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ION RESEARCH CASE STUDIES

Shifting to Online Education and Back Again

One Educators Experience Learning to Teach Online, Online, and Transferring Instructional Knowledge to Face-to-Face Practice

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ABSTRACT

Online distance education is quickly growing across the globe. As more move to this mode of education, instructors are beginning to look towards their teaching practices and techniques of instruction when looking at this new environment. This study, through interviewing and analysis of archived course documents, examines the experiences of one participant in the Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality program designed to increase knowledge and abilities in online instruction. Her personal traits, social influences, and course content/dynamics were explored to find several factors she attributes to her successes in this program. Anecdotes were explored to further discern her experiences within the program. An ability to transfer knowledge obtained in and intended for an online teaching and learning environment to her face-to-face practice is paid particular attention. From this study, it would appear that the two modes of instruction are not as different as many might think. Furthermore, social influences were not seen as a major contributing factor in knowledge transfer for our participant.

KEYWORDS

Online Education, Text-Based Interviewing, Case Study, Teaching Skills, Online Student, Online Learning, Making the Shift, Learning Experience, Teacher Training, Virtual Classroom, Teaching Certificate

Boldly Going...

Jane (as we'll call her) walked down the stairs to her basement office / family room. Thankfully, it was not a dreary basement that one might think of having, but a place where the family could play. The kids were still awake and sitting in the family room. Jane needed some time and space to think though. She could wait until later when the kids were asleep or kick them out of the room for a while. Today, option two won. Today, she began her first online course. Today, she would begin to learn about teaching online.

The buzzing of the computer's hard drive and clicking of the television off signaled the beginning of her virtual session. While starting up her Web browser and directing it to the correct Web site, she was slightly scared; scared because it was new and she hadn't had a course in a while. A slight uneasiness briefly passed over her shoulders. This feeling was soon replaced with a bit of excitement. What would the course be like? What fun it would be to try something new.

After entering her username and password, the course loaded up. It was so organized and structured, not at all what she was expecting. Looking over the content she thought this course would be "much more fun than I expected."

BACKGROUND and CONTEXT

Everyone deserves an education. No compassionate individual would argue against this fact. However, not everyone is afforded the opportunity to receive what they deserve. Sometimes it is a matter of economics; other times race. Most people are aware of these common issues. But sometimes, the imbalance is caused by distance and related factors such as mobility, factors often overlooked. Individuals such as Jane need a new mode of education.

Distance education in various forms has attempted to overcome these factors for years. Often though, distance education is looked down upon as less than equal to its face-to-face counterpart. Items such as educational effectiveness, camaraderie among students, and other items considered a common aspect of the traditional educational experience are questioned in distance education (Russell, 2002). As time has progressed, we have looked for new forms of distance education that can overcome these limitations. Currently, the solution of preference has been the use of networked information technologies, namely the Internet, to extend the educational experience beyond the limitations of both time and space. As such, nearly every educational organization has tried, is using, or is planning to use this mode of education to reach more students. Nearly every

form of knowledge from technical fields such as nursing and engineering to artistic fields and liberal arts are commonly taught in the online environment (IVC, 2004).

Independent of perceptions, in many cases online education succeeds as well or even better than face-to-face education depending on the context, with hybrid models combining both methods perhaps combining the best of both modes (IHEP, 1999; Russell, 2002; Twigg, 2001; Waxman, 2002). These studies can be judged by the numerous benchmarks that now exist when looking at the successes and failures of online education from an administrative, student, instructor, or support perspective (Broadbent, 2002; Horton, 2001; Phillips, 2000; Phipps, 2000; Sloan-C, 2002; Sonwalker, 2002; WebCT, 2004). Researchers now see that factors once believed to be found only in the traditional classroom such as communication levels, interaction, information transferal, overall effectiveness, etc. are found to be possible and as effective in the virtual classroom.

A common primary factor in successes has been the instructor / facilitator. But how does one become a successful instructor in the online environment, or any environment for that matter? While a true answer to this question would be quite complex and composed of factors personalized to every individual, many educational programs have sprung up with the goals of training faculty to be the best online instructors that they can be. One such program is the Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality (MVCR) series of online professional development courses offered by the Illinois Online Network (ION) and the University of Illinois (ION, 2004). The ION "seeks to promote the effective use of networked information technologies in the developing, delivering, and supporting of online education." As such, they offer the MVCR series to help faculty members acquire skills and knowledge needed to teach online. A variety of courses are offered including online student assessment, online instructional design, multimedia development, encouraging communications online, etc. Within the program, a Master Online Teacher Certificate is awarded to those that fulfill certain course requirements. Earning this certificate implies that the individual is competent of a myriad of issues and techniques associated with online education. The effectiveness of the program has been quantitatively explored through their acceptance of the Most Outstanding ALN Faculty Development Program award by the Sloan Consortium (Varvel, 2003).

As individuals are trained to become successful instructors in the online environment, it seems natural to ask why the same is not done in the face-to-face environment. Traditionally, simply being an expert on the content is all that is required in order to teach that content in the classroom, although we all know that content knowledge alone does not make one a good instructor of that knowledge. But could two birds be killed with a single stone. In other words, could teaching skills intended for use online be transferred to face-to-face practice?

ISSUES and QUESTIONS

What makes the idea of transfer of practice from online to face-to-face particularly interesting is a major issue in distance education, namely, the differences between online and traditional practice. Primarily, debates on these two modes of education focus on the differences or lack thereof in outcomes and the differences in the paradigms used in the teaching process (Russell,

2002). However, very little emphasis has been placed on the similarities that may exist between the two in terms of teaching pedagogy and in depth research on the individual's qualities that make someone a good online versus face-to-face instructor, if in fact they differ. Furthermore, most studies looking at either differences or similarities have focused on the students rather than the instructors. The bulk of these studies have asked if something learned in the online setting but intended to be used in the face-to-face settings, such as a laboratory exercise, can be learned in an equivalent manner in the two modes of delivery. However, this study takes another angle. Does something that is learned in and intended to be used in the virtual environment affect practice in the face-to-face environment? Are the two modes of delivery more similar than many may think or want to think?

Also, how might social influences affect such transfer? Depending on the person you ask, there can be an embracing or a dismissal of online education (Twigg, 2002; Zemsky, 2004). Continuous discussions seem to border on what may be called a heated debate on the returns and rational expectations of online education. Only recently does it appear that public approval has begun for online education, perhaps from large advertising campaigns from institutions such as the University of Phoenix Online. Still, corporate and institutional approval is tentative. Into such an environment, it may be difficult to fully exploit the knowledge gained from an online educational mode without the proper context.

CASE OVERVIEW

Into such a context falls our case. The goal of this study was to vicariously experience online education from our participant's perspective and look at how that individual's practices in various educational modalities were altered. To examine possible individual effects that online experiences have had on an instructor's face-to-face practice, an individual's experiences within a set virtual environment were analyzed. These experiences were not and could not be actively observed as they occurred within an asynchronous online teaching and learning environment. However, the retention of all tangible aspects of a course within a stored computer archive makes it relatively easy to access the history of a course. Postings from throughout the program of courses can be analyzed for pertinent information to the case. In particular, these archives can be used to triangulate data obtained from interviews with Jane. Four such interviews served as the primary method of recalling Jane's experiences and feelings during the program, and how these experiences have transcended the virtual realm to her face-to-face teaching.

Our participant, Jane, is a very likeable middle-aged Caucasian American. Jane's occupation is that of an instructor at an Illinois Community College. As a member of the faculty, she juggles work with other activities including her family. Her smile can cheer you up, and her vibrant personality easily lends itself to an underestimate of her early 40's age, completing a common demographic for the online student (Lach, 2003; Sikara, 2000). Although Jane began her career with the intention of going into administration, she soon found that her heart was in English as a second language. From my unstructured social conversations with Jane, I have found her to be reflective on her experiences within the Making the Virtual Classroom a Reality (MVCR) program. Furthermore, she spoke often of how she has implemented her knowledge gained in both her face-to-face and online instruction. Such items initially led to my interest in Jane as a case to learn more from further exploration.

It was in 1999 that Jane decided to start using online education to reach more people in her instruction of English as a second (or an additional) language. Although online distance education had existed for a while, it was only then beginning to become more widespread. Despite being a successful traditional instructor based on student feedback and having an educational administration education, she had no formal teacher training. Moving to a new mode of teaching and learning with which she was unfamiliar, she decided to take advantage of the MVCR series of online courses offered through the University of Illinois and ION. She “took the courses because [she] wanted to learn how to develop something to be delivered online.”

In this program, she was one of the first individuals to earn a Master Online Teacher Certificate (MOT) through the University of Illinois. Participants in this program are trained in numerous instructional, technology, and curricular issues in online and technology enhanced education. Her trailblazing and successes in this field are primary factors making Jane a wonderful case from which to learn about the possibilities (not necessarily probabilities) of teaching practice transfer and possible intersection points in online and traditional instruction.

FINDINGS

Author’s note: You may notice typographical errors in many quotes. Because these interviews were conducted primarily using synchronous text-based Web tools, quotes are taken as is directly from the text archives. When necessary, corrections have been made in brackets in order to aid understanding.

If teaching practices have similarities and differences between online and face-to-face modes, then there should be techniques that transfer naturally between the two modes of instructional practice and other skills that do not easily transfer if at all. Of course, there are certainly universals to the teaching and instructional design process, but what are they, and can they be learned online in a manner conducive to a transfer to face-to-face practice when that was never explicitly defined or even implied? Thus, first Jane was asked what was actually learned during her online education experience. This learning was then cross-referenced with course archives for verification. Then changes that this new knowledge has had in Jane’s various practices, both online and face-to-face were explored. Finally, personal and social influences and issues involved in the process of practice execution were questioned. Time, in depth interviewing, and course text archive analysis affords us this understanding of Jane.

In our conversations, sometimes without prompting, Jane definitely had a lot to say about her online educational experiences. For our purposes, I will limit the discussion to only items that included a discussion on the practice in both a face-to-face and online environment, although there were additional items such as student support and course orientations that were discussed in the online context only.

Knowledge Acquisition and Transfer

The first step in an instructional process is instructional design, Jane's first and third courses in the MVCR program specifically addressed such topics. For Jane, it was a topic she had rarely if ever thought of previously. Much of her content had been laid out by the book. Since learning about the course design process through her online course experiences, Jane learned that you can't just hand a book to an instructor and say teach this. You need to analyze the audience and discern the proper form and content of the instruction. Unlike her prior 'from the book' approach, Jane now says, "I put it into my own [words] now and I do go through a pretty deliberate evaluation in the beginning of what it is I want to do and how I'm gonna get there." She says that since MVCR, "When I found the book lacked sufficient explanations or applications, I built my own." Her instruction was no longer formulaic, but directed by her own knowledge and student needs in all modes of delivery.

Jane also now starts from clear objectives and seeks to meet them with the best content available rather than simply accept the content that is handed to her. According to Jane, "...I am much more aware of what the objectives are for specific face-to-face units, and if [the] book doesn't do the topic justice, I'll jump in." Also, the ideas that she gained, "get me to my objectives faster...it's better instructional design." Such lessons are now considered at the level of course evaluation. In answering a question concerning objectives during one course, Jane wrote,

If you have clearly developed and articulated objectives, and design the course to meet those objectives, you will be better able to measure how effective the instructional activity was. Not only can the instructor improve the course (or individual lesson) with each iteration, but the students can be more confident that they will get what they pay for."

As we can see, Jane's online experiences led to thoughtful reflections on new concepts and her own application of those concepts.

Have the above principles transferred to Jane's face-to-face practice? Yes, they have. She finds herself considering who her students are and what they need to learn on a personal level in all contexts. Objectives are considered and activities are questioned through course evaluation. Even items as formulaic as a syllabus have improved in Jane's opinion since taking the online instruction courses.

One interesting example is that Jane had never considered the use of online resources in her face-to-face courses prior to MVCR. Online technologies and resources are now used often enough in her face-to-face practice that she currently almost considers the courses to be a hybrid between online and face-to-face. Now she uses, "lots of web resources." Since using online resources, when students "need additional support on topic sentences or whatever, I have a whole series of links..."

Other courses in the MVCR series specifically or indirectly discuss pedagogy issues involved with online education. The paradigm of education utilized commonly in online education involves a student-centered and discussion-oriented

methodology. Lectures are used sparingly in exchange for questioning, discussion, activities, simulations, etc. often linked to alternative assessments. Oddly enough, interactions among students and between students and instructor can actually increase when switching to an online education format despite distances and limitations of primarily text-based communications. Experiencing this shift to a more student-centered approach has led to an adoption of many of the principles of this paradigm into Jane's practice in all modalities. As she wrote, "I'm a pretty personal kind of teacher, and I always wanted to know more about my students and what they thought about issues than the book asked. So I engaged them a little more one to one or in groups." Furthermore, she felt that, "MVCR demonstrates the need for student-faculty contact, and if you do that correctly, you can impart a richer understanding of whatever [t]he concept is." It is interesting that the word contact would come up often in our discussions despite the fact that no physical contact took place during the MVCR program.

Numerous other pedagogical lessons were learned and practiced by Jane according to her recollections. The clearest example of a pedagogy shift seen after completing the MVCR program involves the use of audio technologies in her face-to-face courses. On several occasions, Jane discussed how she began to integrate audio recordings into her practice. She describes the activity below:

"online we often talk about multimodal learning and extending the classroom beyond time and space. in my writing classes i decided to push the envelope and now after i see a first draft of what they're working on, i prepare an audio cassette of my comments. they students have to listen, track my pencil comments and make corrections. they have 5 days to do this. i don't think i would have come up with this idea had it not been for mvcr, although no one concretely said 'record comment for f2f.'"

So instead of simply writing comments, Jane now recorded them, allowing the students to not only see the mistakes, but hear the required sounds; something especially important in an ESL course.

Interestingly, one shift in teaching practice noticed by Jane following the MVCR program was a change in wait time, a concept she had not thought of prior to the program. As an aside, I have often heard from students that they feel that they are less patient in an online course. I then ask them if it is less patient to have to wait for many hours to get a response when you want it now and to have that same time later to compose your response, or is it less patient to have immediate answers. The real aspect from a philosophical perspective is what patience is and our willingness to wait for an occurrence. In reality, we are often waiting in an asynchronous environment, but there may be advantages to that waiting. In Jane's case, one advantage was an increase in her teaching patience. To be fair though, she does attribute this change in part to her simply becoming a more mature instructor with better listening skills, but then, discussions with Jane point to the idea that it is in part MVCR that has made her a more mature instructor. One example attributed to MVCR is outlined below.

"I had to get my class started and then walk next door for a 5 minute meeting with my boss. I gave the class

directions to discuss the pros and cons of sending a man to mars and then writing 3 pros and cons in complete sentences on the board. I left. When i returned 25 minutes later – boss talked a lot – they had completed the assignment – WAY above my expectation, they had actually applied readings to the 3 main points. Had I been in the room, i wonder if they would have been as successful.”

She was now willing to sit back and let the students work alone. This idea relates to an understanding of the teacher roles under the collaborative, student-centered instructional paradigm learned through MVCR, which Jane discussed at several points during our conversations.

Collaborative learning is usually centered in group work. Jane actually did not like doing group work online based upon her archived comments within her courses. Still, she attributes these experiences as helping her to manage her face-to-face groups better. She got a sense of things that worked in group settings from her online course, some if not all of which translated into her face-to-face practice.

A few other items were brought up by Jane, but we did not have time during our discussions to delve deeper in to these topics. These items included accelerated learning strategies, student support, and accountability. However, a sampling of Jane’s comments during her coursework revealed that she felt, “This module reminded me of how the online instructor must have critical skills in communicating technical procedure while conveying the ultimate sense of compassion for the students.” Perhaps this compassion has facilitated her desire to implement new ideas in all forms of her practice.

Once a course has been designed and taught, the knowledge acquisition by students has to be assessed in some fashion. As with other topics, assessment aligned towards the online environment such as discussion measures are addressed in several MVCR courses. Since discussion is a major focus of online courses, which may or may not be true in a face-to-face course, it was interesting to see how assessment practices had transferred or not transferred into Jane’s face-to-face practice.

One word that Jane had never heard and a tool she had never used prior to MVCR courses was a rubric. Many people use rubrics without knowing though. Jane used standard composition rubrics prior to MVCR, although they were not necessarily written down or called rubrics. Now however, she makes more extensive use of rubrics, and understands how to utilize them. As she put it, “Assessment was really important to help me think through how I was really going to do this, and then you can construct all of these elaborate rubrics, but if the instructor can’t use them, and if you can’t explain it to the student, what good is it.” She also felt that the use or at least the knowledge of rubrics has led her to be a fairer instructor when it comes to assessing student work. Overall, her entire approach to grading seems to have been affected.

Jane also took the lessons on alternative assessments to heart. Instead of using primarily summative assessments with her students, she now utilizes more performance measures and provides more formative feedback to students during the instruction

process. Although we did not have time to delve further into the topic, she felt that she simply had a greater general awareness of assessment concepts. While MVCR did not address traditional forms of assessment such as clarity within a composition or how to write better multiple choice exams, these were items that Jane had learned through her life in education. MVCR had simply completed the assessment picture, and this picture was not exclusive to the online environment. Analysis of course archives demonstrated this principle. In one of the few activities directly mentioning face-to-face issues in an MVCR course, an assignment asked for a comparison between the advantages and disadvantages of assessment between the two. Repeatedly, the idea that they are basically the same occurred to the students.

It is no surprise however, that not everything teaching related that is learned in or intended for the online environment will transfer to face-to-face practice. Her instructional design practices remained mostly the same except in the implementation and movement to pedagogical issues. In particular, asynchronous discussion, a benchmark in online courses, did not apply to her face-to-face courses that she describes as using a hybrid methodology. In her experiences, ESL students simply do not benefit from the added workload when discussion could be carried out in person and writing is already covered in various assessments.

In addition to discussion, other modes of instructional delivery were not seen as effective in face-to-face versus online. Jane is "Not interested in sitting students down for simulations when they can have the real thing." To Jane, simulations are a substitute in the online environment for more tangible experiences.

Jane also feels that many assignments in the online versus face-to-face environments needed to remain different. She specifically mentioned differences in expectations, not meaning that the assignments were easier in one versus the other, but that different measures needed to be used because the nature of the assignments were different. Further exploration of Jane's face-to-face practice needs to be conducted in order to understand and comment further on these differences.

When discussing instructional design, the use of objectives were mentioned several times by Jane; however, she does not apply these objectives the same in her online versus face-to-face courses. While they are used in both when planning and designing the instruction, in the online courses, she partly shares these objectives with the students in order to give them a better understanding of the assignment as supplemental materials. The same is not true of her face-to-face course, where one might presume that such information could be transferred verbally or discussed as need based on student questioning.

I would be remiss if I did not stress how important it may be that primary pedagogical methods in one mode were considered by Jane to be inferior to the other (face-to-face). Without moving too far along a tangent of the primary discussion of this paper, Jane had implied that perhaps one method was better than the other; however, when probing her feelings and analyzing her course documents, I was unable to verify my suspicions. They were simply different and different methods and activities worked differently in each. The primary effect of the MVCR program was not so much in showing Jane how to teach face-to-face directly, but rather in opening her eyes to many common principles of education independent of modality.

Overall though, Jane believes that MVCR has made her a better teacher. It is difficult to observe this change in retrospect except through Jane's perceptions, which are discussed here. According to Jane, "MVCR presented new strategies that would 'freshen' my teaching." Furthermore, she has "a wider repertoire of teaching strategies as a result." She has a clearer sense of what she is trying to do and how to accomplish it by the end of the term. There are now more possibilities for both her face-to-face and online practice. She has "a clearer sense of what it is that I want to accomplish by the end of the term", an idea that was reiterated several times during our discussions. Of course, despite the transfers that did occur as outlined below and Jane's feelings that she is teaching the students better as discussed above, grades within her courses have remained stable comparing pre- and post-MVCR levels.

Individual Influences

I do not presume that such a thorough understanding of methods could be developed in every individual or that MVCR or a related program could affect everyone's practice across delivery modes in the same way. However, perhaps insight can be gained into traits affecting these items by probing into Jane's personal attributes and her reflections on why the program worked in this way for her.

First of all, the online learning modality seems to suit Jane's learning needs and styles. While she considers herself to be a very verbal person (I can vouch for her ability to carry a conversation and her communication skills through our interactions.), there were many aspects of the online learning environment that she finds fit her well. She feels that she has a stronger voice online. She is "More empowered away from talkative men." Let's hope that she does not attribute all of her face-to-face educational woes to men, seeing as how I am one.

Thus, a primary influence emanating from Jane is her sense and abilities in communication. She is easily able to join the online community that formed in her courses. She has a willingness to share as evident from her many posts reflecting on her own personal experiences and life as evidenced by analysis of her course posts.

This willingness exists also in her desire to learn more. She had a positive attitude going into the program and was intrinsically motivated to learn and participate. Her participation in her online courses was clearly evident from the number and timeliness of her correspondence and the quality of the content submitted. Also, even having finished the certificate program associated with MVCR, she continues to take new courses as they are developed.

When looking back over our conversations together, I believe that some of Jane's motivation for improvement emanates from her compassion for students. She seems to really care about her students and what they learn. Several times in analysis of her course posts, she mentioned that something would work with her students or that she looked forward to her students being able to learn more from the ideas she had gained.

Jane was also thankful for the reflective time within the online learning environment. I refer back to my earlier discussion on patience. In an asynchronous environment, time expires during a conversation. Jane felt that having the extra time to compose thoughts, even if it did mean waiting for a response, helped her learn more thoroughly and think more about the content. As she put it, "Even though I am highly auditory, I think that this read/write method produced more deeply embedded results in my own learning."

A common aspect of online learning that many find helpful including Jane is the convenience and cost. Learning anytime and anywhere with the reduced cost of time and transportation can be very appealing. For Jane, the MVCR program was free because of the guidelines of the MVCR program and its State funding. She was also able to work from her basement or from her computer at work when she had time. Modern obstacles to educational advancement such as full time employment, children, and cost were no longer a factor.

Of course, there were disadvantages seen to the online method. Despite taking a course on the topic, Jane felt that multimedia principles were not something that she could learn in an online environment. She needed someone to sit her down and demonstrate techniques in real time and face-to-face.

Other difficulties Jane was able to overcome. Her technology literacy is below what one would consider helpful to an online student. In one of her courses, Jane wrote, "...after wiping the sweat from my brow because downloading scares me and installing is something I usually only do with another adult present, I tried out the demo. It says I need a plug-in? What's happening?" Fortunately, someone was there, even if at a distance, to help her through her difficulties.

External Influences

One's environment and interactions with others should also have an effect on the ability of one to learn or apply what has been learned. Public and institutional scrutiny of online education is prevalent in society today. For Jane, such external influences were present, but she does not personally see them as having a large impact on her thinking.

For one, she was unable to think of any effects that might be related to her colleagues or administration. Where she works, she feels that she is somewhat isolated from other instructors. Still, independent of Jane's awareness, an administration supportive or at least open to the idea of generating online courses likely helped her motivation and commitment to the program and knowledge acquisition.

Jane also did not directly perceive any effects related to her students. In her feelings and according to course evaluations, student satisfaction has remained stable. Sometimes, no change can have an effect though. While Jane does not recognize the influence, it would be interesting to know any impact that a negative shift in satisfaction might have caused.

Also, despite mentioning technical issues in her course posts, she did not mention them in our interviews. One possibility for it not being considered in retrospect is likely the availability of technical support. With the aid of others, including program staff, her technical issues were overcome quickly as judged from her discussion within her courses.

Similarly, Jane's family was not seen as a major influence. The discussion of online versus face-to-face education has not been an issue. Once again though, in our social conversations, it has become clear to me that Jane does live in a very supportive and caring family environment. It is possible that an influence did exist despite it not being recognized. Sometimes, one needs to be an observer in order to discern context effects on an individual.

One influence that Jane did recognize was that of her fellow students. While the instruction and content of the courses did not presume to apply to the face-to-face environment, she pointed out that people minimally said something about the application of topics in the MVCR courses to their face-to-face courses at least twice per week. When reviewing course archives; however, I was only able to find such comments at most once every two weeks. Clearly, the comments that were made had an impact on Jane for her to quadruple their perceived occurrences. Along the same line of discussion, Jane also did not experience any negative interaction in any of her MVCR courses. Course archive analysis shows this to be true. Jane feels that this lack of negative experience likely had an overall positive effect on her learning.

DISCUSSION

My own entrance into educational research happened at a time of explosive growth in online education. Having now experienced this method from the student, instructor, developer, and administrative perspectives, my questions continue to grow as I try to maintain a critical eye rather than simply accept trends. While I recognize my own positive predispositions, I realize the possible variance in others' opinions and experiences. Through this recognition, I hoped to shed new light on the online learning experience and its effects from analysis of this case.

I mentioned earlier my suspicions that Jane may consider face-to-face education better or more effective in some ways than online. I have found that she feels more strongly that they are simply and only different. She defines online education as, "delivering content and managing communications over the internet – whether real or asynch thereby putting more responsibility back on the learner while shifting (potentially) to a more learner centered design." She sees the difference more as a paradigm shift in how she teaches and the level of involvement of the students. While there may be a better or worse modality for her practice, she continues to relay that she would not know what it is. Each method probably works in a manner dependent not just on the content, but on context, including the instructor and student and how they interact with each other and the content.

From this study, we can see that it is possible to transfer teaching practices between online and face-to-face teaching. Numerous examples were found through Jane such as changes in instructional design, content delivery, and assessment. In

her case, she seemed easily able to transfer skills intended for one mode of instruction to another. Other examples such as group work did not work the same in both environments from Jane's experience. From the extent of transfer, it is argued that it is likely that the two modes are more similar than some would admit.

Several items seemed to contribute to this transfer in our case. Although it was proposed that many social influences may exist that may hinder or enhance such transfer, Jane did not see such influences as being a factor in her own situation. From exploration, situations probably did exist though that may have led to a positive influence simply by the lack of negative influence. Her administration, colleagues, and family did not exert a negative opinion on online learning, while fellow students and instructors in the program seemed to exert a positive influence. It is unclear if society as a whole would play a factor, for true public opinion is unknown and would be difficult to quantify. For Jane, it was unrecognized by her as an influence.

The main influences in Jane's situation seem to originate from Jane herself. She was highly motivated from the start of the program, and seemed interested in increasing her teaching ability. Her participation in the course forums was clearly evident, logging into the course management system at least once per day in most cases during the week. According to Jane, this participation occurred in part due to her ability to exert her voice into the online virtual community. Throughout this participation, she continually experienced positive feedback and a reinforcing environment while not being presented with outside negative influences as discussed earlier under social aspects. Her in-course reflections almost always reached an evaluative state of knowledge, and she often considered how the new knowledge could be incorporated into her own practice. This level of understanding might have been reached due to the course environment, instructor's ability, motivation, participation, ability to take time to reflect upon the content and consider responses, innate learning skills, or other factors; however, a true cause can only be speculated at this point. Certainly correlates are evident though, as she cites many such principles, and while only conjecture at this point, she does appear to have excellent learning skills in the text-based, online teaching and learning environment.

While the above describes possible influences on Jane's knowledge acquisition within the program, Jane was also open to new ideas, and willing to try new things. This attitude carried over into her face-to-face practice. When something was found that did not transfer, this experience did not deter her from trying other techniques learned in the MVCR program within her face-to-face classrooms. Her incorporation of teaching techniques across modalities has led to her reformulating her face-to-face courses so that she now considers them to be a hybrid between face-to-face and online methods.

We are left then with a picture of Jane, who learned the principles of online education from an online training program and was then able to transfer much of her new knowledge and skills over to her face-to-face practice. Could she have learned the same amount if not more from a face-to-face educational program? One cannot say. More to the point is the fact that the online environment presented her with an opportunity she would not otherwise have had and she does seem to have made the most of it.

A Few Days in the Life of an Online Student

For Jane, it was the first day of a new module in her online course. This wasn't bad or good, just something else to take up scheduled time. Fortunately, the course had been very interesting so far. This course was her first experience with online education, and it had been both enjoyable and informative. Of course, she was still in her first course in a series of courses to follow, but it was something she looked forward to experiencing. The overall emphasis of this course had been on what online teaching and learning is all about. It was about possibilities, strengths, and of course the weaknesses; all things she was intrinsically motivated to learn.

Jane walked down the stairs to her office. She finally had some free and quite time to work. Step one when beginning a new unit was to print out all of the readings and assignment for the week. Reading on a computer screen is just not something that appealed to Jane. While it may work for some, she still preferred reading in print. Just because the course was online didn't mean that her reading had to be. There were no special announcements that the instructor might post throughout the course, so the next couple of hours or so would be spent reading and taking notes when needed. Some caffeine would help get through all of the readings before finishing the night and going to sleep. A break here and there to see what the kids were doing, to answer the phone, or simply to stretch would help her get through the readings, although some would still be left for later viewing. She had a week to finish the assignments, and for now she would let some of the readings soak into her memory.

A couple of days passed and Jane could return to her course. She didn't have too much time to think about the readings, but did at least finish reading them. With her busy life, she wouldn't even be able to take the course if it was not offered in the asynchronous online environment. "That's where the asynch. saved me," she would say.

Once again, she headed into the office to do her work. The lights were out, as the family had gone to sleep in this later hour. Jane did not show the same signs of weariness.

Once the computer had started, Jane opened up her browser and typed in the URL for the course. In the Web interface for the course, she proceeded into the discussion area to check for announcements from the instructor, her usual starting point. A nice motivational message was present.

Continuing on without skipping a beat, Jane began to view the discussion between the students and the content for the week. Discussion was the primary andragogical method employed by the course, which really worked well for Jane's interactive style. She would later mention how she really enjoyed reading what others said and appreciated that other students thought of things that she hadn't. In general she found the discussions to be lively and respectful. With an audience composed of college instructors though, such an atmosphere seemed to be relatively easy to create.

Taking her pencil in hand, she began to write notes about things that she wanted to return to or comment about said points in

the discussion forum. An occasional smirk would reflect the “wonderful sense of humor and human touch” within even a text-based environment. Sometimes, an “hmm” might go along with a note as a display of something interesting to think about.

When opportunities presented themselves, Jane would comment on what other students had posted. She tried to do more than just post a “good job” as such posts didn’t really add much to the course and would not really count in assessment anyway. Participation and content of posts were a major component of the assessment in this course. Jane also had to take the time to post her own answers to the discussion questions she had been assigned. Two to three paragraphs would normally be sufficient, but sometimes something a little longer was required.

The night was beginning to have its effects. It was about time to settle into the comfort of her bed. As one last foray online, Jane took a minute to check her email. She wasn’t expecting a grade, which she would normally expect in this fashion, but as long as she was up and at the computer, she might as well see what was in her “inbox”. Tonight there was nothing to read as expected, but that was one less thing to have to think about. It was now time to turn off the computer and call it a night.

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BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I started my career in the field of biochemistry. I then felt a need to be more directly helpful to others and entered the field of education. Since, I am a continuing part time graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where I also earned an M.Ed. in Math, Science, and Technology Division. I have worked for the Office of Educational Technology in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and currently work as a technology-assisted instruction specialist for the Department of Outreach and Public Service for the University of Illinois system. My experience and knowledge in online education and education in general is extensive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. Robert Stake and Dr. Karen Ferneding at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for their guidance on this project. It is still a work in progress.

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