and a sense of a learning community.

Theme 2: Online Communication to demonstrate “presence”

Instructors have to learn how to communicate online to promote social learning in distance education courses. Communication is very important in online courses. This is a way for instructors to show students that they are present and actively engaged in the course.

There are two basic types of communication methods used in the online learning environment. They include asynchronous and synchronous. Synchronous occurs in real-time and asynchronous happens during offline time. Asynchronous communication tools include Discussion Boards, Email, and Announcements. Synchronous communication tools include Web Conferencing. Most instructors in this study used asynchronous communication tools which included Discussion Boards, Email, and Announcements. Instructor C shows his presence in the classroom by answering emails and participating in discussions with his students. He commented, “Well, I answer Emails several times a day and then the Discussion I participate. I go through the Discussion questions every day.”

Instructors need to make sure they show that they are actively participating in the online classroom. It is not enough for an instructor to set up an online course and then just let it run in automatic mode. Students expect instructors to be available to them when they need them. This may be as simple as answering emails in a timely manner or grading assignments and providing feedback on the graded assignments.
Theme 3: Personal & technical challenges transitioning classroom management & content to DE platform

Instructors may face personal challenges when learning new instructional strategies to provide an online social learning environment. They may also face challenges when learning new technology. An instructor has to believe that he/she can learn these new methods. In online learning, self-efficacy is important to both the instructor and the student. Instructors can promote the positive social learning environment for students. Students must also believe in themselves.

Instructor B had to overcome both personal and technical challenges when transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. Instructor B thought her personal challenge was making sure the students understood the material in the online format. She noted, “Making sure I’m teaching it in a way they are understanding what they need to be understanding.” Technical challenges included learning the LMS platform. Instructor B recalled, “And I had to spend some time to start with learning the online component, the Angel system. And making sure I understood that so that I could be effective with students in that particular system.”

Theme 4: Desire to seek out best practices & collaborate

Instructors should work with other instructors when designing online courses. Sharing best practices with colleagues may be a way to learn how to promote social learning in the online environment. Not only do individual instructors need to have a belief in his/her own teaching capabilities and abilities to learn new instructional strategies to teach online, but instructors should also learn to collaborate with others for the overall best interest of the college.

Instructor D has been a student, an instructor, and an administrator in the online learning environment so he has “seen it all” and is always willing to learn more and to help others learn.
He seeks out best practices and collaborates with colleagues. Instructor D said, “And I’m constantly listening to suggestions from students and from other teachers and not just students in my classes but others on “what’s a better way to do things” so that I am continuously changing.” As an instructor he said, “And I’m constantly listening to suggestions from students and from other teachers and not just students in my classes but others on “what’s a better way to do things” so that I am continuously changing.” As a student he remembered, “I took three online classes from (name withheld) and used stuff I learned from there.” As an administrator he noted, “So I have done both sides of it. Well, I have done all three sides. I was an administrator for Blackboard at (name withheld) for a year also…”

**Participant Story Profiles**

A narrative study tells the story of a participant’s lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). The experiences here were included in a chronological order (Creswell, 2012) of past, present, and future. The past described how the instructor started teaching online, the present explained what has happened since that beginning, and the future stated what the instructor thought the future may bring in this area of higher education. Each participant in the study has been given a term that describes his/her personal story and involvement in distance education. Figure 5 depicts the Participant Story Profile of each instructor.
Instructor B could be described as “The Obligated.” She started teaching online because the program area she teaches in is offered 100% online. She started with one class that she was familiar with teaching face-to-face and tried to perfect it as an online course. Instructor B recalled, “So, I just felt obligated to pick that class up and try it online.”

Instructor C could be described as “The Concerned.” He was a staff member at the college and had to make a decision about taking a position as a faculty member when the college merged with another college. He knew he would be asked to teach online if he took the instructor position and was hesitant about it. Instructor C noted, “There are challenges teaching period. I didn’t think I would enjoy it. As it turned out, I enjoyed it.” Then he continued with, “Well, online I wondered what all it would present but you should do one step at a time promising it would be solvable as we went.”

Instructor D could be described as “The Communicator.” He believes communication is the key to a good online course. He communicates using the Discussion Board, announcements, and email. He answers most of his emails from students even if they do not require a response.
He thinks this shows his social and teaching presence in the online classroom. Instructor D said, “I think that communication is extremely critical …”

Instructor G could be described as “The Engager.” He believes in engaging the students in the learning process. He wants to provide an “entertaining” or stimulating environment for the students. He wants to incorporate more social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) into his distance education courses since many of today’s students already use these in their daily lives. Instructor G commented, “Well, I’ve tried to figure out some ways to incorporate some of the social media programs that are out there, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, to be able to just to engage students …”

Instructor L could be described as “The Collaborator.” She is trying to provide more collaborative activities in her online courses. She wants the students to work together on group assignments. She believes students can learn from each other in the virtual environment and tries to provide exercises that promote that interaction between students. Instructor L stated, “In several of my classes that it is appropriate for, I’m working with more and more group activities, collaborative learning.”

**Conclusion**

Instructors were using a variety of methods to learn how to implement emerging technologies to enhance the social learning process within their virtual classroom to include trial-n-error, benchmarking, and updates from the online coordinator. Instructor G used a variety of methods to learn how to implement new emerging technologies to enhance the social learning process within his virtual classroom. Instructor G said he used trial-n-error to get started then sought input from others. “Well, I think overall, I feel like they’re self-taught but in the process of being self-taught, I seek out experts, I mean you just can’t figure it all out on your own…” He
also attended training that the college provided. He noted, “So, of course I have had the training that the school offered…” There were a group of instructors that Instructor G called on from time-to-time also. He said, “Any time I have a situation that I am trying to solve or improve there’s a set group of instructors I can give a call to see how they approach the situation.” The online coordinator is also available to help. Instructor G stated, “… we have an online coordinator who’s also very helpful too.”

Instructors were using a variety of practices to learn new strategies to enhance their students’ social learning: e.g. attending conferences, web-search, reaching out to textbook publishers, in-house training. Instructor L used a variety of practices to learn new strategies to enhance students’ social learning. She recalled, “I definitely reached out to colleagues; I took advantage of training opportunities. I learned a lot by trial and error, and a lot by individual research. And yes, there are things that I have changed.” She also reached out to the textbook publishers to share ideas. Instructor L noted, “And like I’ve said I’ve shared it with book publishers and given some of my ideas there on how to make learning more collaborative.”

To overcome personal and technical challenges, instructors used a range of learning tactics including trial-n-error, interface with coordinator, independent web searches, discussions with colleagues. Instructor B used a range of learning tactics to overcome personal and technical challenges. She said of colleagues, “Teaching online, of course, we have our online coordinators. I did talk to them a good bit, other instructors that have taught online and they had good suggestions.” Instructor B also searched the Internet to learn more about distance education. “There are of course online resources and websites that I did use and do use for my online classes.”
Collaboration was the most significant learning strategy—to include sharing best practices and lessons-learned from the things that don’t work and the things that do work. Instructor D shares best practices and lessons-learned with colleagues. “I’ll share if I am talking to other instructors or somebody asks something about, I will give them some ideas. So some of it has been formal and some of it has been suggestions to others as I talk with them.”

Many of the instructors had been teaching in the traditional, face-to-face classroom a few years before transitioning to the online environment. One reason for this is that distance education was not the “norm” when some of the instructors started teaching. A couple of the instructors started teaching online years ago when it was first being introduced as an alternative method of teaching mostly due to new technology and the convenience the virtual environment provided. The other instructors seem to have finally jumped on the bandwagon due in some part to the increase in the number of online courses the college is now offering students, the increase in the number of students enrolling in online courses, and the continued improvements in technology and communication methods that allow this delivery method to be convenient for both instructors and students.

Most of the instructors faced some obstacles when transitioning from the traditional classroom to the virtual classroom. Most had a learning curve when moving to online instruction. After transitioning to the online environment, the instructors learned instructional best practices to use in their online courses. Most instructors are also continuously searching for new and improved ways to promote social learning for their online students.

Many of the instructors pursued training opportunities, performed their own trouble-shooting, and sought support from other instructors and the online learning coordinator when trying to learn how to transition from the face-to-face classroom to the online environment. Most
instructors described their initial challenges as trying to find ways they could design and deliver their online courses so the students could understand the material and still find the courses engaging. Learning about new technology and better forms of communication were part of the process. For the most part, instructors are using the Discussion Board, social media, and the LMS messaging system or email to promote student social learning in the classroom. The online coordinator and others at the college suggest ways to improve on these methods.

One instructor did not have much of a learning curve and basically just moved his face-to-face classes to a hybrid format and then to an online format. Most of the other instructors had a learning curve when moving from face-to-face classes to online classes. Most thought the design of the online classes needed to be a little different from traditional on ground classes because of the different delivery method being used. Communication and technology issues were mentioned as differences when teaching “on ground” compared to teaching “online.”

Many of the instructors used a variety of methods when adopting new instructional practices for their online courses. They talked to colleagues, attended training sessions, used self-help methods, and learned by trial and error. They also sought support and trouble-shooting techniques from the online coordinator. Most shared best practices with colleagues. Most of the instructors are looking forward to their futures teaching online and hope to continue to learn new methods of instructional design and delivery on their own and through colleagues that will help promote students’ social learning. Chapter 5 will present the interpretations of the primary findings from Chapter 4 and will provide implications for practice and recommendations.
CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This section introduces the interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4. This was a qualitative narrative study. This was a qualitative study exploring the experiences of instructors who are teaching online. A qualitative study was used to provide textual information (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2012), “Interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (p. 187).

A qualitative research approach using narrative inquiry was used for this study. This approach was appropriate for a study that sought to understand the perceptions of college instructors transitioning from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. A narrative study tells the story of a participant’s lived experiences in chronological order (Creswell, 2012). Implications for theory and practice will be discussed. Finally, recommendations and future research will be presented followed by conclusions.

The purpose of the study was to better understand how college instructors who have transitioned from traditional classroom instruction to online instruction describe their learning process. Specifically, the study sought to discover the learning experiences of these instructors as they seek to adopt innovative instructional practices to enhance students’ social learning. The research question to be answered in this qualitative narrative study was “How do college instructors describe their learning relative to new online instructional practices that seek to enhance students' social learning?”

The participants included five full time college instructors that taught at the college where the study was being conducted. The college was a technical college located in the
southeastern region of the United States. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Demographic information of the instructors was used to verify they met the required criteria for participation in the study. The criteria were that the instructor had taught at least two years in the traditional classroom and had taught at least two years in distance education either in the form of web-enhanced, hybrid, and/or totally online.

After first cycle (in vivo) coding and second cycle coding (thematic analysis), the researcher used narrative inquiry as the overall writing structure for the findings. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative inquiry using Dewey’s foundation and the terms of “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (p. 50). For this study, the place (situation) was a technical college in the southeastern region of the United States. The personal and social interactions were the personal relationships instructors developed with colleagues and the social interaction activities the instructors introduced in their online courses that promoted social learning. The past, present, and future (continuity) element narrated the story of the individual instructor’s past and present teaching experience and his/her view of what the future holds for distance education.

There is a relationship between the three-dimensional narrative inquiry that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote about and Bandura’s (2001) triadic reciprocal elements. Social cognitive theory declared learning is a mental and social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment with all three affecting one another mutually (Bandura, 1986). Behavior described the personal and social interactions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of instructors with colleagues, instructors with students, and students with other students. The environment is the place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) where the interactions happened and included the college (place) and the situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) included the
transition from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. The past, present, and future (continuity) aspect (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) connected the sequence of events of the stories. Past, present, and future events affect each other. Figure 6 shows this relationship.

*Figure 6. Relationship of Triadic Reciprocal Elements & Three-Dimensions*

*Adapted from Bandura, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000*

**Interpretation of Primary Findings**

The framework for this study was based on Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Social cognitive theory helps shape the social and cognitive aspects of teaching and learning in distance education. Social cognitive theory declares learning is a mental and social process that includes the three elements of behavior, personal factors, and the environment with all three affecting one another mutually (Bandura, 1986).

Instructors are learning by using the triadic reciprocal elements. Behavior affects the personal component through overcoming challenges, by blending individual and social learning, and by setting goals. Instructors are changing their behavior by environmental factors. They are forced to make choices and are trying to embrace the changes by their desire to perform better in
the online environment. The environment is affected by the instructors’ personal influences. The instructors agree Distance Education is the direction the college needs to be taking to provide more course offerings to students.

The study suggested communication, technology, interaction and engagement, presence, personal behavior and motivation, and the environment are all important aspects to consider when designing and delivering an online course that promotes social learning. Instructors have the challenge of learning new instructional strategies and new technology to teach using this platform. Collaboration with other instructors provides best practices. Instructors are learning to promote social learning in their online courses in a variety of ways. The four key themes that emerged from the data analysis are listed below. The interpretation of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review also follows.

**Theme 1: Conscious effort to Leverage platforms to enhance sense of learning community**

Most instructors used the Discussion Board to promote social learning in the online classroom. A few instructors mentioned using Websites as a way to engage students in an online course. Collaborative and interactive type activities were also used as instructional strategies to provide more social learning for students. “Support for students' interactions with content, instructors, and classmates, for the development of online communities of inquiry clearly deserves the attention of online developers and instructors alike, and further investigation by the educational research community” (Swan, 2001, p. 322).

Interaction is an important part of the social learning environment of an online course. Moore (1989) stated there needs to be interaction between instructor, learner, and content in the classroom. Hillman, Willis, and Gunawardena (1994) suggested technology, including the communication medium used, is an important part of the engagement and interaction process that
is needed in a distance education course. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) stressed the importance of cognitive, social, and teaching presence in the classroom.

One instructor used social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter to help students feel more like they were part of a social learning environment. According to Prensky (2001), the term “Digital Natives” (p. 1) refers to today’s students that have grown up using technology. The term “Digital Immigrants” refers to anyone that did not necessarily grow up with technology but have learned how to use it at some point (Prensky, 2001, p. 2). Digital Natives are the students who probably use social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, etc. They like being connected to others through electronic communication forms.

Social networking tools can help provide the social learning environment needed for interaction in distance education. According to Alexander (2001), Bandura’s social learning theory can be used to study distance education. “Modeling and interacting with the learner’s environment are not activities specific to a traditional classroom…these can also be replicated in a virtual environment” (Alexander, 2001, p. 269). The delivery of the course content may be different than in the traditional classroom, but the student learning outcomes are expected to be the same (Alexander, 2001). Instructors can provide a social learning environment with the advancement of technology and multimedia (Alexander, 2001). Instructor G mentioned integrating social media into his online courses. This is a way to engage the Digital Natives that were discussed earlier in the literature review. The instructor said the students want a stimulating online environment. These students want to be entertained. Prensky (2001) labeled this as “Edutainment” (p. 5).
**Theme 2: Online Communication to demonstrate “presence”**

Communication was also used in various forms by instructors in an online course to provide an engaging and social learning environment for students. All instructors mentioned communication as one of the most important parts of a successful online course. Instructors must communicate with the students and students must communicate with the instructor to avoid miscommunication and misdirection. Students should communicate with other students to provide the social learning educational environment.

The Discussion Board was used by instructors to communicate with students, students to communicate with instructors, and students to communicate with other students. “Discussion forums are an area where the class and the instructor converse asynchronously to discuss key concepts and concerns, share experiences, ask questions, and interact student-to-student and instructor-to-student” (Cranney, Wallace, Alexander, & Alfano, 2011, p. 339). All instructors except one mentioned the Discussion Board as a way to promote social learning in an online class. Wu and Hiltz (2004) wrote, “Online discussions play an important role in student learning” (p. 139).

An email system was used for instructors to communicate with individual students or the entire class. Some of the instructors also used announcements to communicate with their students. Social media tools were used for social interaction between instructors and students. Bandura (2001) wrote, “The evolving information technologies will increasingly serve as a vehicle for building social networks” (p. 292).

“Currently, both asynchronous and synchronous computer conferencing have been widely used in distance learning courses” (Wu & Hiltz, 2004, p. 140). Asynchronous communication tools include the Discussion Board, email, and announcements. Synchronous
communication relies on web conferencing tools. Synchronous communication may be perceived as promoting more of a social learning environment than asynchronous communication (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014). Instructors and students may need to learn how to use all of these communication tools and some may prove to be more difficult to learn than others. According to Olson and McCracken (2015) “As bandwidth becomes increasingly affordable and access to the Internet increasingly assumed, adding course components such as real-time lectures or group discussions using web conferencing may, indeed, increase student engagement and learning” (p. 1).

The web conferencing tools may be the most difficult to learn and the participants must also have the correct technology to be able to use them. The asynchronous tools can be used at any time while the synchronous tools may have to be scheduled for a certain day and time within the length of the course. “Asynchronous discussions do not occur in real time. Students participate any time of day or night that their schedule allows” (Cranney et al., 2011, p. 339). This may be a better form of communication for students that prefer the convenience and flexibility of online learning. Many students may take distance education classes for these reasons. Instructors need to consider this when designing and delivering their online courses.

**Theme 3: Personal & technical challenges transitioning classroom management & content to DE platform**

A couple of the instructors faced the personal challenge of learning new instructional practices to use in the online environment. They were not sure if the students were learning the course content. Many of the instructors had to learn new technology. This included learning the Learning Management System (LMS) that was being used in the online courses.
Instructors facing these challenges have to believe that they can master the changes they face. “Much human behavior, which is purposive, is regulated by forethought embodying cognized goals. Personal goal setting is influenced by self-appraisal of capabilities” (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). This is where Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory and the concepts of the triadic reciprocal elements of personal, behavior, and environment come into play. “The reciprocal causation-effect relations among personal factors, environment, and behavior form the foundation of self-efficacy theory” (Puzziferro, 2008, p. 72).

According to Bandura (1993), “Another important belief system concerns people’s views about the extent to which their environment is controllable” (p. 125). If instructors do not feel they have the capability to learn how to transition from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom, they will not succeed. This will also affect the success of the students enrolled in the online classes. Bandura (1993) also noted, “People are partly the product of their environment. Therefore, beliefs of personal efficacy can shape the course lives take by influencing choice of activities and environments” (p. 135).

The concept of self-efficacy is an important part of the equation. “Self-efficacy, the learner’s belief about his or her ability to perform a given task, is the personal aspect that accounts for why a person engages in the task” (Puzziferro, 2008, p. 72). “Teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve” (Bandura, 1993, p. 117).

An instructor must also believe in his/her capability to motivate students in the course. Instructors can influence the self-efficacy and behavior of students in an online class by
providing a social environment in which the students feel comfortable participating in the cognitive experience of learning (Garrison et al., 1999). According to Bandura (1993):

Any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development. This is because the social influences operating in selected environments continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the self-efficacy determination of their choice has rendered its inaugurating effect. (p. 135)

Self-efficacy is important to student motivation. Bandura (1993) wrote, “Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determine their aspirations, level of motivation, and academic accomplishments” (p. 117). A student must believe he/she can learn the task-at-hand or will not even try to perform the task. Bandura (1993) wrote, “The motivating potential of outcome expectancies is thus partly governed by self-beliefs of capability” (p. 130).

Theme 4: Desire to seek out best practices & collaborate

Collaboration was used by instructors to give and receive support and training and for sharing new ideas and best practices among colleagues. Collaboration occurred in different forms. These included collaboration among the instructor and other instructors and collaboration between the instructor and the online coordinator. Instructors should communicate with other instructors to develop best teaching practices for distance education courses. Instructors may need to communicate with online coordinators and other colleagues for support, training, and trouble-shooting. Instructors should keep working with colleagues to keep current with trends in distance education including best practices that others are integrating into their courses.

shows the importance of collaboration between instructors when sharing instructional strategies that help promote a social learning environment in online education. Instructors can learn from each other and should share best practices. Bandura (1993) noted, “Faculties' beliefs in their collective instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools' level of academic achievement” (p. 117).

**Implications for Theory**

Social activity happens in the traditional classroom and there are ways to promote that social activity in an online classroom. “More engaging, socially-based models for teaching and learning are needed to replace the traditional, “closed classroom” models, which place emphasis on the institution and instructor” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008, p. 16). An adult learning theory that focuses on social learning could relate more to the changing world of the virtual classroom. Marquardt and Waddill (2004) wrote, “Social Learning Theory (also known as Social Cognitive Theory) focuses on the social context in which people learn; i.e., how they learn through interacting with and observing other people.” (p. 4).

Instructors have to learn how to incorporate social learning into the online environment. They need to be able to design and deliver an engaging and interactive course for students. Instructors have to learn how to communicate online to promote social learning in distance education courses. Communication is very important in online courses.

Bandura (1993) wrote, “The impact of most environmental influences on human motivation, affect, and action is heavily mediated through self processes. They give meaning and valence to external events. Self influences thus operate as important proximal determinants at the very heart of causal processes” (p. 118). The triadic reciprocal elements of online learning are personal factors which include self-efficacy, environmental factors which include emerging
technologies, and behavioral factors which include self-direction (Puzziferro, 2008; Pituch & Lee, 2006; Liaw, 2008; DeTure, 2004; Miltiadou & Savenye, 2003). All of these elements are included in what Bandura (1986) referred to as Social Cognitive Theory. The concept of self-efficacy is introduced in Bandura’s (1977a) seminal work and is also included in his later work on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3).

Instructors face challenges when learning new instructional strategies to provide an online social learning environment. They may also face challenges when learning new technology. An instructor has to believe that he/she can learn these new methods. Instructors have to learn how to work with other instructors and share best practices with colleagues to promote social learning in online courses. Not only do individual instructors have to have a belief in his/her own teaching capabilities and abilities to learn new instructional strategies to teach online, but instructors should collaborate for the overall best interest of the college.

**Implications for Practice**

The implications for practice at the instructor level include helping instructors find innovative ways to engage students, provide more interaction between instructor-student and student-student, and show more of a presence in the online classroom. Instructors should keep current with emerging technologies and forms of communication that may be used in the online environment. Teachers must take into account best practices using their pedagogical, social, and managerial roles in addition to their technological role (King & Arnold, 2012). Training must be provided to instructors so they can keep up with the latest trends in distance education. The online coordinator should be included in this process. Other colleges may have positions such as
Director of Online Learning or Vice President of Distance Education to fulfill this role. Human Resources could also be involved in this process by recruiting, training, and rewarding the best possible instructors and online learning administrative and support positions.

The implications for practice at the leadership level is for administration to be kept “in the loop” on current trends in distance education. The college president and other leaders within the college need to support distance education. Bandura (1993) noted, “The quality of leadership is also an important contributor to the development and maintenance of effective schools” (p. 141). Not only do college instructors need to collaborate on designing and delivering online courses, but they need to communicate best practices with administrators at their institution. If college leaders are to support instructors who are teaching online, they need to understand what is happening in distance education. The best way to understand this is to hear it from faculty members who are in the trenches.

The implications for practice at the organizational level include creating procedures that support online instructors and online students. Anything instructors and administrators do at a college affects students and the organization as a whole. Policies are set by administration. Best practices are set by faculty. According to Bandura (1993):

There are three different levels at which perceived self-efficacy operates as an important contributor to academic development. Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning and to master academic activities determine their aspirations, level of motivation, and academic accomplishments. Teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve. Faculties' beliefs in their collective...
instructional efficacy contribute significantly to their schools' level of academic achievement. (p. 117)

A potential contribution of the study could be to help faculty learn best practices when transitioning from the traditional classroom to online formats. The researcher could implement new teaching strategies that would provide improved learning experiences for students enrolled in distance education courses at the college where the researcher teaches. The implications for improved teaching and greater learning satisfaction in online courses could be enormous and could lead to best practices at higher educational institutions locally, nationally, and globally.

Another potential contribution of the study may be the collection of emerging technologies considered important to the virtual learning environment. Teaching online requires instructors to master computer software and various other technologies. A basic Learning Management System (LMS) such as Blackboard may be used to host the course offerings at a college, but an instructor may need to be able to incorporate other technology such as Web 2.0 tools to make a college course part of an interactive social learning experience for students.

**Recommendations**

At the local level, one recommendation would be for instructors to use more synchronous forms of communication such as web conferencing tools to enhance social learning. Synchronous forms of communication may create more of a social learning environment than asynchronous forms of communication. Most of the instructors in this study used more of the asynchronous forms.

Another recommendation would be for the college to consider hiring an instructional designer to help instructors design their online courses. At the present time, instructors both design and deliver their online courses. With the expert help of an instructional designer to help
design the online courses, instructors may have more time to concentrate on the actual delivery of the courses.

Other recommendations at the local level would be for instructors to incorporate different social media tools into their online courses to help provide for a more social learning environment. Instructors should keep working with colleagues to keep current with trends in distance education including best practices that others are integrating into their courses. College administrators should look at various Learning Management Systems (LMSs) that are available.

**Future Research**

Further research could include studies on more innovative practices to use in online courses to promote social learning. Some of these could include studying the effects of using mobile technologies and including gamification in online course for the generation of students that have grown up with technology. Instructors could also explore Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and flipped classrooms.

Five full-time instructors were interviewed for this study. Adjunct instructors were not involved in the study. Further research could be conducted to see if the findings were different for adjunct or part-time faculty compared to full-time faculty.

Future research could be conducted to include the consideration of reciprocity between colleges for course credits obtained online. At the state level, the University System of Georgia is studying this possibility. This could also be considered nationally and globally. With the acceptance of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), this may be an option.

More studies from the perspectives of students enrolled in distance education courses could also be conducted. Students may not view the social learning environment in the same way as instructors. The “net” generation may want social networking tools incorporated in online
courses to promote more social learning. Email and discussion boards are presently used extensively in online courses as an asynchronous form of communication that promotes social learning. Students may want more synchronous methods of communication, such as web conferencing and social media tools, integrated into their online courses to provide them with a more social learning experience.

This study was conducted at a technical college. One of the goals of a technical college is to prepare a graduate to enter the workforce. Research could be conducted to discover employers’ perceptions of distance education. It would be invaluable to determine if employers have any reservations about hiring an applicant with a degree that was attained online.

Conclusion

It looks like distance education is growing and will continue to grow. More colleges and universities are offering distance education courses. Even K-12 schools are starting to offer distance education courses. With the advances in technology and communication tools, instructors are able to provide a more social learning environment for students. Dr. Melanie Clay is the Executive Director of Extended Learning and Dean of USG eCore at the University of West Georgia. Reflecting on distance education, she thinks that with the changes over the years there is now more focus on the quality of online education since its inception (Clay, 2014). She also notes, “It's a lot more social, particularly with increasing integration of Web 2.0 tools” (Clay, 2010, p. 1).

There are pros and cons for offering online courses in higher education. Online courses may be less expensive due to lower overhead costs since land and new buildings are not needed. Online courses also offer more flexibility in the scheduling process. Of course, not everyone is convinced that online courses work. Some instructors may not think they can teach online. Some
students may not think they can learn online. Some administrators may not think online courses are comparable to traditional courses in quality. Some instructors are concerned with creating a social learning environment in their online courses. Some instructors are concerned with learning about the technology and communication tools needed to teach online. There may be a learning curve when transitioning from face-to-face courses to online courses. Sharing best practices with colleagues is a good way to keep current on emerging technologies and other trends in distance education. These and other concerns may need to be taken into consideration when colleges decide to offer distance education courses.
References


Milheim, K. (June 2012). Toward a Better Experience: Examining student needs in the online classroom through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs model. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 8*(2), 159-171.


Appendix A

Request for Consent

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies (CPS) - Doctor of Education

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Margaret Gorman, Primary Investigator
Karen Whitfield, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Innovative Online Instructional Practices: A Narrative Study Exploring the Social Learning Environment of Distance Education from the Perspective of College Instructors

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The basic purpose of the study is to describe the phenomenon that is distance education and how it may differ from traditional education through the college instructor’s eyes.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place at a location of your choosing and the interview process will take about 30-60 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions about teaching and learning platforms. You will also have the opportunity to review your interview transcripts for accuracy.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about higher education teaching and learning platforms.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Thank you.

Dr. Margaret Delaney Gorman
_Name of Primary Investigator_

Karen Whitfield
_Student Researcher_

Please indicate your consent by signing below.

____________________________________  ____________
Signature of person agreeing to take part  Date

____________________________________
Printed name of person above

____________________________________  ____________
Signature of student researcher  Date

Karen Whitfield

Printed name of person above
Appendix B

Recruitment Email

May 1, 2014

Dear College Instructor:

My name is Karen Whitfield and I am a doctoral student with Northeastern University. As a student researcher, I would like to invite you to take part in a study I am conducting for my doctoral thesis. The basic purpose of the study is to explore the social learning environment of distance education by interviewing instructors to understand their perspectives.

A preliminary interview will take place for you to learn more about the study, sign the consent form, and set up the formal interview. I will also answer any questions you may have. This should take no longer than 10-15 minutes. The formal interview process will take about 30-60 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to answer a series of questions about the social learning environment in distance education. You will then have a chance to review your individual transcript for accuracy after the interview is transcribed by me.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about best practices in distance education.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being part of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time for any reason or no reason.

Please let me know if you wish to participate by contacting me through email or by telephone. My contact information is listed below.
Thanking you in advance.

Karen Whitfield

Northeastern University
Mailstop 20 Belvidere
360 Huntington Ave
Boston, MA 02115-9959
Cell phone XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email whitfield.k@husky.neu.edu

*Student Researcher*
Appendix C

Interview Questions with Probes

1. Describe any specific event or experience that triggered your decision to start teaching online.

   • Probe: What were your primary reasons for deciding to transition to online?
   • Probe: Were their cues from the external environment to guide your decision to move to online?
   • Probe: Did you discuss with colleagues or other individuals about this?
   • Probe: Any initial thoughts on your biggest challenges that you would face making this change and/or concerns about your ability.

2. Describe some of the learning processes you used when you first started teaching online.

   • Probe: Where did you go for support, training, or trouble-shooting?
   • Probe: How did you initially learn these new instructional practices?
   • Probe: What were your biggest challenges initially?
   • Probe: Do you recall your learning curve in terms of the instructional practices that were being suggested and any strategies for how you might accelerate that process?

3. You have now been teaching online for 2+ years, can you describe any instructional practices that you’ve adopted since starting teaching online?

   • Probe: Where and/or how did you learn about these practices (e.g. self-taught, training, mentor, trial-n-error, colleagues)?
   • Probe: Where, to whom, do you go to for support, trouble-shooting?
   • Probe: What are the mechanisms to share best practices with colleagues?
   • Probe: What are ways your university encourages learning new instructional practices to enhance student social learning?

4. The notion of engagement and presence has become an important concept for the virtual environment. Can you describe any adjustments or instructional practices that you have made in order to enhance the students’ social learning?

   • Probe: Reflecting on those notions, how did you transfer those concepts to your instructional practices in the online environment?
   • Probe: Reflecting on when you first started online instruction and then how you approach it today, what are your biggest lessons-learned in terms of how you accelerate your learning curve in order to adopt any new instructional strategies that might enhance student learning?
   • Probe: Are there mechanisms for you to share your lessons-learned and/or to hear lessons-learned from colleagues about successful instructional strategies to enhance students’ social learning?
• Probe: Beyond the technical aspect, how might you describe your level of confidence in terms of designing and delivering instruction online in order to enhance students’ social learning?

5. Assume it is 5 years from now and you are featured as one of the premier online instructors because of your innovative practices for enhanced student engagement and ability to continuously learn to use strategies for enhancing your presence. What would the headline be? And what would the features of the story include (who, what, where, when, how, why….did it all happen)?
Appendix D

Coding Tables

Samples of Coding Process

1. Describe any specific event or experience that triggered your decision to start teaching online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Words or Phrases</th>
<th>Possible Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Expertise in specific f2f class</td>
<td>Reasons to transition to online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Job change (staff to faculty)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Student schedules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Needed Student Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Need for an instructor for an online class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>100% totally online classes</td>
<td>Cues from environment (Internal/External)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Online teaching opportunity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Students wanted online classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Nontraditional students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Teaching at multiple campuses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Communication w/instructors</td>
<td>Discussions w/colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Talking with VP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Had discussions w/colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Discussions w/instructors from other colleges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>My ability to teach to my students</td>
<td>Concerns about ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Challenges teaching period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Learning LMS (Bb)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Getting the message across</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Describe some of the learning processes you used when you first started teaching online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Online coordinators, instructors, online resources and websites</td>
<td>Support, training, troubleshooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The Dean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Coordinator, state training, other online instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>LMS classes, Google</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Other Instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Research online, other instructors, online coordinators</td>
<td>Learn new instructional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Angel training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hands-on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Search on the Internet, self-taught</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Hands-on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Making sure I am teaching these students</td>
<td>Biggest challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Adding Discussion Board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Assignment due dates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Entertaining course, visually stimulating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Learning the online component, the Angel system</td>
<td>Learning curve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>How do I know whether they’ve learned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Moved f2f to online, taught hybrid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Have things so that people can understand them and know what it is they are required to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Trial and error, technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. You have now been teaching online for 2+ years, can you describe any instructional practices that you have adopted since starting teaching online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Practice material using websites</td>
<td>New method of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Fewer writing activities, revise point system for papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>LMS (Angel) messaging, Posting all assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Visually changing online class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>More group activities, collaborative learning, Discussion Boards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Self-taught, other instructors</td>
<td>Learning new instructional method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Other instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Advice of a friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Self-taught, training through college, Google</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Training opportunities, individual research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Online coordinators, colleagues</td>
<td>Support, troubleshooting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The Dean</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Online coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Online coordinator, TCSG support people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Colleagues, trial and error</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Getting together and personally working together</td>
<td>Share best practices with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Talk about with other people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Communication with other instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Listserv, meetings, email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Reached out to colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Online coordinator, evaluations</td>
<td>Enhance student social learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Discussion Board, announcements, messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Incorporate more user friendly activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The notion of engagement and presence has become an important concept for the virtual environment. Can you describe any adjustments or instructional practices that you have made in order to enhance the students’ social learning?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Stay in touch with them, announcements, feedback</td>
<td>Enhance the students’ social learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Emails, Discussion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Discussion Board, messages, email, feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Announcements and power points and tests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Cheerleader and encourager</td>
<td>Instructional strategies that enhance student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Email, calendar due dates, color coding material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Discussion Board, Twitter and FB, emails, announcements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Discussion Boards, chat and email, Google Docs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Continually talking to each other</td>
<td>Colleagues share lessons-learned about instructional strategies to enhance students’ social learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Online coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Training at GVTC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Instructors are asked to engage through DB mainly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>I have shared with my colleagues, other colleagues have shared information about the Discussion Forums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>I don’t have it like I would like to online</td>
<td>Level of confidence to enhance students’ social learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Angel technical difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lot of growth on adding the Discussion Boards, Already familiar with technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Fairly confident, the more you try to improve it, the better it gets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairly confident with resources, you can always improve</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Dialog, conversation about material</td>
<td>Transfer instructional practices to the online environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>It hasn’t changed a lot just maybe little details here and there so it would run smoother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Recording video and audio lectures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Little slow in adopting some of that, Pinterest or FB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Book publishers given ideas on how to make learning more collaborative, more interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>