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Disrupting the discussion : the story of disruptive students in the online classroom

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DISRUPTING THE DISCUSSION:

THE STORY OF DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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Dr. Lynn Nielsen, Committee Chair

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Dr. Michael J. Licari
Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

Many online classrooms today are designed based on learner-centered principles. Implicit with this design perspective is the goal to create and facilitate a virtual learning community in which students learn from and share with each other through discussion-based computer conferencing. In the current literature, little has been shared on what happens to the online learning community when students behave in a manner deemed challenging, difficult, or disruptive. However, as in the face-to-face classroom, disruptive student behaviors do appear in the online classroom.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how disruptive student behaviors impact the online learning community and the facilitation and design methods online instructors use to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?

2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?

3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?

4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

This qualitative study relied upon data collection, including survey data, face to face semi-structured interviews, and follow-up email communications. The analysis and

interpretation of the data confirmed the presence of a number of disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities and a perception by instructors that disruptive student behaviors impact the online learning community. The importance of active participation of the instructor in the online learning community and use of communication, both public and private, were the two key factors successful in managing online disruptive behaviors. Design modifications to prevent disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities that emerged were: netiquette or communication policies, structuring discussions, model discussion examples, defined student discussion spaces, structuring group collaboration, grading policies and rubrics, and late policies.

DISRUPTING THE DISCUSSION:

THE STORY OF DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

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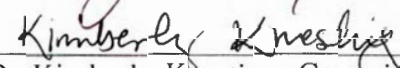
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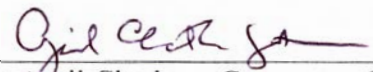
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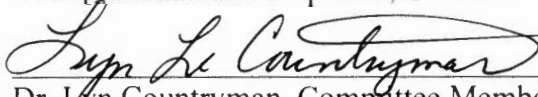
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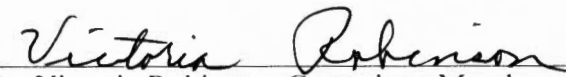
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Belle Doyle Cowden

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July 2011

DEDICATION

To my family, Jack, Mackenzie, Kieran, Isabelle and all my siblings for the love, faith, and support that was never-ending in the course of completing this endeavor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At this most exciting and challenging part of the dissertation, I would like to express my sincere thanks to many people that have helped me along the way. First and foremost, I have been fortunate to have had the most dedicated advisor and committee chair Dr. Lynn Nielsen to guide me through this process. Dr. Nielsen is the master of sandwiching constructive guidance in between layers and layers of positive encouragement and this has been the single most important key to my successful completion.

I would also like to express a special thanks to the members of the dissertation committee – Dr. Kimberly Knesting, Dr. Timothy Weih, Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, Dr. Lyn Countryman, and Dr. Victoria Robinson. Their great mentorship and commitment have been invaluable support through the dissertation completion process.

I am very grateful for all my friends and colleagues who have supported me in so many ways during this endeavor. Though at times I didn't want to be asked how it was going (when it wasn't) it was always reassuring to know that there were others with an interest and concern with my successful completion.

I owe my deepest gratitude to the support of my family. Special thanks to my mother, Isabelle, for always being my role model. Thank you to my siblings for inspiring and challenging me. Thank you to my children, Mackenzie and Kieran, for motivating me to be a good role model to each of you. Finally Jack, my husband, I cannot express how important it has been to have you believe in me. And, no, we will not have three kids in college next year!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to Allen and Seaman (2010), there has been an increase of nearly one million students taking online higher education courses in the past year. Their study reported that over 5.6 million students were taking at least one online course during the fall 2009 term which translates into an increase of 21% over the fall 2008 term. With such rapid and tremendous growth in online learning it is important that researchers seek to understand the online classroom and the online learning community.

The idea of learning climate and the belief that environment effects learning was first introduced in adult education by Malcolm Knowles (Wiesnberg & Hutton, 1995). From Knowles' ideas and beliefs, the concept of learning community emerged. With the achievements of digital communication, learning communities entered a new dimension that has enabled learners the opportunity to experience online learning communities. Thus, by means of communication technologies using different types of digital tools, spaces and forms of interaction, online learning communities have emerged for many universities and colleges.

What does an online learning community look like today? Online learning communities are established on the framework of constructivist learning theory and the use of learner-centered principles. Constructivist learning theory refers to the concept that learners construct knowledge for themselves. Each learner individually (and socially) constructs meaning-as he or she learns. From this perspective, learning is a social activity: where learning is intimately associated with connections with other

human beings. The American Psychological Association (1997) developed fourteen learner-centered psychological principles as a framework for educational approaches, such as online learning.

As Berge and Muilenburg (2000) found, most online learning communities are often more learner-centered than traditional, brick-and-mortar classrooms. Implicit with this perspective is the goal to create and facilitate an online learning community in which students learn and share from each other through discussion-based computer conferencing. From the constructivist perspective, computer conferencing refers to the "exchange of messages among a group of participants by means of networked computers, for the purpose of discussing a topic of mutual interest" (Gunawardena, Lowe, & Anderson, 1997, p. 397).

An online learning community has several elements present that identify it as a community. Lock (2002) identified four cornerstones of an online learning community: communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation. Establishing guidelines for these four cornerstones is instrumental in maintaining a positive online learning community in which meaningful learning may occur. Each of these four cornerstones is exhibited through the actions and behaviors of the members of the online learning community. It is anticipated that each member of the community will contribute positively to the evolution and success of learning in the community. Lock (2002) stated "the relationships, the intimacy, the negotiations, and the engagement of participants all influence the evolution of a community" (p. 396). To achieve learning, an online

learning community requires commitment from the instructor and the students of the community.

Students in the online learning communities need to be active, creative, and engaged in the learning process, but we cannot assume that learners will engage with each other in the learning process. This requires designers to have an understanding of how different aspects of instructional design can influence interactivity and collaboration. It is important to acknowledge the importance of instructional design and the guidance of the instructor-facilitator in the success of an online learning community. Supporting this notion, Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, and Turoff (1995) wrote,

> with attention to instructional design and facilitation, these shared spaces [online learning communities] can become the locus of rich and satisfying experiences in collaborative learning, an interactive group knowledge-building process in which learners actively construct knowledge by formulating ideas into words that are shared with and built upon through the reactions and responses of other. (p. 2)

The instructor's role is crucial in facilitating a successful online learning community. Mason (1991) identified three roles that instructors perform in an instructional setting. Instructors perform intellectual, social, and organizational tasks. Berge (1995) added the technical role in which an instructor makes learners comfortable with the system and software of the online learning environment. Facilitation alone is not the only role of the instructor as Harasim et al. (1995) also emphasized the role of instructional design. Simply adding a threaded discussion board tool to an online course does not imply that an online community will emerge. Instructors need to design an environment that fosters community development and facilitate the interactions within. Specifically, Dennen (2001) suggested the instructor should invest more in the design of

the course infrastructure and she warned against relying too heavily on the instructor's participation for successful discussion and community building. Accordingly, as an alternative measure for success, she proposed through the design of discussion prompts in the course materials. There are two key components of the discussion prompt. The first is the topic or issue, in other words what will be discussed, and the second is the guidelines that define how the topic should be discussed.

It is essential that students in an online learning community express behaviors that are in alignment with Lock's (2002) established guidelines for four cornerstones to ensure that the online learning community does not become compromised by behaviors that are perceived challenging, difficult, or disruptive and non-conducive to learning.

<p style="text-align:center">Problem Statement</p>

In my position as an instructional developer at a Midwest regional comprehensive public university, supporting faculty in the design, development, and facilitation of online learning communities, I have been made aware of instances that have occurred in online courses where students have exhibited behaviors that do not contribute positively to the evolution and success of learning in the community. The behaviors students have exhibited have been perceived by the instructors as challenging, difficult, or disruptive. From conversations with faculty, I have learned that the disruptive student can take many forms: the student who habitually posts late; the student who violates the communication norms of the community; the student who confronts the instructor, and other students; the student who does not participate at an adequate level; the student who is not able to work well in collaborative situations; and the student who is unable or unwilling to adjust to

the technology. From the perspectives of the faculty who have shared problems, the disruptive student behaviors seemed to have an effect on the flow of discussion and the learning community.

My interest in the topic of disruptive student behaviors in online classrooms is to learn more so that I may better support the faculty I serve. Faculty sharing problems have sought my advice on how to deal with or manage the disruptive student behaviors as well as how they may design their courses better to prevent the behaviors from occurring.

As I reflected on the student behaviors that have been shared with me, it seemed evident to me that more knowledge and insight into the identification and descriptions of disruptive student behaviors and a better understanding of faculty perceptions of the impact these behaviors have on online learning communities was needed. Additionally, learning how instructors manage disruptive students and what modifications to course designs they implement to prevent or minimize disruptive online student behaviors could be beneficial in helping us understand how to better facilitate and design online learning communities.

In the current literature, little has been shared on what happens to the online learning community when disruptive student behaviors emerge, how faculty manage the behaviors, and how faculty change their designs to prevent the behaviors. However, just as in the face-to-face classroom, disruptive students do appear in the online classroom.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was fourfold. First, it defined the behaviors of disruptive students in the online learning environment. Second, it addressed the

perceptions held by online instructors related to the effect disruptive students have on the online learning community. Third, it explored how online instructors adjust their teaching strategies to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors. Fourth, it investigated how online instructors modify their course design to prevent disruptive online behavior. Specifically this study sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?

2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?

3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?

4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

Methodology

The design of this study followed a basic interpretive study. According to Merriam (2002), in a basic interpretive qualitative study the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation with the meaning mediated through the researcher as the instrument. As I sought to discover how disruptive student behaviors impact the online learning community and what facilitation and design methods online instructors use to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors,

my purpose was realized by first determining a criteria for survey participant selection and then conducting the faculty survey to select interview participants. The results of the faculty survey, not only helped identify participants to interview, but also became part of the set of the data collected. During the in-person interviews, I followed up on responses from the survey eliciting further elaboration, clarification, and description from the interviewees. In the following paragraphs I explain the survey participant selection criteria, the interview participant selection process, the interview process, and the data analysis and interpretation process.

Criteria for survey participant selection were that they (a) designed their online courses with a high degree of importance placed building a learning community, (b) designed their online courses with a high degree of importance placed on student-to-student interaction, and (c) have observed disruptive student behaviors in their online courses. The first step in the survey participant selection process was to identify administrators at institutions with large numbers of online courses and ask them to provide names of faculty teaching who may fit the survey participant selection criteria. The second step in this process was to email the administrators identified in the first step and asked them to nominate faculty to complete the faculty survey. The names of the faculty nominated comprised a homogenous sample. In the third step, I sent an email message to each of the nominated faculty inviting each to participate in the faculty survey. I noted that specifically that I was seeking faculty whose online courses involved discussion-based student interaction where disruptive student behaviors have occurred.

I assured the faculty the measures of confidentiality in my selection process. Specifically I explained that names and contact information collected on the survey responses were only for the purpose of conducting follow-up interviews for those selected and that completing my survey implied his/her consent to participate in my study.

The faculty survey (Appendix B) requested demographic information and included three questions. The first question asked about the degree in which building a learning community was important to the design of their online course(s). This was followed by a question that asked to what degree is student-to-student interaction important in their online course(s). The primary reason for these two questions was to determine if the faculty designed and facilitated their courses based on constructivist learner-centered principles. For the third question, I adapted a survey from Johnston (1996). Johnston studied how individual faculty performed in groups and crafted a survey utilizing the group roles that appear in group dynamics theory as identified by Benne and Sheats (1948). Specifically, Johnston's survey included a section that provided statements describing types of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in "individual roles" as defined by Benne and Sheats. Individual roles, included behaviors that are directed toward satisfaction of a personal need of an individual rather than towards meeting group goals. For the third question in the faculty survey, I adapted the statements of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in individual roles which Johnston used in her survey.

Criteria for the interview participant selection were the same as the survey participant selection. I was seeking faculty who (a) designed their online courses with a high degree of importance placed building a learning community, (b) designed their online courses with a high degree of importance placed on student-to-student interaction, and (c) have observed disruptive student behaviors in their online courses. I analyzed the results of the faculty surveys and selected faculty to interview. The interviews in my study involved an in person semi-structured interview approximately 60 minutes each. (See Appendix E Faculty Interview.) All interviews were conducted face-to-face and were conducted over a one week period starting in January and ending in February 2011. During each interview and immediately following each interview, fieldnotes were prepared that included notes about emerging issues and analytical comments. These fieldnotes helped track the development of the study and served in a reflective capacity initiating the analysis process. All interviews were transcribed. To protect the identity of the participants during the analysis, unique code names were assigned to each participant.

A fundamental aspect of qualitative research is that multiple methods of data collection be used to increase confidence in research findings; to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity. The results of the faculty survey provided one form of data in this study. The interview transcripts provided a second and the follow-up email messages provided a third. Initially, the plan was for follow-up phone conversations, but it was mutually agreed that follow-up email would suffice.

Data analysis took place concurrently with the process of data collection. The data for research questions 1 and 4 were analyzed and coded using the constant

comparative method. The categories and themes confirmed in the analysis of research question 1 were used in a deductive process to analyze research questions 2 and 3.

Eisner (1998) identified six features that make a study qualitative. The first feature is that a qualitative study is field focused. I believe the online learning community can be considered a valid field of focus given that it is an environment where humans interact. A second feature of qualitative studies is the understanding of the researcher, or self, as an instrument. I recognize that my experiences placed me into the position of entering this inquiry with some assumptions regarding the types of disruptive student behaviors that I felt would emerge. The third feature of qualitative inquiry is the interpretive characteristic. My study contained interpretive characteristics in my attempt to describe and explain the experiences with disruptive student behaviors of faculty in the online learning community. Additionally, in my attempt to make meaning of their stories and integrate their stories together to categorize and illustrate as themes and patterns I depicted an interpretive nature of my study. The use of expressive language and the presence of voice in text is the fourth characteristic of qualitative studies that Eisner (1998) identifies. My use of first person narrative and direct quotes from the faculty interviews within this text demonstrate aspects of expressive language and the presence of voice. Attention to particulars is the fifth feature of qualitative studies. In qualitative studies, the aim is not to arrive at general statements but to heighten an awareness of the uniqueness of the particular situation, individual event or object of study. Attention to particulars is accounted for with my use of examples to explain the types of student behaviors, the impact these students have on the learning community, how the instructor

has managed the behavior, and how the instructor has changed his/her course design to prevent these behaviors a general theme emerged. Eisner (1998) stated "qualitative research becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility" (p. 39). Coherence, insight, and instrumental utility are the criteria for judging the success of a qualitative study and the sixth and final feature of a qualitative. Coherence, insight, and instrumental utility will guide this study and be used as the criteria for judging its success. This approach to inquiry fits well with my interest in learning about disruptive student behaviors, faculty perceptions of the impact they have on the learning community, how faculty manage the behaviors, and how faculty modify online courses to prevent disruptive behaviors.

Research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge, there is little consensus as to the appropriate criteria for assessing validity and reliability with qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Glesne (2006) suggests that the scientific values of validity, objectivity and reliability do not apply in the same way in qualitative inquiry as they do for postpositivist or logical empiricists. According to Merriam (2002), trustworthiness relies on the ethical conduct of research and ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings in qualitative research. Establishing a rapport in the researcher-participant relationship and examining the assumptions one carries into the research process are two starting points for conducting an ethical study (Merriam, 2002). Similarly, Glesne (2006) notes "in qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research—or rapport—and the quality of your self-

awareness of the potential effects of self on your research—or subjectivity" (p. 109). This study was conducted with an understanding of the importance of establishing rapport with my research participants and being conscious of my subjectivity. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I made a concerted effort to reflect on my role in the inquiry in light of my experiences, biases, assumptions, and values.

Limitations of the Study

While the individual faculty members interviewed had direct experiences with disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities, they may not represent the perspectives of all online faculty. The interviews focused on five faculty who emerged as the key informants in this study and this small sample size may be perceived as a lack of representativeness or a limitation in the study. I was limited in funds and time to interview all of the faculty survey respondents that met the survey participant selection criteria. Additionally the voice of the sixth interviewee that I was scheduled to interview was omitted from this study due to complications with weather that prevented the interview from occurring.

Another limitation of this study could be attributed to single-session interviews. I was only able to interview each of the five once and though the interviews provided me with enough data for my purposes, the data could be seen as Glesne (2006) notes "thinner" data than I could have obtained through multiple interviews.

Additionally, this research has not explored the views or perceptions of the students involved in the learning communities in which disruptive student behaviors have emerged and thus it only represents a faculty perspective.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study include:

Distance Education – planned learning that does not involve the traditional classroom setting in which the students and instructor are in the same location at the same time. Examples range from correspondence courses to videoconferencing to online classes (Ko & Rosen, 2010, p. 399).

Online Learning Community –a place on the Internet where learners gather to share information, collaborate on projects, and meet the needs of the other learners in the community through communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation (Lock, 2002).

Internet –a global data communications system made up of a hardware and software infrastructure that provides connectivity between computers.

Perceptions – immediate experiences observed by individuals or groups at a particular moment and using existing and relevant data (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Significance of the Study

Very little has been shared in the current research literature on what happens to the online learning community when students participate in such a way as to be deemed challenging, difficult, or disruptive. Only two studies were found which were research based and studied disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities. Beaudin

(1999) conducted a quantitative research study that determined techniques that instructors recommend and use to keep students discussions on topic, and Taylor (2002) conducted a case study looking at participation patterns of online students and quantified the interactions with the course materials and the communication with others in the discussion based online course. Tobin (2001) and Ko and Rosen (2010) each provided references to disruptive student behaviors based on situations observed or heard about as opposed to based on a formal methods of inquiry. In this section, I will briefly describe this literature here. In Chapter 2, I will expand the overview and share a more detailed account of the research and literature.

Beaudin (1999) conducted his study via an online questionnaire that rated a variety of techniques for online instructors to use for keeping online learners on topic during discussions. This study viewed instructor techniques for keeping discussions on topic as well as implied design issues that help prevent off-topic discussion but did not specifically view this as disruptive behavior to the online learning community nor did it explore the impact that off-topic discussion has on the learning community.

Taylor (2002) conducted a case study that involved a granular analysis of participation in a discussion board based course by examining the number of times individuals accessed the tool. Three types of participation patterns were identified. The proactive participation group ("The Workers") contained students who contributed above average number of postings to the discussion and also visited regularly. The peripheral participation group ("The Lurkers") included students who contributed less than the average number of postings to the discussions, but at the same time participated regularly

in the discussion in "read only" mode. The parsimonious participation group ("The

Shirkers") contributed only one third of the average number of postings to the

discussions, and similarly visited this part of the site on less than 50% of the group

average. Taylor related that variable participation patterns were potential predictors of

academic performance in this course but did not address perception held by the online

instructor as to how the participation patterns affected or impacted the online learning

community. Additionally, this study did not explore how the online instructor adjusted

his/her teaching strategies to engage "The Lurkers" and "The Shirkers" nor did it

investigate how the instructor modified the course design to prevent participation patterns

in future courses.

Tobin (2001) wrote an essay that suggested one of the most difficult issues facing

distance-learning administrators was how to respond to disruptive students in the online

learning environment and dealing with faculty who are inconsiderate of their students or

unsupportive of their learning needs. Tobin's conclusions were supported by survey

research, individual interviews, institutional policy, and solicited testimonials from many

institutions across the United States. In his essay, Tobin identified types of disruptive

students and made suggestions for faculty responses to the behaviors but did not include

in his study the ways in which faculty and student in online learning communities

perceive the learning to be disrupted or how the faculty may alter their instructional

strategies, or the instructional design of the course, to prevent disruptive behaviors.

Additionally since Tobin's work was an essay, not a formalized research study, it sheds

light on disruptive student behaviors but does not necessarily contribute as research per se.

Ko and Rosen (2010) provided four composite examples of different types of disruptive behaviors of students based on real situations that they have either observed or have heard described. The composite examples included: the know-it-all, the mutineer, the belligerent student who hasn't kept up, and the belligerent student on the attack. For each of these examples they provided suggestions to how the instructor may manage the behaviors. Other than stating "skillful management of student expectations... in a comprehensive syllabus, clearly written assignment instructions, protocols for communications, codes of conduct, and clearly stated policies" (p. 342), Ko and Rosen (2010) did not share specific design considerations to prevent disruptive student behaviors.

As colleges and universities embrace the Internet as a platform for conducting learning, the effectiveness of student learning and community building is increasingly questioned. Given that little had been researched on disruptive student behaviors, how these behaviors affect the online learning community and how faculty manage and adjust their instructional strategies to design courses to counteract disruptive behaviors makes this study significant in its attempt to help identify new facilitation and design strategies for dealing with disruptive student behaviors.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

"The review of the literature can be related directly to the topic, to the background of the topic, or to the applications and usefulness of the topic" (Newman & Benz, 1998, p. 24). Following this advice, the intent of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature and research related to the topic of online learning communities.

The first part of the review provides an overview of the technologies that have supported online learning and the research conducted on these technologies. Next is a review about what is known about online learning communities with illumination on the characteristics and aspects of the four cornerstones of online learning communities: communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation as noted in Chapter 1 (Lock, 2002). The topic of online learning communities reaches across several other related topics. These include constructivist learner-centered principles, the role of instructional design, instructor roles and learner roles in online learning communities. The literature related to each of these topics will be discussed; then I will conclude Chapter 2 with an overview of the literature on disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities and a summary.

History of Online Learning Technologies

Networked computers have been used for distance education in the United States as early as the 1980's (Murphy, Drabier, & Epps, 1998). It is important to trace the history of the technologies involved with online learning to better understand what the online learning community has evolved. The technologies used for online distance

education have progressed in a series of evolutionary stages. Each progression has had a profound impact upon the accessibility and pedagogy of online learning. The earliest and simplest form of technology used to support online learning involved the use of a web site coupled with the use of electronic mail. The students were provided the web address for the home page of the course web site, and the use of electronic mail was employed to facilitate the student and instructor interactions. The student typically worked individually with the instructor and did not interact with other students. Courses established in this format were based on the principles of correspondence study and did not involve learning communities.

In order for instructors to teach online courses that allowed exchange of messages between students, the technology of the mailserv was needed. The mailserv software allowed the creation of an electronic mailing list specific to the students enrolled in a course. The students on the mailing list were able to send one electronic mail message to a list of multiple users in a single electronic mail address. As technology improved over time, the use of computer conferencing became a popular medium for facilitating online discussions replacing the role of the mailserv. The term computer conferencing is often used interchangeable with other terms such as computer-mediated communication (CMC), online conversation, and threaded discussions. Essentially from the constructivist perspective, computer conferencing refers to the "exchange of messages among a group of participants by means of networked computers, for the purpose of discussing a topic of mutual interest" (Gunawardena et al., 1997, p. 397). The use of the term "bulletin board" was commonly used to describe the function of computer

conferencing systems. With a bulletin board students logon to the discussion board and type in a question, respond to an instructor's query or collaborate with other learners as part of an ongoing exchange of information. The web-based medium that supported a bulletin board allowed student to enter a discussion topic by simply clicking on the title and posting a message to that discussion. The collective results of the students' actions yielded a series of posts in an outline form with related discussion items "threaded" together visually. Thus, primarily due to the method by which the technology stored discussion messages, "threaded discussion" or "threaded discussion board" emerged as common phrases used interchangeably with the term bulletin board.

The distance learning technologies discussed thus far supported what is referred to as asynchronous distance learning. Asynchronous means that the interactions between participants occur at different times as with the use of electronic mail, mailing lists, and threaded discussion boards. Synchronous technologies emerged to complement the online environment. These tools allowed instructors to incorporate real-time interactions into online courses. Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and desktop video conferencing were two such tools. Chat allowed real-time text based discussions (Simpson, 2000) while desktop video conferencing supported video and audio transmission between participants. CU-SeeMe was one of the first desktop videoconferencing systems developed. According to Hodges (1996), CU-SeeMe was developed in 1992 by Cornell University. Prior to developing and sharing this software free over the Internet, videoconferencing involved dedicated systems housed in specialized room, but with CU-SeeMe videoconferencing became more widely accessible through personal computers.

The early web technologies provided a means for distributing course materials to students as well as established tools to promote interactive communications, thus allowing instructors to develop learning situations that were based on constructivist learner-centered principles. Nevertheless the environment was not yet ideal because the student had to access a multitude of platforms in order to participate in the various aspects of the course. The next evolutionary stage of distance education technologies involved course management systems that simplified the learner interface and resolved the complexity of building an online classroom. Course management systems or learning management systems are software packages that integrate the earlier independent tools, with additional new tools to create online environments. As such, course management systems create a single space for students to login to engage in all aspects of the online student-centered environment. These online learning environments provide tools that facilitate instructional design, access control, student engagement and course management (Dixson, 2010), thus supporting both instructional purposes and administrative functions. Instruction purposes are met with content modules that organize course web pages; communication tools that facilitate interaction; and online quiz creation to administer online surveys and exams. Administrative functions such as grade books and student tracking systems to track student course use provide course management opportunities. The past decade has introduced a dramatic increase in learning management system utilization in higher education. The majority of higher education institutions now use a learning management system for their online course delivery strategy (Browne, Jenkins & Walker, 2006).

Since the early uses of computer conferencing, researchers have analyzed the environment to determine its effectiveness. Some early researchers engaged in assessing participation patterns and participant satisfaction (Hiltz, 1990; Levin, Kim, & Riel, 1990; Mowrer, 1996). These studies answered patterns and satisfaction questions fairly successfully using several methods. Among the methods were participation analysis techniques, which analyzed the capacity of a conference to engage members. At the same time, participants' reports of learning and satisfaction with the learning experience uncovered through analysis of the transcripts of a conference or by means of online or paper surveys were determined important methods.

According to Hara, Bonk, and Angeli (2000), early studies also focused on accessibility of computer conferencing, the impact of computer conferencing on students' attitudes, and the effects of computer conferencing on society.

Content analysis for on-line discussion in educational settings was another point of interest in many early computer conferencing research studies. Ahern, Peck, and Laycock (1992) applied content analysis to computer conferences, controlled under different moderator conditions, to determine the quality of the student participation. Howell-Richardson and Mellar (1996) proposed a methodology for the analysis of interaction in computer conferences based on Speech Act theory. Their interaction analysis takes the illocutionary act as its unit of analysis and further classifies the content by coding the unit's focus, addressee, and inter-message inference. The focus determined whether the message concerns the group, the task, or is off-task. The target addressee

determined whether it is all, an individual or a subgroup. The inter-message inference determined as reference or no reference to other messages.

Additionally, in regards to early research in content analysis, a number of researchers (Gunawardena et al., 1997; Gunawardena, Lowe, & Anderson, 1998; Hara et al., 2000; Howell-Richardson & Mellar, 1996; Tsui & Ki, 1996) described the framework of Henri (1992). Henri's framework proposed a system of content analysis which involves breaking messages down into units of meaning and further classifying these units into five categories according to their content. As reported by these researchers, Henri's categories include: participation, interaction, social, cognitive, and metacognitive.

Hillman (1999) devised a coding system, an adaptation of Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman and Smith's (1966) model of pedagogical moves, which classified each sentence on three levels. Hillman explained that Bellack et al. originally designed their system to examine the back-and-forth interactions of a face-to-face classroom. In Hillman's system, the first level of the coding system describes the purpose of the sentence. The second tier of the coding system describes the mechanism of the sentence, the means or agency by which the meaning of the sentence took place, or how the subject of the sentence was discussed. The final tier of the coding system refers to what was being discussed—the content being considered or statements about something. Each sentence was assigned a code from each of the three tiers, which served to summarize the sentence's instructional intent. Hillman's study compared face-to-face learning with computer conferencing. His results indicate "interaction patterns in the computer-

mediated courses resembled discussion, whereas the patterns in the face-to-face courses resembled recitation" (Hillman, 1999, p. 37).

It is interesting to note that Hillman (1999) expressed concern that the results of earlier studies accomplished "nothing more than tallying the number of words, postings, or messages generated by the participants and then trying to draw meaningful conclusions from these numbers about what transpires in the courses, neglecting their qualitative aspects" (p. 39). In contrast, according to Bickel (1999), Horizon Research Incorporated had traditionally used qualitative measures such as participant interviews and questionnaires coupled with observations of on-line discussions to answer questions such as: how interactive are online "classroom" discussions; do discussions tend to be instructor- or participant-directed; and how do course design and questioning strategies influence on-line interactions? Although they believed these qualitative findings were meaningful, they were based mainly on participants' perceptions and qualitative assessments of on-line discussions, and the researchers realized a need for more concrete illustrations and quantitative measures of the interactive nature of online discussions and therefore the "discussions diagrams" method was developed. Discussion diagrams are based on sociograms, a social network analysis tool used frequently to study traditional classrooms (Bickel, 1999). The method provides both a visual model that illustrates on-line interactions and quantitative indices that describe the level and type of interaction.

In all of the studies shared in this review thus far, the answers to significant questions pertaining to elements of computer conferencing established methods and procedures for developing and evaluating interactive learning environments.

Online Learning Communities

Online learning communities have been defined in the literature in many ways. An online learning community is a common place on the Internet that addresses the learning needs of its members through computer-mediated communication with the purpose of achieving learning objectives. But the online learning community is more than the digital connection, as common elements or themes must be present, such as common goals and values, as well as, the ability to build a mutual trust, a sense of belonging, a sense of membership and support, and an ability to share in the learning process (Riel, 1996; Shea, Li, & Pickett, 2006). According to Moore (2004), developing an online learning community is not an end in itself, but rather the better the sense of community, the better the quality the knowledge that is generated and the higher quality of learning experience for the learners.

Lock (2002) identified four cornerstones of an online learning community: communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation. The following sections will discuss each of the four cornerstones.

Communication

Communication is pivotal in an online learning community generating interaction, engagement and alignment among learners (Lock, 2002; Schwier, 2001). Communication needs to be open and frequent with all members of the learning community. Multiple means with technologies that allow for one-to-one and one-to-many types of communication are important. The level of civility in the communication is important as well. Hermann (1998) found that civil language in the form of being

positive and friendly are important factors in creating and sustaining a community over time. Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1998) contend that effective communication allows a community of learners to acquire a personality and sense of direction while transcending the individual views and needs.

Collaboration

Collaboration in an online learning community may be evident in the design of group work and discussion based activities. Dennen (2000) defined collaborative learning as "a process that involves interaction amongst individuals in a learning situation" (p. 329). Collaborative activities in an online learning community aid in fostering learning by engaging all participants in working together in the learning process. Collaborative learning can be used to foster critical thinking skills. Through collaboration, students "achieve a deeper level of knowledge generation while moving from independence to interdependence, thus strengthening the foundation of the online learning community (Palloff & Pratt, 2007, p. 157).

Often students are resistant to participating in collaborative activities. This can be based on past experiences where other students have not shared the load or from experiences where it has been difficult to coordinate efforts of collaboration with online technologies. According to Palloff and Pratt (2007), the instructor can ease this degree of resistance by explaining why the activity is occurring, how it relates to the learning objectives, and by including the expectations for collaboration as guidelines. Providing appropriate tools and support of those tools that help facilitate the collaboration is also key to successful collaborations.

Interaction

According to Schwier (2001), interaction in a community usually results in engagement of ideas, people, and processes. Interaction is an important aspect of learning. Without interaction, teaching involves only passing on information. The premise of an online learning community based on a constructivist model is that knowledge is created or constructed by every learner (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2007).

Moore (1989) identified three types of interaction in an online learning community: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. Learner-content interaction is the interaction between the learner and the content or subject of study. Content can be presented in many different formats, including text, audio, video, graphs and images, and in online learning communities in which knowledge is generated, "students should actively construct their own knowledge through intensive engagement with multiple sources of information" (Arbaugh, & Benbunan-Fich, 2007, p. 855).

Learner-instructor interaction is the interaction between the learner and the expert who prepared the subject material. Depending on the instructional approach, the instructor can provide a prominent role as in an instructor-centered environment or can perform more of a facilitator role. Online learning communities are designed to be more learner-centered with the instructor performing a facilitator role (Berge & Muilenburg, 2000).

Learner-learner interaction is the inter-learner interaction, between one learner and other learners. Anderson (1999) identified five reasons why learner-learner interaction is important in an online learning community. The first reason is that learner-

learner interaction is what identifies an online course that has a learning community from an independent or self-study course. This leads to the second reason, which is interactivity maintains the community of discourse. The third reason is that interaction between learners defines and reconstructs the body of knowledge within the community. Feedback is crucial to the development of community and interactions between the learners are a form of feedback. Finally, Anderson believes that interaction is a stimulator and motivator to the learning community.

Hillman, Willis, and Gunawardena (1994) identified a fourth type of interaction. Learner-interface interaction is the interaction of manipulating the online tools to accomplish a learning task. Students in online learning communities use specific technologies to interact with instructors, other students, and the content. Thus as technology increasingly becomes the means for establishing communication between learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content, the interface design becomes important to the success of the learning community.

Participation

Participation is fundamental to the meaning of a learning community. Without participation, the community becomes merely a connection of digital resources that are inert. Spectators (lurkers) to an online learning community cannot claim membership in it until they participate in it (Schwier, 2001). Participation in an online learning community involves both social and academic components that are integral to sustaining the community. Setting up a space in the structure of their online classrooms to support

the personal social aspect of the online learning community is important. Harasim et al.

(1995) write

> Social communication is an essential component of educational activity. Just as a face-to-face school or campus provides places for students to congregate socially, in online educational environment should provide a space, such as a virtual café, for informal discourse. The forging of social bonds has important socioaffective and cognitive benefits for the learning activities. The virtual café should be primarily a student space and not directly tied to the curriculum. (p. 137)

The academic aspect of participation in online learning community suggests that participants must be learners willing to change and grow according to the goals and activities of the community. One of the reasons that online courses have become popular is because students can participate when it is convenient for them particularly when the community incorporates asynchronous activities such as discussions.

<div align="center">Constructivist Learner-Centered Principles</div>

Constructivist learning theory provides a set of guiding principles that help instructors and designers create learner-centered collaborative environments. Constructivist learning theory represents the element of co-construction of knowledge that is desired in an online learning community. Moore (2004) contends that when learners build knowledge together and support each other emotionally they are involved in a learning community. According to Palloff and Pratt (1999), constructivist learning theory is the predominant philosophy in online learning. Applying constructivist principles to the design of online learning communities requires learners to come together to discuss, learn, and construct knowledge through a community (Gabriel, 2004). Learning occurs by participating in and interacting with the learning environment in order to create a personal view of the world.

Early researchers engaged in assessing participation patterns and participant satisfaction as noted earlier. With an emphasis on knowledge construction through interaction within the learning environment, research literature on the social construction of knowledge in computer conferencing learning environments in apparent result. Gunawardena et al. (1998) believed that little has been done to establish procedures for evaluating the actual learning that takes place during a conference, especially when that learning is defined according to the constructivist principles as the co-construction of knowledge by negotiation of meaning. Gunawardena et al. (1998) believed that the use of transcript analysis would provide the opportunity to follow the interaction between participants in a conference. In their rationale, they proposed that if knowledge is indeed being socially constructed within a group of participants, then the analysis of the interaction should provide a view of how knowledge is co-constructed. Their study elected to use the entire debate transcript as the unit of analysis and measure it for the: (a) type of cognitive activity performed by the participants (questioning, clarifying, negotiating, synthesizing, etc.), (b) types of arguments advanced throughout the debate, (c) resources brought in by the participants for use in exploring their differences and negotiating new meanings, such as reports of personal experience, literature citations, and data collected, and (d) evidence of changes in understanding or the creation of new personal constructions of knowledge as a result of interactions within the group.

Online learning communities are often more learner-centered than traditional, brick-and-mortar classrooms (Berge & Muilenburg, 2000). Learner-centered principles shift the responsibility of learning to the individual learners. The American

Psychological Association (APA; 1997) developed learner-centered psychological

principles, consistent with more than a century of research on teaching and learning.

Active and reflective nature of learning and learner, as it pertains to the learner and the

learning process, is emphasized in the 14 psychological principles. The principles "focus

on psychological factors that are primarily internal to and under the control of the learner

rather than conditional habits or physiological factors" but at the same time

"acknowledge external environment or contextual factors that interact with these internal

factors" (APA, 1997).

American Psychological Association developed these principles as a framework

for new educational approaches, such as online learning, that stress the integration of the

needs, skills, interests, and backgrounds of learners for curriculum planning and

development (Chou, 2001). The 14 learner-centered principles are divided into four

categories of factors influencing learners and learning: (a) cognitive and metacognitive;

(b) motivational and affective; (c) developmental and social and; (d) individual

difference. Cognitive and metacognitive factors include the nature of the learning

process, goals of the learning process, construction of knowledge, strategic thinking,

thinking about thinking, and context of learning. Motivational and affective factors

include motivational and emotional influences on learning, intrinsic motivation to learn,

and effects of motivation on effort. Developmental and social factors include

developmental influences on learning and social influences on learning. Individual

differences factors include individual differences in learning, learning and diversity, and

standards and assessment. According to Chou (2001), blending learner-centered

principles into the design of online learning environments enhances opportunities for improving learning activities by recognizing the value of empowering learners to take control of their learning and considering learners' backgrounds and prior knowledge.

<div align="center">Important Roles in Online Learning Communities</div>

It is important to recognize that the presence of online learning communities do not simply emerge on their own. They are established and evolve because of a conscious effort in instructional design and development, facilitation and guidance, and active and creative engagement from the learners. The four cornerstones on an online learning community, communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation that Lock (2002) identified are evident from the actions displayed by the members of the community. Each member of an online learning community has an important role to contribute for the evolution and success of the learning.

Role of Instructional Design

Learner success in an online learning environment places an emphasis on the importance of the role of instructional design. The online learning environment interface is the learners' sole connection to course materials, instructors, and other learners. Additionally, the instructional design of online learning environments that incorporate constructivist theory and learner-centered principles poses the challenge of determining the right balance of structure to engage learners and at the same time promotes construction of knowledge.

A number of researchers have explored the instructional design needs of online learning environments. Some similarities exist in their frameworks, but essentially most

align with elements from the theoretical constructs of constructivism and learner-centered principles. Cifuentes, Murphy, Segur, and Kodali (1997) suggest that collaboration, relevance, learner control, and technological preparation are four instructional design considerations used to design learning environments that are authentic, situated, interactive, project oriented, interdisciplinary, learner-centered, while at the same time taking into account various learning styles. Consistency in course design, interaction, and active discussion are the three factors that Swan, Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, and Pelz (2000) have found present in the design of successful online learning environments.

According to Moore (2004), the basic principle in designing a constructivist learning environment is to establish minimum structure that will allow for maximum degree of dialogue between the learners. This begs the question, how much structure is the right amount of structure? Gustafson and Gibbs (2000) suggest that the amount of structure varies with different learners, and also emphasizes that structure does not equate to instructor control. It is understandable that highly motivated learners or learners that have background in the content of the course will not need as much structure but some learners will need more structure to help guide them. Conrad (2002) found that learners are seeking clarity and comprehensiveness of instruction to lessen anxiety present when beginning a new course. The goal then is to provide clear and visible guidance in an online learning environment that will allow learners to know what to expect, what to do to meet the learning requirements, and the schedule of learning activities. Several researchers suggest organizing content in a modular design (Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000; Swan et al., 2000; Tilson, Strickland, DeMarco, & Gibson, 2001). Swan et al. (2000)

implied that consistency in course design, one of the three factors previously noted as factors of successful online learning environments, also implies consistency in design at the module level.

Instructor Roles

Mason (1991) identified three roles that instructor's carry out in instructional settings. Instructors perform intellectual, social, and organizational tasks. In the intellectual role, the instructor formulates questions and probes for participant responses, while at the same time completing social responsibilities by creating a friendly environment where learning is promoted. The organizational role of an instructor involves setting the agenda for the discussion and managing ongoing interactions among the participants.

Berge (1995) identified a similar framework of instructor roles: managerial, pedagogical, social, and technical. Berge's managerial role parallels the organizational role identified by Mason and Berge's pedagogical role and is described the same as Mason's intellectual role. Berge (1995) added the technical role in which an instructor makes learners comfortable with the system and software of the online learning environment. In terms of the technical role, Berge (1995) emphasized that although it is an important role, the use of technology is secondary to a well-designed online learning environment. The following subsections will discuss each of the four instructor roles.

Intellectual/pedagogical role. Mason (1991) suggested the intellectual role as the most important role of the online instructor. Liu, Bonk, Magjuka, Lee, and Su (2005) conducted a study to explore the instructors' perception regarding the four dimensions of

instructor roles and found that overall instructors most strongly emphasized the

pedagogical role. Liu et al. (2005) further determined that "pedagogical roles can be

categorized into four areas: course designer, profession-inspirer, feedback-giver, and

interaction facilitator" (p. 34).

One of the most important aspects of the intellectual/pedagogical role of an

instructor in an online learning environment is formulating questions that probe for

learner responses in a discussion-oriented collaborative learning environment. One of the

two key principles for creating effective discussion-oriented online learning

environments is to design the discussion ahead of time (Eisley, 1992).

"Conversation is an essential part of the meaning-making process because

knowledge, for most of us, is language mediated" (Jonassen et al., 1998). We cannot

assume learners know how to converse constructively in an online discussion. Learners

need guidelines and to be taught netiquette skills for participation. Discussion questions

also need to be clearly stated and guidelines such as expected length and depth of

responses need to be articulated. Dennen (2001) proposes the design of discussion

prompts to initiate discussion. The premise behind discussion prompts is to involve more

collaborative activities with intentional use of constructivist learner-centered design

principles. There are two key components of the discussion prompt. The first is the topic

or issue, to be discussed, and the second is the guidelines that define how the topic should

be discussed.

According to Berge and Muilenburg (2000), there is more importance on the

instructor asking the right question than giving the right answer and the right questions

are those that foster learner engagement in the learning process. Asking learners to simply discuss the reading is too generic and questions asking learners to recall facts and both will result in poor responses from the learners. A discussion question needs to provide adequate guidance and allow each learner the opportunity to respond with a unique contribution. This said, it is important to expect and value multiple perspectives. Berge and Muilenburg (2000) stated that it is important to "consider the divergent directions that questions might take the discussion and possible learner responses to each question" (p. 53). Diverse responses can be expected when more diverse the group of learners or when more complex and divergent the question.

Social role. Instructors need to ensure a safe and socially welcoming environment for the learners. The social role of the instructor is important and one of the best ways to facilitate this is to model effective teaching and learning by accepting the responsibility of keeping the discussion on track and maintaining group harmony (Berge, 1995). Instructors should avoid expressions that may appear threatening, discouraging or disrespectful as they model interaction characteristics implicit in a safe social communal space. Berge and Muilenburg (2000) suggested an important social role for the instructor at the beginning of a course is a private e-mail message to each learner to welcome them the online learning environment. Establishing a welcoming, friendly online environment is crucial to the development of a knowledge-building community.

Organizational/managerial role. Managing the discussion in process is the second key principle for creating effective discussion-oriented online learning environments (Eisley, 1992). The organizational/managerial role of the instructor comes into play to

ensure success interactions are facilitated and monitored. Hobbs (2002) found that when the instructor is more actively engaged in the discussion this increased the interaction between the learners and the instructor and increased the learners' perception of the learning. However, the instructor needs to maintain a balance between too much participation and too little participation. Dennen (2001) contends that overt instructor participation may lead to successful experiences in some instances, but "it is not uncommon, to hear the war stories of instructors who despite repeated attempts could not achieve as deep of a discussion as they do in a traditional classroom, or who spent an entire semester living and breathing at the computer in order to keep a discussion going" (p. 1). Moore (2004) advised instructors to restrain themselves from jumping in too often as learners quickly discover when the instructor is driving the discussion and this inhibits their taking ownership of the discussion thus defeating a constructivist learner-centered design. Berge and Muilenburg (2000) suggest that if things are going well, do not interfere to ensure that learners don't perceive the instructor's long, well-articulated post as the final word and thus ending their participation in the discussion. An important distinction to make is the summary post that an instructor makes to signify the end of the discussion. It is typically the instructor's role to post a summarization of the discussion to move the learners on to the next topic of discussion.

Technical role. Good interface design can minimize the technological barriers to online learning. The technical role of the instructor is important as well. The technical interface is the learners' sole connection to course materials, instructors, and other learners so it is important that the instructor select appropriate technologies and is

available and able to support the learner-interface interactions. The learners must be empowered with the necessary skills to use the tools and feel comfortable in the learning environment. If the learner is unskilled with interacting with the technologically mediated medium, then time is lost for learning by a majority of the learner's mental resources going to understanding the interface. The instructor can include learning activities at the beginning of a class that put the learners at ease with the technology to help them become comfortable with the interface (Hillman et al., 1994).

Learner Roles

Online learning communities depend on responsible, autonomous, motivated learners and must be willing to change and grow according to the goals and activities of the online learning community. Key elements such as honesty, responsiveness, respect, openness, and empowerment are characteristics of successful learners (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Additionally learners need to expend effort to remain engaged and connected to the online learning community.

However, one cannot assume that learners will know or understand their role. Clear expectations concerning the quality and quantity of participation must be stated to ensure learners engage with each other in the learning process. As stated earlier, Dennen's (2001) suggestion for the use of discussion prompts designs online courses which motivate students to be more independent and actively engaged in discussion activities and to construct knowledge. In short, the design of the discussion activities using discussion prompts, as opposed to the instructor's participation during the discussion, redirects the responsibility for carrying on discussion to the learners.

The topic of discussion in an online class typically is based on a set of readings not unlike discussion in a traditional face-to-face course. The difference is that in an online environment the issue needs to be adequately developed and defined. If the topic is too generic, such as simply discussing the readings, the students lack a sense of focus and direction. In a similar sense, if the question is too specific, such as a fact-based question, then only one right answer is necessary, thus "once one student has given the correct response there is little incentive for others to participate" (Dennen, 2001, p. 123). The goal in mind is that the topic and the prompt need to allow each student to have a unique contribution. This process is in agreement with key course design elements Sherry, Billig, and Tavalin (2000) found as success factors for online conversations. Their study suggests good design includes having a goal for each conversation and creating and publishing guidelines for online conversations.

In defining guidelines for the discussion prompt lies the challenge to ensure that students read each other's work and ask them to respond to each other, i.e., engage in discussion. This is a requirement that can be designed in the discussion prompt itself (Dennen, 2001). Again, though similar to the design of the initial question, the students need guidance to frame their responses to simply reflect and reply to x number of student's responses does not clearly describe the instructional intent of the discussion nor does it provide adequate guidance.

Another challenge that can be accommodated via the discussion guidelines is to ensure the timeliness of students' participation. Dennen (2000) suggested the use of incremental deadlines for group collaboration. Deadlines help students manage their time

and seem to "foster a greater sense of within-group and self-responsibility" (Dennen, 2000, p. 333). Additionally, Dennen (2001) recognized that "a fair number of students are likely to complete their work in a deadline-driven manner" (p. 124) and suggests that deadlines should accompany each stage of the discussion. Additional guidelines such as expected length and depth of response required may also be necessary.

Without diminishing the importance of the instructor's role to facilitate discussion, as individual learners begin to take leadership responsibilities, learners may be assigned roles to lead discussions (Tagg, 1994). According to a study Poole (2000) conducted, it was found that learners' sense of community increased when all learners were given responsibility to moderate or lead discussions.

Literature on Disruptive Student Behaviors in Online Learning Communities

In the literature, only two studies were found that were research based and studied disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities. Both were quantitative studies. Beaudin's (1999) study determined some techniques that instructors recommend and use to keep students discussions on topic and Taylor (2002) looked at participation patterns of online students and quantified the interactions with the course materials and the communication with others in the discussion based online course. Tobin (2001) and Ko and Rosen (2010) each provide references to disruptive student behaviors based on situations observed or heard about as opposed to based on a formal methods of inquiry. In this section, I will briefly share this literature here.

Keeping students on-topic to minimize the problem of losing track of the interactions in asynchronous threaded discussion was the issue that motivated Beaudin's

(1999) study. The purpose of the study was to identify techniques that instructors both recommend and employ to keep learners on topic during discussions. A 37 item online questionnaire was completed by 135 online instructors who were subscribed to an international distance education listserv. Thirteen techniques used for keeping students on topic were identified. Using a 6-point Likert scale, 13 of the items on the questionnaire asked the instructors to rate the techniques they recommend for keeping students on topic. Thirteen additional questions asked the instructors to rate which techniques they use for keeping online learners on topic while teaching. The final 11 items on the questionnaire collected information related to the instructor's background and work environment characteristics. The same four techniques ranked as the top techniques as recommendations and uses for keeping discussions on topic. In other words, the techniques that instructors recommend were the same techniques that they used. The results of this study suggested the following as the top four techniques for keeping learners on topic: "carefully designing good questions, providing guidelines for learners to use when preparing their responses, rewording the question when discussions go off topic, and by providing discussion summaries" (Beaudin, 1999, p. 51). As noted in Chapter 1 and above, this quantitative study did not specifically view off-topic discussions as a disruptive student behavior, but viewed it as a problem of losing track of the interactions in asynchronous threaded discussion. Additionally, it did not explore the impact that off-topic discussions had on the learning community.

The case study that Taylor (2002) conducted analyzed participation in an online discussion based course by examining the number of times individuals accessed the tool.

The course FET8601 was designed to be interactive in terms of content and electronic references linked within it and the asynchronous interactions with other students were encouraged and in some instances required. A reflective nature to the discussion processes was intended as opposed to face-to-face oral discussion, which Taylor believed to be more spontaneous in and less structured. In a general overview of the statistics of the course, Taylor reported that interaction with the course materials constituted 25% of the interaction while 75% of the interaction in the course was interaction between the members of the course.

Three types of participation patterns were identified. The proactive participation group ("The Workers") contained 14 students. The worker contributed above average number of postings to the discussion and visited the course regularly. The peripheral participation group ("The Lurkers") included 17 students who contributed less than the average number of postings to the discussions, but participated in "read only" mode on a regular basis. The parsimonious participation group ("The Shirkers"), a group of 12 students, contributed only one third of the average number of postings to the discussions and visited the course site less than 50% of the group average. In terms of academic performance, the workers and lurkers performed fairly similarly, which suggested to Taylor an efficacy in learning through peripheral participation can occur. Seven of the 12 shirkers did not complete the course, and of the five that did complete the course only four achieved a passing grade.

Tobin (2001) wrote an essay which he claimed was supported by survey research, individual interviews, institutional policy, and solicited testimonials from many

institutions across the United States. Tobin identified types of disruptive students in his essay and made suggestions for faculty responses to the behaviors. Some of the behaviors that Tobin identified included students who are the silent student in face-to-face classes; when they encounter an online class they either clam up all together or they finally uncork. Students sharing too much personal information were exhibiting a behavior that was inappropriate for the online classroom. Messages posted with mild profanities, overtly racial remarks and inclusion of personal information about one's sex life or status of relationships were examples of inappropriate and sharing more information than is socially acceptable, or sharing information that is offensive or embarrassing. Students that complain that they turned in work that never seems to reach the instructor on time or never reach the instructor at all was another behavior identified.

In Ko and Rosen's (2010) text they describe composite examples of four different types of disruptive behaviors of student. Their composites are based on real situations that they have either observed or have described to them by others. The composite examples included: the know-it-all, the mutineer, the belligerent student who hasn't kept up and the belligerent student on the attack. For each of these examples suggestions were provided on how an instructor may manage these behaviors.

The "know-it-all" student Ko and Rosen (2010) named Janet. Janet, about midway through the course, began to answer questions that were addressed to the instructor in the asynchronous discussions. The instructor at first felt this was fine, given that Janet had some real-world experience with the topic. However, soon Janet was contradicting the instructor's information sharing a link to her website and suggesting

students use it as their guide. The instructor reinserted her authority and focused the student by addressing the class publically in the discussion space asserting that there may be disagreements by scholars but the principle posted by her was sound and it was what the students were to use in the course.

The mutineer student Ko and Rosen (2010) named Jerry. Jerry, like Janet, knew quite a bit about the subject being discussed and because he didn't think the professor's approach was interesting, he began to address the instructor in a condescending and critical manner in class discussions. After Jerry posted a public presentation, the instructor posted brief comments which Jerry complained about publically as not being constructive and then also sent a private message to the instructor that suggested the instructor was teaching poorly. Ko and Rosen provided an example of what the instructor should not do to handle this situation, to emphasize the importance of knowing when to address something on a public level and when to address an issue privately. The instructor in this scenario didn't help matters, because instead of responding to Jerry's private message, in her anger she posted publically to the class. This action resulted in other students rallying in mutiny behind Jerry and agreeing with him that she was not teaching well.

Andy was the belligerent student who hadn't kept up in participating in his online class (Ko & Rosen, 2010). His emotion was exhibited in angry messages that he posted, complaining that he did not understand the assignments. This type of behavior was managed by addressing the public comments with clear explanations of how to go forward without addressing the emotion in the student's remarks. The instructor was then

advised to follow-up with a private message to Andy recognizing his frustration and acknowledging that he is responsible for catching up.

The belligerent student on the attack was Tom, who attacked another student during a heated debate in the discussions calling the student a right-wing bigot. In this example, Ko and Rosen expressed the need for alerting and turning over a behavior issue to the department head. First though, the instructor posted a general statement reminding students of the code of conduct without specifically addressing Tom and then the instructor privately sent Tom a message asking him to apologize to the student as well as suggesting he delete the offending post. Tom reacted to this publically attacking the professor stating that he had the right to state whatever he wanted. The instructor at this point let Tom know that the department head had been informed and advised him to refrain from any more personal comments.

Ko and Rosen provided interesting scenarios and management techniques that an instructor might employ but did not discuss the impact that these types of behaviors have on the learning community or share specific design considerations to prevent disruptive student behaviors.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Distance education in the United States has used network computers for online learning since 1980's and the technologies used to support online learning have progressed in a series of evolutionary stages with each progression impacting the accessibility and pedagogy of online learning. Asynchronous distance learning technologies most common in the form of electronic mail messages and threaded

discussions spaces were later complimented with synchronous technologies such as real time chat features and videoconferencing technologies. Later yet, course management systems simplified the online learner interface and resolved the complexity of building an online classroom.

Researchers analyzed computer conferencing technologies from the beginning to determine its effectiveness. Research concerning accessibility of computer conferencing, the impact of computer conferencing on students' attitudes, and the effects of computer conferencing on society were the focus of early studies. Also studies assessed participation patterns and participant satisfaction and the quality of the student participation. The question of how interactive online "classroom" discussions are, as well as, how course design and instructor questioning strategies influence on-line interactions have been researched.

An online learning community's creation and evolution is based on how well the design and facilitation adheres to the theoretical frameworks of constructivist theory and learner-centered principles (Harasim et al., 1995). Given this premise, studies evaluating the actual learning that takes place have emerged. According to Lock (2002), the goal for a knowledge-community to emerge requires activities based on facets of communication, collaboration, interaction and participation. Facets of these four cornerstones appear in the review of the literature on learning communities from a variety of researchers and experts.

Online learning communities are established and evolve because of a conscious effort in instructional design and development, facilitation and guidance, and active and

creative engagement from the learners. The four cornerstones in an online learning community are evident from the actions displayed by the members of the community. Each member of an online learning community has an important role to contribute for the evolution and success of the learning.

A number of researchers have explored the role of instructional design in making the environment successful. Clear expectations concerning the quality and quantity of participation must be stated to ensure learners engage with each other in the learning process. The role of the instructor is critical, and Mason (1991) and Berge (1995) identified four key tasks that instructors perform to successfully facilitate a learning situation. In the intellectual role, the instructor formulates questions and probes for participant responses while at the same time completing social responsibilities by creating a friendly learning environment. Organizationally, the instructor performs the task of setting the agenda for the discussion and managing ongoing interactions among the participants while at the same time making learners comfortable with the technical aspects of the online learning environment.

Online learning communities depend on responsible, autonomous, motivated learners who must be willing to change and grow according to the goals and activities of the online learning community. Students are expected to engage in the discussion by reading and responding to each in a timely fashion. In short, learners need to expend effort to remain engaged and connected to the online learning community.

In closing, very little has been shared in the current research literature on what happens to the online learning community when disruptive student behaviors occur. I

discussed Beaudin's (1999) quantitative research study that determined techniques that instructors recommend and use to keep students discussions on topic and Taylor's (2002) case study on participation patterns of online students. Additionally, references to disruptive student behaviors based on situations observed or heard about, as opposed to formal methods of inquiry, were found in the literature from Tobin (2001) and Ko and Rosen (2010).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was fourfold. First, it defined the behaviors of disruptive students in the online learning environment. Second it addressed the perceptions held by online instructors related to the effect disruptive students have on the online learning community. Third, it explored how online instructors adjust their teaching strategies to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors. Fourth, it investigated how online instructors modify their course design to prevent disruptive online behavior. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?

2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?

3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?

4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

This chapter describes the basic interpretive qualitative study design that was used in the research design to shape this study. This includes the participant selection criteria, the faculty survey, the interview process and data collection, and the data analysis and interpretation. Features of qualitative interpretive inquiry and how this methodology

provided a philosophical framework to support this study is addressed second. Credibility of the study is discussed next to demonstrate aspects of trustworthiness in my data and the conduct of my study. I conclude this chapter identifying the strengths and limitations of this study.

Research Design

The design of this study followed a basic interpretive study. According to Merriam (2002), in a basic interpretive qualitative study the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation with the meaning mediated through the researcher as the instrument. The strategy is inductive and the outcome is descriptive. As I sought to discover how disruptive student behaviors impact the online learning community and what facilitation and design methods online instructors use to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors, my purpose was realized by first determining a criteria for survey participant selection and then conducting the faculty survey to select participants. The results of the faculty survey, not only helped identify participants to interview, but also became a one of the data collection methods which were then further enhanced with in-person interviews. While gathering data, simultaneous data analysis and interpretation occurred. In the following sections, I explain the survey participant selection process, the interview participant selection process, the interview process of data collection, and data analysis and interpretation process.

Survey Participation Selection Process

Criteria for survey participant selection were that they (a) designed their online

courses with a high degree of importance placed building a learning community, (b)

designed their online courses with a high degree of importance placed on student-to-

student interaction, and (c) have observed disruptive student behaviors in their online

courses. The selection of survey participants for this study was facilitated through the

process of issuing a faculty survey to faculty teaching online courses. The first step in

this process was to identify individuals at institutions with large numbers of online

courses and ask these individuals to provide names of faculty teaching who may fit the

survey participant selection criteria. One individual was identified by the chair of my

committee and one individual I identified myself. The individual identified by the chair

was a consultant for a Midwest public comprehensive university that offers a number of

full online professional development graduate degree programs for educators. The

individual I identified was an executive director for a Mid-Atlantic community college

with a large number of online courses serving undergraduate students. Both of these

individuals had responsibility of supervising and overseeing programs that involved

online courses at their institutions.

In the second step of my selection process, I contacted via email the two

individuals noted above. I explained in the email that I was a doctoral candidate working

on my dissertation study and that my study focused on disruptive student behaviors in

online courses. I explained the purpose of my message was to ask for help in identifying

faculty who meet the criteria of my study. I explained that from the nominations

provided, I would send a brief survey. The purpose of the brief survey would help me identify three to five faculty to visit for interviews. I shared my four research questions and concluded with a statement asking for nominations of faculty who are teaching or have taught online classes who may meet the criteria of my study. Seven names and email addresses were provided by the consultant from the Midwest public comprehensive university and five names and email addresses were provided by the executive director from the Mid-Atlantic community college (see Appendix A Consultant Email).

The names of the faculty nominated comprised a homogenous sample. In the third step, I sent an email message to each of the 12 identified faculty inviting each to complete the faculty survey. I explained in the email that I was a doctoral candidate working on my dissertation and that my study focused on disruptive student behaviors in online courses. I shared my four research questions and explained that the purpose of the faculty survey was to determine the level to which the design of their online class met the framework of my study. I noted that specifically that I was seeking faculty whose online courses involved discussion-based student interaction where disruptive student behaviors have occurred.

I further explained my interview selection process and stated that after receiving and evaluating the survey responses, I may be in contact for further participation in my study. I stated that further participation would involve one to two face-to-face interviews (60 minutes each) and two to three follow-up phone calls as needed.

I assured the faculty the measures of confidentiality in my process. Specifically I explained that names and contact information collected on the faculty survey responses

were only for the purpose of conducting follow-up interviews for those selected and that completing my survey implied his/her consent to participate in my study. The faculty survey was provided as a link in Survey Monkey which housed the survey. The letter of consent was included as part of the survey completion process. (See Appendix B Faculty Survey, Appendix C Recruitment Email, and Appendix D Informed Consent for Survey.)

The faculty survey (Appendix B) requested demographic information and included three questions. The first question asked about the degree in which building a learning community was important to the design of their online course(s). This was followed by a question that asked to what degree was student-to-student interaction important in their online course(s). The primary reason for these two open-ended questions was to determine if the faculty designed and facilitated their courses based on constructivist learner-centered principles.

For the third question, I adapted a survey from Johnston (1996). Johnston studied group behavior of individual faculty members. In her study, she designed a survey utilizing the group roles that appear in group dynamics theory as identified by Benne and Sheats (1948). Benne and Sheats classified group member roles into three broad categories. The first, task roles, included behaviors that relate to accomplishing the task within a group. The second, group-building and maintenance roles, included behaviors that relate toward enhancing or maintaining the group's way of working and strengthen, regulate, and perpetuated the group. The third, individual roles, included behaviors that are directed toward satisfaction of a personal need of an individual rather than towards meeting group goals. The list of statements that I adapted from Johnston (1996) for

question 3 was a list of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in individual roles. The text of question 3 from the survey is copied here, however it should be noted that I have added the numbers in the left column to help in the narrative in Chapter 4:

Which of the following disruptive student behaviors have you observed in your online teaching? Check all that apply.

	A student ...
1	... demeans other students.
2	... expresses disapproval of values, acts, or feelings of other students.
3	... attacks other students or the topic being discussed.
4	... displays distracting behavior by calling attention to self (e.g., boasting, reporting personal achievements, or responding in unusual manner).
5	... displays distracting behavior by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to class activities (e.g., elicits sympathy through sharing personal problems).
6	... lacks participation in class activities.
7	... exerts authority or manipulates other students.
8	... exhibits other disruptive behaviors.

The final box in the table "... exhibits other disruptive behaviors" was followed by a text box that allowed the participants to provide examples of other behaviors. The results of the faculty survey provided a means for selecting the interviewees as well as provided me with insight on the types of disruptive student behaviors faculty were experiencing in their online courses. Eight of the 12 that I sent an email invitation completed the faculty survey.

Interview Participant Selection Process

To begin the interview selection process, I analyzed the results of the eight surveys to determine if they met my criteria. Namely, did he/she (a) design his/her online

courses with a high degree of importance placed building a learning community, (b)

design his/her online courses with a high degree of importance placed on student-to-

student interaction, and (c) observe disruptive student behaviors in online courses. While

analyzing the results of the surveys, I determined that all eight of the respondents met the

criteria of my study and warranted inclusion in the interview process. My research plan

was to interview three to five faculty. The final determination for selection looked at the

geographic locations of each of the survey respondents and determined best method to

select meet three to five faculty to interview to meet my study plan. The eight faculty

resided in four different states and I chose two states to visit that would allow me to meet

and interview three to five faculty. I selected six faculty to interview. Four of these

individuals were geographically close to each other in a Mid-Atlantic state while two

were geographically close to each other in a Pacific Northwest state. The remaining two

individuals not selected were each in other states. For the selected six faculty members, I

used the telephone and email to communicate with each and made arrangements to travel

and conduct the interviews. The following section describes the interview process.

Interview Process

The interview in my study involved an in person semi-structured interview

approximately 60 minutes long. (See Appendix E Faculty Interview.) All interviews

were conducted face-to-face at a table arranged where the interviewee sat across the table

from me, and I placed a digital audio recorder with an attached microphone on the table

between us. The location of each interview was selected by the interviewee given I used

air travel to meet each of them. The locations consisted of private offices, conference

rooms, and public spaces such as an alcove in the hotel. The interviews lasted approximated 60 minutes each and were conducted over a one week period starting the last week in January and ending the first week February 2011.

I was consistent with each interview in explaining to the interviewee prior to starting the recording, that I would be taking notes during the process and that I would attempt to minimize or hold my verbal exchanges with them until they concluded responding. I explained instead of interjecting affirmative comments, I would use facial expressions and head gestures in response. My reason for this approach was to help simplify the transcription process given that it can be difficult to transcribe what has been recorded if we both spoke at the same time. I also explained that I would begin the recording of the interview by introducing the interviewee stating his/her name, his/her title, the location, and the time of our interview. Finally, I informed them I would signal the conclusion of the recording of the interview by making a statement thanking them for participating in my study.

During each interview and immediately following each interview, fieldnotes were prepared that included notes about emerging issues and analytical comments. These fieldnotes helped track the development of the study and served in a reflective capacity initiating the analysis process. All interviews were transcribed. To protect the identity of the participants during the analysis, unique code names were assigned to each participant.

Though an interview schedule was determined with six interviews, I was only able to complete five due to icy weather which prohibited one of the interviewees from being able to make the interview appointment.

In the following section I briefly introduce each of the interviewees including background information regarding the courses they have taught. Pseudonyms are used throughout. In Chapter 4, each of the interviewees is introduced in more detail and how each met the criteria for interview selection is more fully explained.

Interviewee Brief Introductions

Dr. Deanne Fitzgerald was the first interviewee. She has taught online courses for the Psychology department at a Mid-Atlantic community college and also has served as an adjunct professor for a Mid-Atlantic regional comprehensive public university. She has taught an array of online classes in Psychology including Introduction to Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Sport and Exercise Psychology, Child Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, and Psychology of Aging. Research Methods is another course that she has taught online. Deanne has been teaching online for approximately 15 years.

Ms. Natalie Ingersoll has taught online courses for the past two years as an adjunct professor at a Mid-Atlantic community college and for a Mid-Atlantic regional comprehensive public university. Cultural Anthropology and Introductory Physical Anthropology are the classes she has taught for the community college and Cultural Anthropology for the university.

Ms. Rachel Stuart has taught online professional development workshops for Quality Matters (QM) for the past five years. The workshops she has taught have ranged in duration from two to three weeks and she has taught four different online workshops.

Dr. Karen Livingston has taught online courses for institutions that are geographically located from the Midwest to the West Coast. These institutions include

four different regional comprehensive public universities, one of which offers online

degrees only, and a regional research public university. Most of her classes are taught to

educators earning masters degrees, but some have been to educators not degree seeking,

but working on professional development. Additionally, some of the classes she has

taught have been for students pursuing degrees in instructional technology or online

teaching and learning.

Dr. Jeremy Langdon has taught online courses to the full range of college students

and at a variety of accredited institutions. Methodology and Social Science are the

undergraduate level classes that he has taught at a regional comprehensive research

university in the Pacific Northwest. He has taught master's students in the Teacher

Education program or the Educational Leadership program for a Midwestern

comprehensive public university. Another master's level course he has taught was Using

Technology in Middle School at a Midwestern comprehensive private online only

university. The doctoral level courses he has taught have been for a comprehensive

private Christian university in the Southwestern region of the United States.

Data Collection Methods

A fundamental aspect of qualitative research is that multiple methods of data

collection be used to increase confidence in research findings, to relate them so as to

counteract the threats to validity. The results of the faculty survey provided one form of

data in this study. The interview transcripts provided a second, and the follow-up email

messages provided a third. Initially, the plan was for follow-up phone conversations, but

it was mutually agreed that follow-up email would suffice. In the following sections I will illuminate each of the data collection methods.

Faculty survey results. The Faculty Survey (Appendix B) was utilized to provide a means for selecting the interviewees and it provided me with insight on the types of disruptive student behaviors faculty were experiencing in their online courses. To some extent, it supported my endeavor to study this topic. Had I found that none of the faculty surveyed observed behaviors that they perceived as disruptive, I certainly would have reconsidered this inquiry.

As noted above, the names and email addresses of 12 faculty were provided to me in the nomination phase of my survey participant selection process. Eight of these 12 individuals responded to my faculty survey. Also noted above, the faculty survey consisted of three questions and requested name and phone number. The first question asked, "To what degree is building a learning community important to the design of your online course(s)?" Responses to this open ended question included the presence of the words "important, very important, essential, critical, and crucial." The use of the words "very important" were expressed by four of the eight respondents. The second question asked, "To what degree is student-to-student interaction important in your online course(s)?" The responses to this question referenced "required, a key element, very important, extremely important, essential, critical, and crucial." The primary reason for the first two questions was to determine if the faculty designed and facilitated their courses based on constructivist learner-centered principles. Given the intention and importance of building learning community and the importance of student-to-student

interaction reported in the survey responses, it was clear that all eight faculty did design and facilitate their online classes based on constructivist learner-centered principles and deemed further consideration for inclusion in my study (Berge & Muilenburg, 2000; Gabriel, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). I adapted the statements of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in individual roles which Johnston (1996) used in her survey for the third question in the faculty survey. All eight of the faculty indicated the observance of disruptive behaviors in their online courses. Statements 1-4 and 8 were behaviors observed by five of the respondents and statements 5 and 6 were behaviors observed by seven of the respondents.

Interview transcripts. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe how qualitative researchers can collect and analyze the stories and narratives from the participants of their studies. They emphasized that stories and narratives shared in interviews can be seen as highly structured and formal ways of transmitting information while at the same time being creative artful genres. Interviews in qualitative inquiry can be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured (Newman & Benz, 1998). The structured interview is designed so that the same data is collected from each interviewee in a standardized way, while the unstructured interview has no standardization and is used to identify the different perspectives that interviewees may have depending on their position in regards to what is being studied. Semi-structured interviews, like the structured interview, follow a list of question that directs the interview on a path consistent with the purpose of the study and can be subject to validity checks. Through the use of probes, follow-up questions, and attention to nonverbal cues data collection is enhanced.

As noted earlier, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Additionally, pseudonyms were assigned to the interviewees to protect their identity.

Follow-up email messages. Conversations in follow-up email with the interviewees provided the third type of data collection. Initially this was planned as follow-up phone conversations but email was the preferred method of the interviewees. Follow-up email communication allowed for me to check for clarifications as I was analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

As noted above, the data analysis took place concurrently with the process of data collection. Inductive and deductive processes were used to analyze the interview data. The data was analyzed and coded using the constant comparative method, and tentative categories, themes and patterns were identified for research questions 1 and 4. "Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). The themes or types of behaviors identified in research questions 1 were then used in a deductive method to analyze the data for research questions 2 and 3.

Many techniques and methods are employed by qualitative researchers to find themes in the data, to find connections that are meaningful. Description, analysis, and interpretation are three techniques described by Walcott (1994). Walcott (1994) explained the distinction of these three means in the form of questions. Description asks, what is going on here? Analysis addresses the questions, why is a system not working or how might it work better? Interpretation asks, what does it all mean?

Description involves quoting fieldnotes and interview transcripts in which "rendering an account is to stay as close to the data as originally recorded" (Walcott, 1994, p. 10). This strategy utilizes long excerpts from interview transcripts to let the informants speak for themselves. In this approach descriptive data is treated as fact. In my writing, I followed an analytical framework to organize and present description of my data as a measure of structure on my descriptive accounts. My four research questions represented the analytical framework. Interview transcripts provided direct quotes from the participants about the experiences they had with disruptive behaviors in their online courses.

Analysis, the second technique, expands and extends beyond the descriptive using a systematic way to "identify key factors and relationships among them" (Walcott, 1994, p. 10). As a way to approach analysis, I identified patterned regularities in the data to discuss the relationships between the patterns presented in the data. Initial reactions to each of the interviews and ideas about emerging categories and themes were recorded using fieldnotes as mentioned previously. Efforts to analyze the data from the beginning provided an opportunity to modify interview questions, clarifications from subsequent participants, and to delve deeper into specific areas.

The goal of interpretation, Walcott's (1994) third technique, is to make sense of the data. One strategy suggested is to personalize the interpretation by connecting it with personal experience. This approach was used and I have attempted to make sense of the data in connection to experiences from the faculty I support in my role as an instructional designer.

"There is no absolute rule as to the proper ratio of description to analysis to interpretation" (Walcott, 1994, p. 41). The purpose of the research helps determine the balance of the ratios of which methods to use. Walcott (1994) suggested that dissertation and novice researchers "should err on the side of too much description and too little interpretation" (p. 36).

Data analysis thus was based on both inductive process drawing on the constant comparative methods of Bogdan and Biklen (2007). As themes and categories emerged from research question 1, I turned to a deductive processes drawing from Walcott's (1994) three techniques of description, analysis, and interpretation to deductively approach the data for research questions 2 and 3. I returned to an inductive process for research question 4.

Qualitative Interpretive Inquiry

Eisner (1998) identified six features that make a study qualitative. The first feature is that a qualitative study is field focused, one aspect being, but not limited to, places where humans interact. The online learning community undoubtedly constitutes a place where humans interact. As discussed previously, interaction is one of the four cornerstones of an online learning community (Lock, 2002). Four types of interactions are prevalent in an online learning community (Hillman et al., 1994; Moore, 1989). Learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions specifically address the human interactions in this field of focus. It is through these two types of learner interactions that disruptive student behaviors have been observed or perceived by the instructors and managed by the instructors and consequently emerged in the process of this study.

A second aspect of qualitative studies is the understanding of the researcher, or self, as an instrument. "The self is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it" (Eisner, 1998, p. 34). As I interacted with the interviewees and interpreted their stories, it involved providing individual insight on my part into the situation being studied. In my position as an instructional developer of online learning communities from conversations with faculty whom I work with over the past 13 years, I have been made aware of instances that have occurred in online courses where students have exhibited behaviors that do not contribute positively to the evolution and success of learning in the community. Thus I entered into this research with some assumptions regarding the types of disruptive student behaviors that I felt would emerge in the interviews. In other words, as an inquirer, I brought certain assumptions and experiences that cannot be set aside. I cannot separate myself from that which I am researching or the context in which that research takes place. I was deeply immersed with what I sought to understand.

The third feature of qualitative inquiry is the interpretive characteristic. Eisner (1998) further identifies two features that distinguish qualitative research studies as interpretivist in character. First, an inquirer attempts to account for what they have given an account of, or in other words, the inquirer's interpretation explains what has been shared and how it relates to the research study. Second, interpretivist inquiry is concerned with matters of meanings. Specifically, qualitative researchers are interested in how participants make meaning, assign meaning, or experience meaning within the situation studied. In this study, my use of interpretive narrative describing the

perceptions of the faculty depiction of the types of disruptive behaviors that emerged, how they felt the behaviors impacted the online learning community, how they managed the behaviors, and how they designed their courses to prevent the behaviors depicted this third feature of qualitative inquiry. In other words, with the data from the faculty survey and the follow-up interviews that provided elaboration, I have attempted to describe and explain the experiences of faculty in the online learning community when disruptive student behavior emerged. In addition to explaining their perceptions and relating their stories, I had to make meaning of their stories in order integrate the stories together to categorize and illustrate them as themes and patterns.

The use of expressive language and the presence of voice in text is the fourth characteristic of qualitative studies that Eisner (1998) identifies. This presence of voice and use of expressive language, empathy, is important to helping further human understanding. In this study the use of direct quotes provides a measure of incorporating the voices of the faculty within the text of this manuscript. Additionally, my use of first person singular represents a feature found in qualitative inquiry.

Attention to particulars is the fifth feature of qualitative studies. In qualitative studies the aim is not to arrive at general statements, but to heighten an awareness of the uniqueness of the particular situation, individual event or object of study. Further, Eisner (1998) explains that attention to particulars in reference to generalizations in philosophical circles is the concrete universal which is "regarded as a true rendering of universal features through exemplification" (p. 203). By providing distinctive and particular examples to explain the types of student behaviors, the impact these students

have on the learning community, how the instructor has managed the behavior, and how the instructor has changed his/her course design to prevent these behaviors, a general theme emerged. Thus, particulars exemplify more than they describe directly.

Eisner's (1998) views the sixth and final feature that distinguishes a qualitative study and the criteria for judging the success of a qualitative study is based on "its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility" (p. 39). A qualitative study becomes believable because of these aspects. Believability, with respect to coherence, can be found in the tightness of the argument, or in other words, whether one can makes sense of the story, one can see support for the conclusions, and one can see that interpretation was based on multiple sources of data. Believability is also tied to the concept of reading consensus. Consensus is "the condition in which investigators or readers of the work concur that the findings and/or interpretations reported by the investigator are consistent with their own experience or with the evidence presented" (Eisner, 1998, p. 56). In another way, it is persuasion due to an understanding, intuition or insight derived from being able to relate or connect what is studied to one's own experience and previous understandings. Instrumental utility is really the question of usefulness. Eisner (1998) believes that the most important test of any qualitative study is its usefulness. Usefulness of comprehension is one type of usefulness. Do the results of the qualitative study help us understand or comprehend something that was unknown or confusing? Another type of usefulness is anticipation. The ability to anticipate the future from the descriptions and interpretations beyond the information presented is an important outcome of the study.

In summary, I have described features of interpretive qualitative inquiry and explained how this methodology provides a philosophical framework that supports this study. I shared how I believe the online learning community can be considered a valid field of focus given that it is an environment where humans interact. I explained that I recognize that my experiences placed me into the position of entering this inquiry with some assumptions regarding the types of disruptive student behaviors that I felt would emerge. I discussed how my study contains interpretive characteristics in my attempt to describe and explain the experiences with disruptive student behaviors of faculty in the online learning community. Additionally, in my attempt to make meaning of their stories and integrate their stories together to categorize and illustrate as themes and patterns I depicted the interpretive nature of my study. My use of first person narrative and direct quotes from the faculty interviews within this text demonstrate aspects of expressive language and the presence of voice. Attention to particulars is accounted for with my use of examples to explain the types of student behaviors, the impact these students have on the learning community, how the instructor has managed the behavior, and how the instructor has changed his/her course design to prevent these behaviors a general theme emerged. Coherence, insight, and instrumental utility will guide this study and be used as the criteria for judging its success.

Credibility of the Study

Research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge, there is little consensus as to the appropriate criteria for assessing validity and reliability with qualitative inquiry (Merriam, 2002). Still, the question of how the validity and reliability

of qualitative studies should be judged is actively debated within the research community. Glesne (2006) suggests that the scientific values of validity, objectivity and reliability do not apply in the same way in qualitative inquiry as they do for postpositivist or logical empiricists. The findings of an investigation need to be believed or trusted and a means of ensuring rigor in the conduct of the study. According to Merriam (2002), trustworthiness relies on the ethical conduct of research and ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings in qualitative research. Establishing a rapport in the researcher-participant relationship and examining the assumptions one carries into the research process are two starting points for conducting an ethical study (Merriam, 2002). Similarly, Glesne (2006) notes "in qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research—or rapport—and the quality of your self-awareness of the potential effects of self on your research—or subjectivity" (p. 109). This study was conducted with an understanding of the importance of establishing rapport with my research participants and being conscious of my subjectivity. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I made a concerted effort to reflect on my role in the inquiry in light of my experiences, biases, assumptions, and values.

Multiple methods of data collection contribute to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 2006). This study utilized three methods for collection data. The results of the faculty survey provided one, the interview transcripts provided a second, and the follow-up email messages provided a third. The interviews as well as the follow-up email

messages, were used as a form of a member-check. Member check can be conducted throughout the course of the study (Merriam, 2002). During each interview, I provided the individual his/her survey results, discussed their responses with them, and asked them to confirm and elaborate on the disruptive student behaviors they identified in question 3 on the faculty survey. Further follow-up email messages were sent seeking clarifications to a few instances to confirm my findings and interpretations.

<u>Strengths and Limitations</u>

Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task that it may seem at first however, interviewing is one of the most common ways we use to understand fellow human beings (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The intent of interviewing, and one of the strengths of a qualitative study, is to capture the unseen; the perceptions of another person. The approach is directed to understanding phenomena in the fullest possible complexity through elaborative responses that include both affective and cognitive underpinnings of respondents' perceptions (Glesne, 2006). A special strength in interviewing provides an opportunity to learn about things you cannot observe and because of the closeness in researcher-participant interaction in interviewing, opportunities to document voices of many perspectives arises.

While the individual faculty members interviewed had direct experiences with disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities, they may not represent the perspectives of all online faculty. The interviews focused on five faculty who emerged as the key informants in this study. This small number of interviewees may be perceived as a lack of representativeness or a limitation in the study. Also, I was limited in funds and

time to interview all eight of the faculty survey respondents though all met the participant selection criteria. Therefore my study did not include two individuals that met the participant selection criteria. Additionally the voice of the sixth interviewee that I was scheduled to interview was omitted from this study due to complications with weather that prevented the interview from occurring.

Another limitation of this study could be attributed to single-session interviews. I was only able to interview each of the five once and though the interviews provided me with enough data for my purposes, the data could be seen as Glesne (2006) notes "thinner" data than I could have obtained through multiple interviews.

Additionally, this research has not explored the views or perceptions of the students involved in the learning communities in which disruptive student behaviors have emerged and thus it only represents a faculty perspective.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was fourfold. First, it defined the behaviors of disruptive students in the online learning environment. Second it addressed the perceptions held by online instructors related to the effect disruptive students have on the online learning community. Third, it explored how online instructors adjust their teaching strategies to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors. Fourth, it investigated how online instructors modify their course design to prevent disruptive online behavior. Specifically this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?

2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?

3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?

4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

The selection of survey participants for this study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase of my selection two individuals were identified that could potentially provide names of faculty for participation in my study. The individuals had responsibilities for supervising and overseeing programs that involved online courses at

their institutions. In the second phase, I contacted via email the two identified individuals and solicited nominations of names of their faculty who met the criteria of my study. Twelve names and email addresses were provided by these individuals and, as the third phase of my selection, I sent via email a brief survey to these 12 faculty. The purpose of the brief survey was to help me identify and select three to five faculty to visit for interviews. Eight of the 12 completed the faculty survey. The faculty survey (Appendix B) consisted of three questions and also requested name and phone number. The request for name and phone number was necessary for follow-up contact for further participation in my study. The first question asked about the degree in which building a learning community was important to the design of their online course(s). This was followed by a question that asked to what degree is student-to-student interaction important in their online course(s). The primary reason for these two questions was to determine if the faculty designed and facilitated their courses based on constructivist learner-centered principles. For the third question in the faculty survey, I adapted the statements of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in individual roles which Johnston (1996) used in her survey. This list included behaviors that are directed toward satisfaction of a personal need of an individual rather than towards meeting group goals. The results of question 3 provided me with insight on the types of disruptive student behaviors faculty were experiencing in their online courses.

I analyzed the results of the eight surveys and selected six faculty members that I would interview. I phoned each and made arrangements to travel and conduct the

interviews. As it turned out, I only interviewed five of the six due to icy weather which prohibited one of the interviewees from being able to make the interview appointment.

The interviews in my study were in person semi-structured interviews each lasting approximately 60 minutes. (See Appendix E Faculty Interview.) They were conducted over a one week period starting in January and ending in February 2011. During each interview and immediately following each interview, fieldnotes were prepared that included notes about emerging issues and analytical comments. All interviews were transcribed. To protect the identity of the participants during the analysis, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and are used throughout this narrative.

Conversations in follow-up email allowed me to check for clarifications as I was analyzing the data.

In this chapter, I report the findings of my study in two major sections. In the first major section, I begin with a brief report of the information gleaned from the faculty survey. Then I provide an overview of the analysis and explain how my four research questions and a modified version of the categories of question 3 from the faculty survey guided the narrative of the analysis of my data. This is followed with a brief description of the interview process. Next, I introduce each interviewee, including an overview of the online classes he/she has taught. Within each introduction, I explain how the individual's responses to the faculty survey identified to me that the individual met the criteria for inclusion in my study.

The second major section includes an overview of the findings and is further divided into four sections, one for each of my four research questions. The findings in

this section, as I indicated above, are guided by a modified version of categories of disruptive student behaviors provided in the faculty survey. It should be noted that quotations I include in this chapter were drawn verbatim from the faculty surveys and the interview transcripts.

Faculty Survey Results

The purpose of the Faculty Survey (Appendix B) survey was to help me select three to five faculty to interview and it provided me with insight on the types of disruptive student behaviors faculty were experiencing in their online courses. To some extent it supported my endeavor to study this topic. Had I found that none of the faculty surveyed observed behaviors that they perceived as disruptive, I certainly would have reconsidered this inquiry.

As noted above, the names and email addresses of 12 faculty were provided to me in the nomination phase of my survey participant selection process. Eight of these 12 individuals responded to my faculty survey.

The faculty survey consisted of three questions and requested also name and phone number. The first question asked, "To what degree is building a learning community important to the design of your online course(s)?" The responses to this question included reference to important, very important, essential, critical, and crucial. Very important was the most predominant response appearing on four of the eight completed faculty surveys. Some of the respondents elaborated more on this question in support of their response. For example, one respondent indicated, "Community is everything in an online course!" and another said, "Without a learning community

students would not be as engaged with the course material and it also increases retention."

The second question asked, "To what degree is student-to-student interaction important in your online course(s)?" This question solicited responses that included the terms: required, a key element, very important, extremely important, essential, critical, and crucial. One respondent didn't include a term that rated the importance, but instead responded, "Student to student interaction is what keeps the course interesting and also keeps the students coming back. Students don't seem to care as much about my opinion as they do about other student's feedback and opinions." This statement is consistent with the fifth reason that Anderson (1999) identified as why learner-learner interaction is important. Anderson found that interaction is a stimulator and motivator to the community.

The primary reason for the first two questions was to determine if the faculty designed and facilitated their courses based on constructivist learner-centered principles. It was clear that all eight faculty did design and facilitate their online classes based on constructivist learner-centered principles given the intention and importance of building learning community and the importance of student-to-student interaction reported in the survey responses, and deemed further consideration for inclusion in my study (Berge & Muilenburg, 2000; Gabriel, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

I adapted the statements of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in individual roles which Johnston (1996) used in her survey for the third question in the faculty survey. With the adaptation, I devised a table of statements

included types of behaviors or roles that group members exhibit when behaving in "individual roles" as defined by Benne and Sheats (1948). As noted previously, this list included behaviors that are directed toward satisfaction of a personal need of an individual rather than towards meeting group goals. The results of question 3 provided me with insight on the types of disruptive student behaviors faculty were experiencing in their online courses.

The text of question 3 from the survey is copied here, however it should be noted that I have added the numbers in the left column to help in the narrative that follows.

Which of the following disruptive student behaviors have you observed in your online teaching? Check all that apply.

	A student ...
1	... demeans other students.
2	... expresses disapproval of values, acts, or feelings of other students.
3	... attacks other students or the topic being discussed.
4	... displays distracting behavior by calling attention to self (e.g., boasting, reporting personal achievements, or responding in unusual manner).
5	... displays distracting behavior by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to class activities (e.g., elicits sympathy through sharing personal problems).
6	... lacks participation in class activities.
7	... exerts authority or manipulates other students.
8	... exhibits other disruptive behaviors.

All of the defined types of behaviors (noted as 1-7 in the table) were indicated as observed by faculty who completed the survey. Specifically, seven of the eight faculty indicated that they have observed students that displayed distracting behaviors by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to class activities, number 5, and seven of the eight faculty also have experienced students that lack participation in class

activities, number 6. Five of the faculty reported observing student behaviors in their online classes related to the behaviors noted as 1 through 4.

The final option in the table "… exhibits other disruptive behaviors" was followed by a text box that allowed the participants to provide examples of other behaviors. Five of the faculty responded to this option. However, several of these responses I felt could be classified as aspects of the other seven types of behaviors in the table. Specifically, one stated she observed "racist statements" and "statements about anti-Americanism," which I felt was really the behavior of attacking other students, number 3. Similarly, the student that attacks the topic being discussed, also part of number 3, was reported in this area stated as "I have experienced students who disrupt the class by calling into question the validity of the course material covered." Another reported that he observed students that "do not work in a group setting or assignment… but claims they have" which I viewed as at type of lack of participation, behavior identified in behavior number 6. Yet another observation that indicates lack of participation is the student that "does not respond to repeated emails or other forms of communication. Response is limited and only when the student wants to respond."

Other disruptive student behaviors that were observed and which I felt were truly others, and not part of the defined behaviors, included students being overly involved to the point of shutting everyone else out of the conversation and students undermining facilitator's authority in the community. Another very telling comment provided in this area suggested a perception of the impact disruptive students have on the faculty. The faculty member shared, "Disruptive behavior ultimately has the effect of causing the

instructor to spend more time on problems than they do instructing which leads to loss of instructor-student time on other tasks."

<div align="center">Analysis of Interviews</div>

As briefly described above and in Chapter 3, data was gathered via a pre-interview faculty survey, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up email messages with faculty teaching online classes. (See Appendix B for the Faculty Survey and see Appendix E for the Interview Questions.) The interview data was analyzed and coded using the constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) as well as a deductive process.

Several interview questions were crafted to relate to each of the four research questions and were used to guide the semi-structured interviews. During the analysis of the first research question, the themes that emerged were very similar to the statements that I provided in question three of the faculty survey. Therefore, I devised categories that are similar to the statements and used these to guide the analysis and narrative of the data for research questions 2 and 3. Here is the list of categories I devised to guide my analysis:

Demeans Other Students
Attacks Other Students
Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic
Lacks Participation in Class Activities
Exerts Authority on Other Students
Other Disruptive Behaviors Observed.

This list of categories was used because not all of the behaviors that were noted as observed on the faculty survey were divulged during the interview process and thus did not emerge as categories and themes in the interview data.

The analysis of research question 4 utilized the constant comparative method and the narrative was arranged based on categories and themes that emerged as the interviewees discussed modifications to their course design from a general perspective as opposed to relating to specific disruptive behaviors that occurred.

The Interview Process

All interviews were conducted face-to-face at a table arranged where the interviewee sat across the table from me, and I placed a digital audio recorder with an attached microphone on the table between us. I relied on the interviewee to identify the location of the interview. I was consistent with each interview in explaining to the interviewee prior to starting the recording, that I would be taking notes during the process and that I would attempt to minimize or hold my verbal exchanges with them until they concluded responding. I explained that I would use facial expressions and head gestures in response instead of interjecting affirmative comments. My reason for this approach was to help simplify the transcription process given that it can be difficult to transcribe what has been recorded if we both spoke at the same time. I also explained that I would begin the recording of the interview by introducing the interviewee stating his/her name, his/her title, the location, and the time of our interview. Finally, I informed them I would signal the conclusion of the recording of the interview by making a statement thanking them for participating in my study.

Interviewee Introductions

As noted in Chapter 3 and above, from the survey responses I ensured that each of the interviewees met the criteria outlined in the framework of my study; specifically it

was important that each designed his/her courses with the intention of establishing an online learning community with a high degree of student-to-student interaction (Berge & Muilenburg, 2000; Gabriel, 2004; Palloff & Pratt, 1999) and that each reported that he/she had observed disruptive student behaviors in online teaching.

Each interview was initiated with a series of introductory questions for the purpose of providing me with background information of each faculty member so that I would better understand the online courses they teach and allow me to introduce each interviewee in this analysis. The first introductory question asked the faculty to tell me about the online classes they taught including the title of the course, the program of study the course was part of, etc. In the second question, I asked them to explain the types of learning activities in their online courses. Specifically then, I asked them to describe how discussion activities fit into the overall design of their online courses. Finally, the last introductory questions asked them to explain how important building a learning community was in the design of their courses. This last question had also been part of the faculty survey, but I felt it important to include in the interview for two reasons. The first was that it provided the interviewee the opportunity to expand upon the statements her/she provided in the faculty survey. The second was that it helped frame the context of the subsequent interview questions. In other words, I wanted them to be thinking in terms of the importance of learning community when responding later in the interview to questions regarding the impact disruptive student behaviors may have on the online learning community.

The following sections introduce each of the faculty sharing a description of his/her courses, an overview of the types of learning activities designed in his/her courses, the role of discussion activities in the overall design, as well as, the importance of building learning community in the course design. Responses to the faculty survey as well as responses to the interview questions were used for this section. The order of introductions follows the order in which the interviews were conducted.

Dr. Deanne Fitzgerald

Course descriptions. Dr. Deanne Fitzgerald has taught online courses for the Psychology department at a Mid-Atlantic community college and served also as an adjunct professor for a Mid-Atlantic regional comprehensive public university. She has taught an array of online classes in Psychology including Introduction to Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Sport and Exercise Psychology, Child Psychology, Adolescent Psychology, and Psychology of Aging. Additionally, she has taught Research Methods as an online course. The number of students in Deanne's online classes ranged from 7 – 25 students, but more typically were closer to the upper limit of 25. Deanne has a wealth of experience teaching online given that she reported she has taught by this method for fifteen years.

Each of Deanne's courses was designed using learning modules. The number of modules varied between 7 and 13 based on the length of the course. Several researchers suggest organizing content in a modular design (Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000; Swan et al., 2000; Tilson et al., 2001). Textbooks accompany her courses, and the chapters in the textbooks are used to construct the learning modules. "By and large I do one module per

chapter and then depending on the length of the course, they may have two modules per week" was her response when I asked for clarification on her course organization. Deanne has also incorporated text-based documents, including an introduction to the chapter topic, and has enhanced the resources provided to the students with PowerPoint presentation files, related videos, podcasts and external web links.

Learning activities. Learning activities in Deanne's courses included discussions, online quizzes and "every class has at least one paper." Some classes required content specific requirements, for example the Abnormal Psychology requirements included a case study, and given that her department at the community college required a final exam in the Introduction to Psychology course, Deanne has administered this to meet departmental requirements. Another learning activity in Deanne's courses was required group work. Deanne's view of the importance of group work is reflected in the following statement:

> In just about every course I do some group work. There are at least 2 or 3 discussion board assignments that are groups because people have to learn how to work in groups online because that is the way the roles of work is going these days. It is a class, if you are in a regular face-to-face class, you are going to be working in a group, and I don't want to hear any whining. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Role of discussions in course design. Deanne responded to the faculty survey question 2, regarding the importance of student-student interaction, by stating, "Interaction is required and account[s] for about 15-20% of the course grade depending on the course." During the interview when I reminded her of her survey response, she noted, "Sometimes the percentage can go up to like 25-30%, it sort of depends on the class." Student-to-student interaction in Deanne's courses occurred in the discussion

board as she has designed both individual and group discussions with her online courses. In each learning module, Deanne has instructed the students to interact with the resources and respond to the discussion board. Student posts to the discussion board need to meet a minimum requirement of 200 words. Additionally the requirements stated students must respond to one other student during the discussion. Deanne values the student-to-student interaction in the design of her courses and supported this with her statement, "But with the online come my activities. Discussion boards sort of take the place of what people do in [a face-to-face] class. That's how I view them, really as class participation."

Importance of building learning community. The intention of building an online learning community was evident in her response to faculty survey question 1. "I think it is important to build community sense whether online or F2F [face-to-face]. I design to courses so that the interaction and group work will help make the course as much like a F2F as possible." This also was evident in the introduction activity she has designed in her courses. Deanne explained during our interview:

> Well, the first thing I do is make them introduce themselves. Well, I don't make them, its two extra credit points, and as we all know students will do anything for extra credit. I also tell them it's going to be their only chance for extra credit, which it is really not, but they don't know what when they are staring the class. I have a list of things they have to include in their introduction. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Further, it is clear that Deanne values and encourages an online learning community given that she reported she responds to every student's introduction post which she felt provided an example of her expectations of the community:

> In the introductions I respond to every student which I am finding out that not everybody does. I had a student this semester say that this is the first time she has ever had an instructor respond to every student in the introduction. In all of the

training that I have done online you teach people that that is how you set the tone. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Berge and Muilenburg (2000) suggested an important social role for the instructor at the beginning of a course is a private e-mail message to each learner to welcome them to the online learning environment.

Ms. Natalie Ingersoll

Course descriptions. Ms. Natalie Ingersoll has taught online courses for the past two years as an adjunct professor at a Mid-Atlantic community college as well as for a Mid-Atlantic regional comprehensive public university. She has taught Cultural Anthropology and Introductory Physical Anthropology for the community college and Cultural Anthropology for the university. Typically at both institutions, Natalie reported class sizes as 20 – 25 students.

Learning activities. Natalie's online courses are designed in the same way that Deanne designed hers. She has learning modules guided by a textbook. Included in the learning modules are text-based lectures which Natalie has enriched with interactive materials utilizing a software package called "Soft Chalk." With this software she produced interactive web pages that have enabled her to incorporate crossword puzzles, matching games, flash cards, and pop-up windows to help support instruction on vocabulary terms. Videos and graphic images have been embedded in the learning modules as well.

Role of discussions in course design. Graded discussion boards supported her statement on the faculty survey that student-to-student interaction, question 2, was

"extremely important." She shared in the interview that she viewed graded discussions as

a learning opportunity:

> It is just like in a face-to-face class you know when you start talking about things
> you start thinking about it at a different level, so that is what I am trying to do. In
> the discussions there are certain elements that have they have to cover, they can't
> just write "yeah, me too, or whatever." (N. Ingersoll, personal communication,
> February 1, 2011)

Further, Natalie expressed her concern that if an online class did not involve

student-to-student interaction then it would be a matter of students "just reading and

regurgitating"; she felt online classes needed discussion to counteract "the lack of contact

between the instructor and the students and the students and the students." As she also

stated, "So, I see the discussion in my online classes is kind of trying to incorporate at

least some element into those courses as well."

Importance of building learning community. In Natalie's responses to the faculty

survey, she stated "Very important – a crucial element of my online courses" to the

question 1 regarding the importance of establishing an online learning community and

"Extremely important – so much so it is required and graded" to question 2 asking to

what degree student-to-student interaction was important. These statements clearly

support that she felt it important that she design her courses with the intention of

establishing an online learning community with a high degree of student-to-student

interaction.

During the interview, when I asked her what strategies she used to establish the

online learning community, her response was:

To build the community, basically just the self introduction. I have what I call "Anthropology Café" and that is where they do their introductions and that is where they can talk to each other. It doesn't even have to be on topic, it can be anything really. I tell them if they have a question go ahead and post it there if it is general question, that way everybody can benefit from the answer. I always remind them of course; if it is something personal, don't put it there, email me. But I am always like if you want to talk about something off topic as well, feel free, that's the place I don't mind at all. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Ms. Rachel Stuart

Course descriptions. Ms. Rachel Stuart has taught professional development online workshops for Quality Matters (QM) for the past five years. The online workshops teach the design principles for online courses based on the QM Rubric which is a set of standards used to evaluate the design of online and blended courses. She has taught four different online workshops ranging in duration from two to three weeks. Typically the number of enrolled participants was 20.

Learning activities. During Rachel's interview, she indicated that the structure of the workshops were consistent regardless of duration, "they depend on the discussion boards, but they also have individual activities submitted for grading."

Role of discussions in course design. The design of the discussion board activities in the online QM courses provides the preparation of the individual activities. Rachel felt these were "fundamentally the key to the entire workshop." Through the discussion activity she can see how well the participants have interpreted the information presented and determine how well they are keeping up with the material.

<u>Importance of building learning community.</u> Though Rachel did not design the online workshops (they were designed by QM) she responded that "building a learning community is very important to the design of my online courses."

The workshops are designed with an introduction discussion, but what is different about this than others presented thus far was the focus for the introductions. In the QM workshops, the focus for the introductions was on the level of knowledge the participants have of the QM Rubric. Rachel explained that this approach allowed participants to get to know each other and gain a comfort level with the other participants, not by sharing something personal about themselves, but by discussing their knowledge and experience with QM.

> We always do discussion boards that just have to do with knowledge and experience with QM, and that is usually another place where you will have people who have either no experience sort of gravitate towards each other and start talking about not having any experience, and then you have the people who have a lot of experience. So those are two of the discussions, at least the types of discussions that we put out there just to start to build some connection between them. The intention is that they would build community because what we are really looking for is to have each of the participants engage in the material through the discussion board and working with their colleagues and peers in the online course. (R. Stuart, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Dr. Karen Livingston

<u>Course descriptions.</u> Dr. Karen Livingston has taught online courses for four different regional comprehensive public universities, one of which offers online degrees only, and for a regional research public university. These institutions are geographically located from the Midwest to the West Coast, and she has taught these classes all from the comfort of her home in the Pacific Northwest. Karen's areas of expertise are online teaching in general, designing, online learning, and teaching with technology in the

classroom. Most of her students have been masters degree students, some have been

educators working on professional development, while others have been pursuing degrees

in instructional technology or online teaching and learning. The online courses she has

taught have varied from six weeks to full semester length courses with small classes of 6

– 8 students but also larger classes with maximum enrollments of 20 – 25 students.

Karen's background was unique from the other interviewees in that she had been

a K-12 educator who earned both her master's and doctorate degrees as an online learner.

When I asked her how long she has been involved with online learning as both a student

and teaching, she stated:

> Last June was my 10th anniversary as a graduate of the California State program
> in online teaching and learning and we were the first cohort to complete the
> program, so it was 12 years ago when I began a master's in online teaching and
> learning. At the time I barely knew online learning was out there, I had done
> distance ed. courses, like mailed stuff back courses because I live in a rural area
> and there isn't always a university handy that gives the class that you need for
> whatever certification you are looking for in the state. So, I found distance ed.
> course, but when I found I was resisting doing my masters as a teacher because I
> wasn't going to do it just to do it, but when I found this program that was a
> masters in online teaching and learning, it was so new it was just fascinating to
> me. So, 12 years ago I guess is when I started as a true online learner. (K.
> Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Learning Activities. Karen shared in the faculty survey regarding student-to-

student interaction, "This includes peer review, student collaborative projects, interaction

in the discussion forums and more." During the interview, I asked her to elaborate on

each of these activities in place of asking her to describe the learning activities in her

courses.

Peer review activities stemmed back to her experiences teaching eighth graders.

She said, "when you can get eighth graders to do peer review well and not pick on each

other, take it seriously, give good quality feedback, I knew it could work with adults just as well." She found at first that her students, who were teachers, "tend to want to be really polite to one another" so she had to frame it from the perspective of asking them to ask a colleague from across the hall to review their work and offer feedback. In online classes, she has to tell them what to look for in peer review so that the feedback is helpful. Structuring this activity she felt aided in making it a more meaningful activity. She explained the student-to-student interaction that occurs in this activity:

> We use the discussion forum to post a piece of work and then others can come in and either mark up the piece of work and return it as a document, or they can make the comments on the discussion forum. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Karen has incorporated at least one group project in every online class she has taught. She admitted, "there is often some pullback because people have had bad experiences with collaborative activities." Karen shared that she had an interest to better understand online collaboration and how to facilitate it effectively and this became her dissertation topic. She discovered, in her review of the literature for her dissertation study, that many studies on collaboration and cooperative learning did report how groups were formed but only reported how online groups fail.

> If they asked it, they didn't report it. About half of the studies didn't even say how groups were created. It seemed to me like that seems to be a really big thing when you are talking about the way groups fail, it just seemed to me it was information I really needed to say this is how people are doing it and then they are reporting failure. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Role of discussions in course design. Karen indicated that in her online classes she has provided "a forum, like a student lounge or something" to allow for students to discuss off topic or concluded topic items. This was similar to the space that Natalie's

Anthropology Café created for students to interact as a community. Karen, similar to Deanne, said, "Introductions is one of the discussions where I respond to every single person and I respond in a way that pretty much requires them to respond back so they have that experience of responding back." This strategy supports her statement on the faculty survey for question 2, "Student-to-student interaction is a key element in my course designs."

Karen demonstrated that she values discussions as a form of student-to-student interaction. In most of her online courses, she has graded the discussions at the end of the week, however, at one of the institutions, it was believed that "those conversations should never stop so that the rubric for [institution title] is different." She indicated that in all her courses she provided posting expectations for the students so that the students would understand what is required, "I say you have to respond to at least two, but I also have expectations about not just giving the atta boy sort of response that wastes my time to open it and wastes other student's time to open it."

Importance of building learning community. Karen's responded to question 1 on the faculty survey "Community is everything in an online course! Without the learning community the material becomes just a self-paced tutorial." Specifically, she shared that one of the classes she has taught online included communities in the title. "Collaborative Communities, so I am teaching people how to do that in their own classes. So community is a huge part of what I feel I do." The course had planned ways that help students connect with one another. One strategy she used to ensure success with this aspect was to make contact with the students prior to the start of the class to establish a

relationship and ease any anxiety they may have about learning online; "and it seems to make them more willing to connect with their fellow students."

For the past five years, another strategy Karen has used is to "develop prompts for that introduction that relate in some way to the curriculum we are going to be discussing so that if they have been in online courses before they are not just regurgitating the same introduction of themselves." This was something she learned from being an online learner, where she found herself simply copying and pasting her introductions from previous courses to fulfill the requirement even though the other students and she were part of the cohort and already knew each other. From the instructor perspective, she needed to get to know students who already know each other and this strategy helped her not only get to know her students but gave the students another chance to relax and relieve any anxiety they may have. She explained:

> Those prompts that relate to the curriculum kind of help with that. Usually it is something where they can tell a personal incident or a person story so that they relax a little bit again and we all kind of find something humorous that we can share with one another. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Dr. Jeremy Langdon

Course descriptions. Dr. Jeremy Langdon has taught online courses to the full range of college students and at a variety of accredited institutions. As he shared in his interview, "I guess I teach at all levels in the college levels." The undergraduate course he has taught is Methodology and Social Science at a regional comprehensive research university in the Pacific Northwest. Other courses he has taught at a Midwestern comprehensive public university have been for master's students in the Teacher

Education program or the Educational Leadership program. Another master's level course he has taught was Using Technology in Middle School at a Midwestern comprehensive private online only university. The doctoral level courses he has taught have been for a comprehensive private Christian university in the Southwestern region of the United States. The class sizes he has taught online ranged from as small as 6 – 7 students to as large as 20 – 26 students.

Learning activities. He used collaborative projects such as PowerPoint presentations or web pages as group activities. Also, given that the students have to learn APA students are required to write papers as individual learning activities. He also has used private blogs and discussions in his online courses.

Role of discussions in course design. Discussion was the primary activity he has used to integrate student-to-student interaction in his courses. He said, "I really regard discussion as the key element because that is where they get to know each other, and you can't really have them work together as a group if they don't know each other." Similar to several of the other interviewees, Jeremy has used a structured approach for facilitating discussions. He reflected:

> I want them to understand how to do discussion. I want them to understand how to respond with substance and not just, nice job. And sprinkle throughout the week so they don't just put it all on Sunday night or whenever the ending day is. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Importance of building learning community. Jeremy's faculty survey response for two was extensive. To state it succinctly here, he felt that building a learning community was "very important" in his online courses. Building learning community was a very conscious intended aspect of his online course design. For many of Jeremy's

courses, he has taught to cohorts of students or to students who are in the first class of a newly forming cohort. He has established a "class café" discussion space for students to introduce themselves, and similar to Deanne and Karen's style he has responded to every introduction, though it is not his favorite activity. In his words:

> It is probably the one element that I feel is the most important, but as the instructor, it is probably the most aggravating for me too. (He chuckled as he continued.) I really don't like it because I feel like I am just creating chit chat, and it is a waste of my hands, fingers typing away, but I also realize how valuable that is because I get in touch with every student that way sometimes multiple times because I will always ask them a question. I have noticed by that by doing that I feel that it also encourages them to also start looking at others and responding to them. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Overview of the Findings

This section provides an overview of the findings and is further divided into four sections, one for each of my four research questions. Interview questions were crafted to relate to each of the four research questions and were used to guide the semi-structured interviews. Question 3 on the faculty survey asked survey recipients to identify, from a list of disruptive student behaviors, the behaviors that they have observed in their online courses. Each of the interviewees was provided a copy of his/her survey responses during the interview. The responses were reiterated and elaborated on throughout the interview by the interviewees.

The narrative of the first three research questions are guided by the list of categories that emerged during the analysis of research question 1 which are similar to the categories of statements that were provided in survey question 3. The narrative for the analysis of research question 4 is arranged based on categories and themes that

emerged as the interviewees discussed modifications to their course design from a general perspective as opposed to relating to specific disruptive behaviors that occurred.

<u>Research Question 1: Defining Disruptive Student Behaviors</u>

The purpose of research question 1 was to explore the types of behaviors faculty observed in online classes that were deemed disruptive to help define disruptive student behaviors. As noted in Chapter 2, Tobin (2001) and Ko and Rosen (2010) each provided references to disruptive student behaviors based on situations observed or heard about as opposed to based on a formal methods of inquiry. Several of the behaviors they referenced emerged in the interviews.

As described in detail in Chapter 3 and above, the faculty survey results were used to select the interviewees in this study. During the interview, to aid the interviewees in recalling how they responded to categories and to allow them to elaborate on the responses to question 3 on the survey, I handed each a copy of his/her survey response to review and reference during the interview. The themes or categories that emerged in analyzing the data for this research question included the following: Demeans Other Students, Attacks Other Students, Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic, Lacks Participation in Class Activities, Exerts Authority on Other Students, and Other Disruptive Behaviors Observed. These themes are the framework for the following narrative.

<u>Demeans Other Students</u>

Each of the five interviewees indicated in his/her faculty survey responses observing instances of students demeaning other students. The demeaning comments and

offenses which were shared publically in the discussion spaces of the courses ranged from name calling, making inappropriate comments about another student's profession, to criticizing and questioning the intellect of other students. In Deanne's course, she encountered a student who made reference to the term "redneck" within discussion posts. Jeremy experienced a situation where the students in the course were educators and one student made reference to counselors which struck a nerve with the student in the course whose profession was a school counselor. Though Jeremy could not recall the exact statements, he shared that the gist of the dialogue was that one student posted, "well, I think that sometimes counselors go overboard.... essentially that they [counselors] create more problems. The counselor took offense because it looked like someone was attacking their profession and their job." Karen felt one student demonstrated demeaning behavior to another student in the following remark:

> I have experienced a few people who just out and out would not challenge the ideas, but challenge the person, or even say mean things about the person. I had one student coming from business, he just flat out told the person that he was stupid because they thought xyz and no sane person could think that. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Natalie shared the story that most blatantly depicted a situation of a student demeaning another student that escalated in a very short time. In this situation, there was one female who student had very poor spelling and grammar skills and a male student "basically trying to demonstrate his superiority." As Natalie related it:

> [the male] student called her out on it the second or third discussion into the semester and he was like "I can't understand what you are trying to say, you really need to work on your writing skills." Well then, she got very defensive and was like "well if you think you are so great, what are you doing going to [the name of the university] anyway, maybe you should be going to a different school." (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Attacks Other Students

Attacking other students or the topic being discussed was another one of the faculty survey categories that all the interviewees checked as observed in their online courses. Issues of attacking the topic did not emerge in the interviews, but several of the interviewee's shared stories of students attacking other students. There was a division, however, between the interviewees on whether or not they perceived that this behavior still existed in online courses. Deanne and Jeremy both felt that this was a behavior found earlier on in online courses but now it was not as prevalent. Deanne stated "I found more of these things in the earliest days of our giving online classes because they really did not know how to do it." Jeremy also expressed this as an evolution of the knowledge of students of how to behave in the digital environment.

> I think that as adults now we are used to online learning, we have all been around email for a long time, we know what it is like. So I think maybe that is kind of maybe a natural growth of technology and that maybe we aren't going to see as much of that anymore. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Rachel and Natalie both felt students attacking other students was a disruptive behavior that they have recently observed. Rachel indicated, "I have seen where students have either just right out called someone out based on ethnicity, something inappropriate in that way, or calling someone else a name, just a variety of inappropriate things." Further it was Rachel's belief that perhaps this was a behavior that may be unique to the online environment, "I'd like to say, the things that that same person probably never would have said in the classroom if they were sitting there together." Several situations have occurred in the online classes that Natalie has taught for the university. Many of the

students enrolled in this university have military backgrounds which Natalie attributes as the reason to some of the behavior she has observed. She explained:

> We have a lot of military students at [the name of the university] and I tend to get a lot of culturally biased responses. For example; this past semester I had a student say, All Muslims are extremists, things like that; just very sweeping generalizations about groups of people which I can certainly see that perspective because in a military environment there is kind of a mindset that is reinforced in that way. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Another situation that occurred for Natalie involved a student that had just returned from Iraq and she questioned whether or not his posts that appeared to be inappropriate were intentional or not. In her words:

> I also had a student in my class, who he told the class at the very beginning of the semester that he had just come back from Iraq and he had post-traumatic stress disorder, and then he was the very first person, like the very first post to say all Muslims are extremists. All throughout the semester he would say things, and I could never tell with him if he was trying to instigate or if he was just being himself and he didn't realize what he was saying was inappropriate. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Karen was more neutral on her position of the existence of attacking behavior and stated, "Most people as adult learners, I guess I should say they know better than to just be out and out rude to some people." However, though, due to the text based nature of the online environment she felt that some of the attacking behavior may be associated with lack of experience or netiquette for online communication: "[for] some people it is just not understanding how to communicate in this environment." The lack of verbal cues was discussed by several of the interviewees as well as the level of misinterpretation that they have witnessed in discussions due to the wording that is used. As Deanne relayed, "I will have somebody use a word that or phrase that could be taken the wrong way." Karen expressed a similar concern when she stated:

Occasionally, it is the way people word things that just makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up and I am worried that that is making the other person feel the same way. So it is usually a danger sign I need to watch out for. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

The split in perception of attacking behavior is interesting, and it is possible that the length of time that a person has taught online and the number of modifications that have occurred in the design of his/her course to prevent disruptive student behaviors may explain this discrepancy.

Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic

This category was not provided as a choice in question 3 on the faculty survey, but I felt from the interview responses that I should merge two categories on the faculty survey together to become this category. The original faculty survey categories were "displays distracting behavior by calling attention to self" and "displays distracting behavior by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to the class activities." For both of these categories the faculty responded on the faculty survey that they had observed these student behaviors and related them as distractions by students to move the discussions off course topics. Deanne generalized this in her comment, "Posting stuff that is not at all related to the discussion board." Karen, when she has taught classes on the topic of online teaching and learning expressed a specific concern when students utilized her discussion spaces to vent about other online classes. She expressed it this way, "they will bring up other online courses where this happened or that happened, and that sometimes can get a little touchy, especially if I work at the same institution." Natalie reported that her student with the post traumatic stress disorder "would always

talk about how he drives a Hummer; he likes Bill O'Reilly, but none of this had anything to do with the discussions we were having."

Lacks Participation in Class Activities

Lacks participation in class activities was identified by four of the interviewees on the faculty survey and discussed in all of the interviews. Lack of participation in discussion spaces, lack of participation in group collaborations, and lack of participation due to student being over committed in their lives were the themes that emerged. Rachel's online workshops experienced the most evident lack of participation or late participation. Both of the two week workshops she was teaching at the time of the interview consisted of 20 participants. In one of the workshops she reported, "So we are what, today is Tuesday, we are five days in, and the course is going to end February 10th next week Thursday, and we only have three people who are participating in the discussion board." Further, Rachel had concerns about the quality of the discussion with participation starting so late in the workshop duration:

> The people who waited until the last minute the only thing you have are the required discussion boards, no replies, nothing in the general question board, and it is because they just didn't, they just could only blow through it. I mean the instruction on the board says respond to your colleague, but they are not doing it. (R. Stuart, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Karen experienced a situation where a student was irate in a phone conversation with her because she would not agree to allow him to catch up on a ten week class when he was eight weeks behind. "It was based in part on participation in discussions, and there was a whole list of assignments that were supposed to go to an end of class portfolio." Karen was amazed that the student's "expectation was not only that they

could do that but that I would be willing to grade all of that at the last minute." This is reminiscent of Andy the "belligerent student who hadn't kept up" in Ko and Rosen (2010).

Group collaborative activities were components of Deanne, Karen and Jeremy's online courses. Each of them observed issues of non-participation with the participants of the groups. Deanne stated, "I shuffle the people who aren't working into a group of their own and there is a whole group of slackers who don't do anything and it cuts out on a lot of fussing." As Karen indicated, "If they are in a small group and they are not participating the other members of the group will start telling me they have an issue." Further Jeremy shared, "I will inevitably get someone in the class saying, hey we tried to email Joe, Joe never sends anything back, we don't know what is going on with Joe."

Another common theme that emerged in several of the interviews was the faculty's realization that the students lack of participation in his/her online courses was due to having too many commitments outside of the course work, or better phrased "too much on their plates." Deanne expressed this in her statement, "It is hard to get them to really engage sometimes in some of the discussions I should be doing because they have got so much else going on." Jeremy indicated that he is fairly unsympathetic with a student if the student is not participating due to over commitment in his/her life.

> If it is someone that will tell me "geez, I'm coaching and it the middle of basketball season and I just can't get to this, I'm going to have to get to it Sunday, or I'm just going to have to not get to it this week but I will make up for it next week." If they are that type of excuse then I don't let them get away with it. I just say, you know, you have to drop something. You can't keep continually picking up things. You have to take something off your plate. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Students enrolled in online classes need to be mindful of the commitment required to be an active and engaged participant in the course. One sign of a student that is overly committed in their lives is the student that enrolls late. Karen explained her belief about students that are late to enroll in a course, "if their life is that busy that they couldn't sign up for it on time, they are probably too busy to be doing the class."

Exerts Authority on Other Students

Exerts authority as a disruptive behavior was reported in the interviews as portrayed by students who either felt a need to prove they knew more than the instructor or the other students or by students who had a strong opinion or personality type. The behaviors shared are consistent with the composite "know-all- student" that Ko and Rosen (2010) described. Karen and Deanne both shared experiences with students who behaved as though they knew a great deal about the course materials – at times more than the instructor. As Karen summarized:

> I love to have those people in class, we can learn from them, but occasionally that is where I often get somebody who just feels like they know more than we do and they are going to tell everybody else about it and they are going to tell everyone publically that one of us is wrong which is a touchy thing in any setting. I don't really mind being wrong if I am wrong because I have been wrong and I will be wrong, but publically telling others that you are wrong and the student knows more than the teacher really undermines the authority of the teacher and it is something that really can be a problem. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Deanne felt that she found this behavior more in students who were not earning a degree from her community college but were taking a class to transfer to their home institution. She said:

Visiting university students that think that at the community college we are not a real professor, we are not a real college because I am teaching here I can't possibly know as much as their professors know. I had one student one time say "When I go back to a real college." I said "well this is a real college, it's a real F you are getting." They sometimes assume that we are just high school and we are not rigorous and things of that sort, so it is kind of an attitude of "well I am just here because I have to be here this semester." I'm like, sorry, we're a real school and it's going to be just as rigorous, trust me. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Deanne and Karen also both observed students who felt they knew more than the other students in the class. These students they considered disruptive because they post excessively in their number of posts or in the length of their posts. Deanne said, "Occasionally you get students who want to comment on everybody's posting." Karen shared, "Usually they think what they know is so much more that I know or that anyone else knows, that the need to educate the rest of us and they will post these long, long, long messages."

Rachel and Natalie both said they observed students who attempted to disrupt the discussions in their courses due to strong opinions. In each case, the students had fundamentally opposing opinions to the topic of the discussions to the point of disruption. In Rachel's course, she shared that she would find participants that do "not particularly agree or accept the principles of Quality Matters that they use the discussion board to try to dispel or counter what Quality Matters is about." In Natalie's anthropology course, the topic of evolution was addressed. She lets the students know she is not trying to dismiss their beliefs or change their minds whether or not they believe in evolution. Despite establishing this with the students, "I always tend to get at least one student who starts

interjecting that it is God and evolution is not true and that type of thing." Karen has also

experienced disruption from individuals with strong personalities. She related:

> There is a very strong personality there and usually it is someone who has some
> anger about something, whether that is about the class or online learning may not
> even be relevant. There is someone who is undergoing a lot of stress that may not
> be anger. They are undergoing a lot of stress somewhere in their life and they are
> a very strong personality. So, they have lost track of their manners. (K.
> Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Other Observed Disruptive Behaviors

At the conclusion of question 3 of the faculty survey, I provided an open-ended

category asking the respondents to explain other disruptive behaviors observed. Most of

the responses to this category were addressed during the interviews in responses to

descriptions of disruptive behaviors and the observations shared were classified to fit into

the categories from question 3 as discussed in the previous sections. However, Karen's

faculty survey open response related disruptive behaviors that stemmed from grading

issues as well as disruptions that occurred due to students engaging in mutinous

behaviors, as Karen shared in her survey response, "Contacts other students behind the

scenes to stir up issues and feelings." Ko and Rosen (2010) discussed similar

characteristics in their composite "the mutineer student."

Reference to disruptive student behaviors revolving around grading was

mentioned in all interviews with the exception of Rachel's. Group projects caused the

most anxiety about grades. As Jeremy stated in reference to group projects, "they do

worry about their grade a lot." Karen tried to deemphasize grades in her courses but she

stated, "Grades are a necessary evil, still the institution requires them." She felt students

demanding special treatments for grading exhibited disruptive behavior on one extreme,

and on the other were the students that just had to get a perfect grade and would have

issues over less than perfect scores. She said:

> We were having people, and [supervisor's name] could tell you stories about this
> as well, having people throw absolute fits over a tenth of a point. Where if you
> took something off just to make sure they read the comments, because if they get
> full credit lots of times they won't read the comments but there might have been
> something you really wanted them to pay attention to. So throwing a complete fit
> and making sometimes public to the other students about minor deductions is
> something that is really silly in my opinion. (K. Livingston, personal
> communication, February 3, 2011)

Natalie had one of the most disturbing experiences from a student with a grading

issue. The student had made it clear to Natalie that she was really upset with grades that

she had received. The student also posted off the topic of discussion at the same time

publically that her husband was in law enforcement. One morning Natalie woke up and

noticed that she had missed a call from an unfamiliar phone number in the middle of the

night. She didn't think much about the missed phone call until she arrived at her office

and she found an email message from the student who was upset with her grades. She

explained:

> It was basically like a poem, I interpreted it to be a poem about killing an
> instructor. I was in my e-mail, it was from her e-mail address, but it wasn't like
> Professor Ingersoll from so and so, it was just this poem. (N. Ingersoll, personal
> comrnunication, February 1, 2011)

Karen reported what she referred to as "underground rumble," in which outside of

the course, students communicate by email, phone, or other means about the course or

about the instructor regarding an issue that they are keeping from the instructor. "The

instructor may not know about it until it erupts in their face or they may never know if

they are really checked out." One specific story that Karen shared involved a student

who had shared privately with her that she was experiencing challenges with moving an

elderly parent. Karen commiserated with her as she has elderly parents and knew this

was potentially a part of her own future responsibilities. In Karen's words:

> Throughout a couple of weeks as I would make comments on the work, I would ask about it or mention it, and I was commiserating because I was really feeling like I kind of knew what she was in and where I was headed, and she somewhere along the way got the impression that she was being graded down because she had these personal issues that she was losing points because I was picking on her because she had told me this personal thing and she was telling other students not to tell us if they had some kind of emergency or something because we would count them down for that. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

The problem escalated throughout the duration of the course and later they (Karen

was co-teaching the course) found that another student had experienced a family

emergency, but he was told not to share about it unless he wanted it to affect his grade.

Rachel experienced mutinous behavior in one of her online workshops in which

all the participants were from the same institution. In this particular workshop, the

participants were local to each other but geographically distanced from Rachel. "One

woman felt like this Rubric was about to really restrict their academic freedom and their

abilities to teach the online courses, etc., and she ended up getting a little group together

on her side." Rachel had noticed, people somewhat polarized over how well they

accepted the content and the principles of the content.

Natalie learned of underground rumble in one of her online courses from a

concerned student who felt Natalie ought to be aware that students were chatting in a tool

that did not generate a log and thus she was not aware that it had occurred. Similar to

Karen's student who told other students not to share any personal issues if they didn't

want their grades to be affected, this rumble in Natalie's class started with a student that had not been happy with grading.

> I had a student e-mail me directly, and he said "this chat has been happening with the class and I just thought maybe you should know." I think she had actually also sent out an e-mail to the rest of the class saying that she didn't think I graded fairly, does anybody else think I don't grade fairly. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Research Question 2: Impact of Disruptive Student Behaviors

The purpose of the second research question was to learn if faculty perceived any negative impact resulting from disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community. The disruptive behaviors and specific stories faculty shared in the last section guided a deductive analysis of research question 2. Therefore, the subheadings from the last section have been carried over in this section to arrange this narrative.

Demeans Other Students

Faculty perceived that student behaviors involving demeaning comments publically shared in the discussion spaces of the courses did negatively impact the learning community. Jeremy observed that for the duration of the course "some "antagonism built up between" the student who was the school counselor and the student who posted the remark, "well, I think that sometimes counselors go overboard.... essentially that they [counselors] create more problems." As noted in Chapter 2, the level of civility in the communication is important. Hermann (1998) found that civil language in the form of being positive and friendly are important factors in creating and sustaining a community over time. When the level of civility has been violated, antagonistic behavior in the community, such as what Jeremy observed, arises.

Karen imagined "everybody in their own home going Uhhhhh," when the student with the business background blatantly told the other student that he was stupid. The student who received the demeaning comment was who Karen was most concerned of losing in the course. In her words, "they are going to just fade away and quit." An interesting observation that Karen shared, is that she found other students come to the defense of the victims of demeaning rude behavior. "Even before I can make a comment, often times a third party will step in and say, that came across really rude, unfeeling, or mean."

Attacks Other Students

When I questioned Natalie about how she felt the online learning community was affected after the verbal exchange between the poor spelling student and the other student, Natalie laughed and said "she suspected her students were utilizing the spell checker more after the incident." On a more serious note though, she felt, "I certainly think that it is going stifle some of the students in how they feel and how they express themselves as well."

Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic

As was discussed in the previous section for research question 1, faculty did deem students posting off topic as a distraction or a disruption on the faculty survey, but none reported that they felt that it negatively impacted the learning community during the interviews. This behavior is addressed more in research question 3 with strategies for managing this behavior, as well as in the discussion for research question 4, where it was

found most interviewed had modified the design of his/her courses to allow for a discussion space devoted to off-topic discussions.

<u>Lacks Participation in Class Activities</u>

Lack of or late participation in course discussion spaces, group projects, and due to student being overly committed in their lives were the themes that emerged as disrupting student behaviors in this category. These behaviors from the faculty perspective had negative effects in the online learning community. The quality of the discussion and conversation was considered to be negatively impacted by lack of participation which was considered a negative consequence. As Jeremy said, "From an instructor standpoint, I think you worry a little bit more about it because you want to make sure you have more of a conversation." Natalie expressed it as, "Too few [participating] and it is hard to keep discussion going." Rachel felt that "it just seems like when there are less people in the board at a time, the less likely they are to talk to each other."

In terms of late participation, at the time of the interview, Rachel was teaching a workshop in which only 3 of the 20 students were participating. Rachel speculated that if the other 17 students were to "at the last minute come in and start feverishly going through all the boards they aren't going to be looking at anything because they are going to just be looking to finish." Natalie received concerned messages from the other students when they are waiting for others in the class to post as it hinders their progress to move on in the steps outlined for class discussion. "Well, if other students aren't responding or aren't putting their own posts up there in time, they have no one to respond

to, and I have had a lot of students complain about that." Karen perceived the late

student as an interruption to the community. "They interrupt the community, they take

the instructor's time and they don't end up gaining much from the class."

Group work using collaborative projects in online courses are challenging enough

without having problems with students who don't participate in a timely manner with the

other group members. Deanne has found "in the groups they get upset because

somebody is not responding." Similarly Karen has heard from the students when other

group members are lacking in their participation and shared "so then they have disrupted

the group process." Jeremy felt,

> If it is a collaborative project, it impacts it a lot because what happens is I will
> assign a project anywhere from 4 weeks, 1 week, I don't know, it varies
> depending on the class. I will inevitably get someone in the class saying, "Hey
> we tried to email Joe, Joe never sends anything back, we don't know what is
> going on with Joe and things like that." Sometimes they pick up the slack
> anyhow and do Joe's works because it is part of the project, I don't know, and
> sometimes they just let it go. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3,
> 2011)

Exerts Authority on Other Students

The perception from the interviewees was that the learning community was

impacted by students who exhibited authoritative behaviors. The impact was expressed

as a change in the dynamic of the student-to-student interactions. From the "know it all"

student who posted as though they know more than the other students or the instructor to

the strongly opinionated student, each had an impact on how other students participated

and interacted with these students in the learning community. Karen's perception of the

reaction of the other students to the "know it all" student was that her other students

"really self selects on someone like that, they just stop reading those long posts." An

indication that suggested to Karen that students were not reading the posts of these students was evident in the lack of response back to these types of students. Karen witnessed posted statements of irritations from the authoritative students in the form of posts that said, "how come nobody is responding to me?" Deanne also believed that students ignore the posts from the "know it all" student that posts excessively. "You get students who want to comment on everybody's posting. It gets tiresome, but I also think that after a while most students see it and not read it."

Deanne has also experienced the "know it all" student that at the beginning of a class has caused confusion for some students in the class about who is teaching the class. Students are confused because the authoritative student in interpreted as behaving as the instructor in the course. She explained:

> I think the occasion when I have had somebody who kind of has a know it all, occasionally you get students who when you look at their responses to other students it is kind of like they are trying to be the teacher. So sometimes I think that some of them, particularly if you have a student who is doing a lot of responding, and my concern is that sometimes I think that some of them [the other students], and they may not be the sharpest tacks, don't realize that this student is not the instructor. A couple of times I have wondered of this, because I will watch the next response and then it's like they think she is the teacher. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Students in the class in which Deanne had the visiting student who perceived himself above the community college felt the need to come to her defense in response to the visiting student. As reflected in this statement shared by Deanne, "One student came back, he [the visiting student] made some comment on something and he [the other student] said, you know, I really think she [Deanne, the instructor] knows more than you do."

Rachel and Natalie both experienced students with strong opinions impacting the

interaction of the students in the learning community. Rachel received multiple private

messages from the participants in her workshop concerning the participant that very

opinionated about Quality Matters and her belief that it was going against her intellectual

freedom to design online courses. Given that the workshop participants were all from the

same institution, they felt the need to contact Rachel and tell her, "that is just Susie that is

how she is." Rachel in general felt the other student's reaction to "Susie" was either they

tried "to neutralize her or not respond to her – kind of ignore her."

Natalie had the student who was strongly opinionated regarding the topic of

evolution. She was concerned his posts impacted the other students' discussion on the

topic. She felt this about his behavior:

> Well, I think it stifles what other students may want to talk about. Make them feel
> more guarded in talking about that. Because you also have to think about if they
> may feel like now that they might offend that person. You know, it goes both
> ways. Or am I going to be offending the person who doesn't believe in it by
> saying these things. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February 1, 2011)

Other Observed Disruptive Behaviors

As reported in the finding for research question 1 above, other disruptive

behaviors stemmed from grading issues. Specifically grading issues were found with

group collaboration and grading issues spurred some students into disruptive behavior

that resulted in mutinous behaviors. These behaviors were perceived as having an impact

on the learning community. An anxious behavior was reported with students spending

energy with concerns about grades in group activities. Deanne shared, "I think it is the

grading that is always the concern with the students is that they are going to do all this work and somebody is just taking their coattails and doing nothing."

Students dissatisfied with grades also were reported to have engaged in mutinous behavior for both Karen and Natalie. Karen's situation was the student that was dealing with the care and move of her elderly parent. Karen's intentions were to commiserate with the student, but when the student received a less than perfect grade for work, she believed it was because she shared a personal problem. This student started what Karen referred to as an "underground rumble." Other students in the class were told by this student not to divulge any personal issues to avoid grade discrimination. Karen perceived this as:

> really a very disruptive situation to the community, it really destroyed the community in the class. I don't know how many of the other students were involved in these communications, whether it was everybody or just a select few, but it was definitely a disruptive influence. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

The "snippy type of comments" in the discussions from several students provided insight to her and her co-instructor that something was going on behind the scenes with the students though they weren't fully aware of what the problem was until the end of the course. At that time, they learned "somebody else's spouse had an emergency and had to be air lifted to a hospital, etc, etc and that person had been told don't tell them."

Natalie's situation involved the student using a chat tool on the side with other students and engaging them in conversations that questioned her grading and credibility. The student was influencing the learning community and their perspective of the learning that is occurring. During the interview, I summarized what I was interpreting I was

hearing from Natalie in the story by saying. "that it seemed that this student was trying to sway them to think that she was not a good instructor and to question her validity." Natalie responded, "Yes, she certainly was."

Research Question 3: Managing Disruptive Student Behaviors

The interviewees provided a descriptive array of different disruptive behaviors and their perceptions of how these behaviors were impacting the learning community. My third research question focused on the strategies and teaching methods that the faculty employed to manage the behaviors as they occurred. Characteristics of the different roles that instructors have in instructional settings, as reported by Mason (1991) and Berge (1995), are evident in the actions that these faculty implemented to manage the behaviors. In particular, the organization/managerial role for managing the discussion was a key principle for creating effective discussion-oriented online learning environments as noted by Eisley (1992).

The purpose of this question was to learn more about the teaching strategies implemented to manage disruptive behaviors in the online learning community. It was found that the approaches to dealing with behaviors shared in the interviews contained both a public approach to addressing the student behavior as well as a private approach with communication directly to the individuals exhibiting the disruptive behaviors. The analysis of this section is guided by themes derived from research question 1.

Demeans Other Students

The strategy for managing demeaning comments was consistently a private approach by the interviewees that experienced student with demeaning comments to

other student. Deanne related that she used email to address the student that included the

"redneck" comments in her post to the class. She shared, "I emailed the student

immediately and told her what was going on and why she couldn't say that." Deanne

shared that she perceived this as a "teachable moments." She also shared that she

monitors her discussions pretty closely. "It is pretty hard for something to get going."

Jeremy was very specific and shared, "yes it is always at an individual level"

when managing students involved in demeaning interactions. His first step has been to

contact the offended student and put this student at ease and let him/her know he is taking

care of the situation. Then he contacts the individual that has made the offense and lets

them know that the other student was offended. He said, "You are basically trying to get

a handle, put the fire out I guess."

In the case of the student that offended the counselor on the discussion board post,

Jeremy shared that he handled it this way:

> The way I handled that was just to kind of put out the fire with the counselor and I
> just talked to the other student and I said, you know sometimes, it was through e-
> mail I talked with this person, and I said sometimes you really have to watch your
> wording, they way you word it so that, yeah, you may have a feeling that
> happened in your school with your situation, but you can't stereotype essentially
> the whole profession whatever that profession happens to be or job in this case.
> (J. Langdon, personal communication. February 3, 2011)

When demeaning comments are shared in the learning community in the

discussions the instructor does have the capability of deleting the offending comments in

most course learning management systems. Deanne and Nicole both had this capability

in the learning management system they were using but differed in their strategy.

Natalie, with the case of the student who was demeaning to another student regarding her

use of grammar and spelling in her discussion posts, felt it important to leave the

interaction intact in the discussion board to be more aligned with interactions that occur

in face-to-face classes. After she shared in the interview that a public attack escalated

and ensued back in forth between the two students, I questioned Natalie as to whether or

not she deleted the negative posts. She responded:

> I left it there. Because I want this to be just like my face-to-face classes, so if that
> had happened in a classroom setting I probably would have privately after class
> told that student, you know, maybe it really was not appropriate for you to call her
> out in front of the class like that, but obviously we would not have been able to
> take those words that everybody heard away. So I really hesitate to delete posts
> because I feel like, I don't know, it just seems odd to me. You couldn't delete
> words that were said in the class, and I don't want to feel like I am censoring
> anyone or anything like that. (N. Ingersoll, personal communication, February
> 10, 2011)

Deanne on the other hand says she deletes or edits offending posts:

> I would remove this word or phrase or whatever because an instructor you can
> edit anybody's posts. I always print out the original just in case I need it in case
> there is any problem and it is something I always recommend to new online
> faculty is before you delete something print it out so you have got documentation.
> (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Attacks Other Students

When comments are posted in the discussion board that are of the nature where

one student has attacked another student, thee strategy was consistently a public approach

by the interviewees that experienced this behavior. Karen believed that "you have to do

something publically or the rest of the students are sitting there wondering what to say

what to do." Her strategy starts with first contacting the person who may have been

offended to "get a read on how things are going, if they need me to deal with it, if they

want to deal with it, how they want me to handle it." Karen has found that usually the

offended student wants to handle the situation on his/her own. At times they have requested suggestions for how she thinks they should respond to the offensive student. In some cases, Karen reported that the offended student has wanted her to address the offending student. In most all cases regardless of who has addressed the offending student, Karen has managed the situation at a public level by posting a comment such as:

> Remember this is supposed to be a dialog about the topic and we want to make sure that it doesn't come across like we are attacking the person. Challenging their ideas or their thinking that is fine, but you know, and just remind everyone of kind of our baseline and then how the attacker responds to that tells me where I need to go next but I have at that point I have already contacted my supervisor to watch the threat because they need to be aware. Not only does it protect me but it gives them a good idea of what is going on and just lets them build a background for it. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Rachel also shared her belief that students making ethnic or culturally biased comments in her discussion boards needed to addressed in a public manner. "I make sure I go right in, diffuse it, and respond to it and try to not let it spread like a cancer. If the post was public, I feel like I have to go public.

For situations that Natalie has experienced with student attacking other students ethnically or culturally, she shared that she has responded publically to these situations. She has posted an announcement saying the exchange was inappropriate and that "we need to remember our netiquette. We need to not make things personal, keep in to the topic at hand, not personal attacks."

Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic

As was discussed in the analysis for research question 1, the interviewed faculty did deem students posting off-topic as a distraction and a disruption but instead most provided a space that allowed for off topic conversation. To manage this, they

encouraged students to post to the defined spaces. Names for these spaces varied, but essentially the "student lounge, Anthropology Café, or class café" were all spaces defined for off-topic discussions. Harasim et al. (1995) discussed this importance of setting up a space in the structure of an online classroom to support the personal social aspect of the online learning community.

Karen, on the other hand, did feel that she had to manage off topic comments when they were of the nature of students bringing up topics of concerns about other classes that they were enrolled in. She was particularly sensitive to those off-topic type comments when she taught at the same institution as the course being discussed. She shared that when these comments arose "what I usually do is alert my supervisor that these comments are happening" and allowed the supervisor to look into the comments. She felt her responsibility was to "just alert the supervisor, then get out of the way" to address this behavior.

Lacks Participation in Class Activities

Lack of participation or late participation in discussion spaces, lack of participation in group collaborations, and lack of participation due to student being over commitments in their lives were the behavioral themes that emerged in the faculty interviews. Rachel, Natalie, and Karen reported the lack of or late participation in discussion spaces. Rachel and Karen did not report any specific approach to managing this behavior, but Natalie shared how she has managed this behavior. Natalie alerts the students early on in the course to be aware that discussions are important and she will be observing and grading them. She explained that her strategy was to make a class

announcement after she graded the first discussion posts and provide "detailed feedback in the announcements." Her announcements have taken this form, "I want to let everybody know discussions have been graded so look for your grade. If you don't see a grade then let me know just in case I missed somebody or something." She felt this type of announcement has been effective and has prompted those that have missed the deadline to be aware that "oh, she really is looking; she really is holding us to it."

Karen, Deanne, and Jeremy shared strategies they use to address lack of participation with group collaboration. One common strategy was their methods for group member selection. Karen discussed that she has the students self report the type of personality they are (Type A or Type B) and then has selected group memberships based on personality type. She has posed this question to the students: "When it comes to work like in this kind of online course and doing projects, are you wanting to be the first one done?" Those that respond with yes to her prompt, she determines are Type A personality and she puts them in a group with other Type A's. Those that respond with "Well, sometimes I am like that" she classifies as "people are on the fence." Further she stated, "If they are on the fence I figure they are type B" and she puts them in a group together. Deanne doesn't employ a strategy on the first group assignment, but has used the outcome of the first group assignment to determine if she needs to shuffle the students who aren't participating into a group of their own. She stated, "as I am forming groups I see who is working early and then there is a whole group of slackers who don't do anything and it cuts out on a lot of fussing [by grouping based on working style]." Though Deanne didn't specifically use the terms Type A or Type B, her use of the terms

"early" and "slackers" revealed that she implemented a similar approach to group member selection. Jeremy used observation as his method for selecting his group memberships combined with other logistical considerations. He has taken note of the students that are in class before it officially begins and the ones that aren't there until four or five days into the class. Those in early he said, "I have my Type A's." He also has considered time zones of his students and because most of his students are educators, he has taken their teaching level into account and has placed them in group with others teaching at the same level.

Deanne and Karen both also managed their course similar, in that they required all group interaction be available for them to read. In Deanne's case all group interaction was required to be conducted in designed group discussion areas. Deanne shared that problems have occurred "when they start working with email or offline where I can't follow what is going on." When problems have occurred, she has directed them to review the "document that I created talking about working in groups and about social loathing. It kind of drives it home." Karen's strategy "to keep them from having one person just do all the work and rest put their name on it" was to require groups to copy her on all group communications. Despite this strategy, she has encountered situations where she has had to step in. She prefers the group take action first and try to get the person's attention. She shared that she has told groups, "I don't want to step in; you guys are all adults."

Interviewees shared that they address the over committed students that lack participation in class activities privately to attempt to resolve their status in the course.

Deanne has used the results from her 168 hour questionnaire and has gone as far as to

send students private email messages with the message, "You are overloaded; you really

need to review your schedule. I can't make you drop anything, but I am telling you right

now you are [overloaded]." Jeremy has also used email message to prod the over

committed student into reconsidering their load. "I just say, you know, you have to drop

something. You can't keep continually picking up things; you have to take something

else off the plate." Karen has counseled students privately by email and phone. She has

told them, "Don't schedule the trip to Tahiti for this semester. And if you are getting a

divorce, let's talk about you taking it [the class] another time."

Exerts Authority on Other Students

Disruptive behavior in which students' exerted authority over other students, or as

several of the interviewees phrased it the strong personality type or highly opinionated

students, was discussed by four of the five interviewees, but only Karen offered a

suggestion for managing this type of behavior. She felt that a phone call or a Skype

conversation typically resolved the problem.

> Actually having those phone conversations resolves so many things because you
> let them vent and let them just get past it and you can dig down to what is really
> the problem because usually what they are venting about isn't the real issue. (K.
> Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Other Observed Disruptive Behaviors

Other disruptive behaviors reported stemmed from grading issues. Grading issues

found with group collaboration were prevalent. Also grading issues spurred some

students into disruptive behavior that resulted in mutinous behaviors or in Natalie's case

with the student who send the poem, a threatening type of behavior. Jeremy and Deanne

each shared strategies for managing groups that were experiencing problems with concerns about grading. Their strategies were similar in they addressed the collaborative group as whole. Deanne reiterated her grading policy reassuring the students that as long as each of them does their individual work, their grades would not be penalized from the lack of participation of members of the group that were not doing their parts. She told them to be "rest assured that if somebody doesn't work they are not getting the points." Jeremy's strategy mirrored Deanne's as he told his students. "I am not going to penalize your group for it, that is Joe's problem and that's between myself and Joe."

Karen related how she managed students who express displeasure from less than perfect grades. She has told her students "I was that same student and I have discovered that perfection is highly overrated." Even though she does not like to use the phone, she shared that it is "one of the best devices and one I don't use as often as I should is voice communication." When she does use the phone, she can resolve a problem in 10 minutes that would have taken numerous email messages. Rachel also relied on phone communication as a measure to the resolve the problem she had with "Susie" in her online workshop. Susie was the participant that was really against Quality Matters and felt that it would diminish her academic freedom with designing online courses. She disrupted the learning community in a mutinous manner with her attempt to get other colleagues to side with her. During the phone call, Rachel was able to get Susie to understand that the workshop was not right for her because she could not embrace the principles of Quality Matters and that it would be best for all if she didn't finish the workshop.

Natalie's situation in which the student sent her an email with the poem that referenced killing an instructor really caused quite a lot of anxiety and concern for Natalie. Natalie managed the situation by first informing the academic director at the institution. Unfortunately, the academic director was not supportive and told Natalie that "Maybe she [the student] didn't really mean to send it to you, it's not addressed to you or anything, you know, it doesn't say Dear Professor Ingersoll, so maybe she accidentally sent it to the wrong email address." After not getting the support from the institution, Natalie decided that she was going to take a "let's wait and see what happens approach." She shared, "I decided that I'm not going to say anything, I am just going to pretend like I didn't get that email." After a few weeks, Natalie received another email from the student. In this email the student claimed that she accidently sent an email to Natalie which was "a chant that they sing when they are marching" when she meant to send it to a military colleague. Natalie concluded, "I think she did intend to send it to me and I think maybe then she started having second thoughts." Natalie was an adjunct professor for the institution so perhaps was concerned about future employment with the institution which might be why she shared, "I don't want to be that person who is always bugging them and you know, with the issues."

Karen also had the experience where she had to pretend that nothing was wrong when she had the student that felt her grades were affected because she shared her personal problems of dealing with caring for her elderly parent. In this case, the student went directly to Karen's supervisor. In turn Karen's supervisor let her know that she was in communication with the student. As Karen related it:

My boss intervened and had several long conversations with this person and they were just overwrought with their life, but she was convinced that she was not being graded fairly. It was really hard. She never came to me with any of this. So it was really hard for me to keep acting like I didn't know anything of it. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Research Question 4: Preventing Disruptive Student Behaviors by Design

Modifications to course design to prevent disruptive student behaviors was the focus of research question 4. The interviewees responded to this question in a general sense during the interviews as opposed to relating to a specific behavior that occurred in class. Themes and categories that emerged are: Netiquette or Communication Policy, Structuring Discussions, Model Discussion Examples, Defined Student Discussion Spaces, Structuring Group Collaboration, Grading Policy and Rubrics, and Late Policy. These themes and categories were used to organize the narrative and analysis for this research question.

Netiquette or Communication Policy

A netiquette or communication policy was a modification or an addition to the course design noted by all of the interviewees. The term netiquette was derived from the terms network etiquette. This policy addition provided a guide to students with the expectations and proper use of the public forums in terms of appropriate behavior. As Natalie stated, "Most universities have a communication policy that is just kind of in there in the course site, not for me to change."

Structuring Discussions

The importance of structuring discussions was identified as a design feature that was effective in sustaining the learning community and allowing for positive and

meaningful learning through student-to-student conversations over the course content. Discussions start with a prompt in the form of a question, and as Jeremy shared, "You have to fashion the question obviously so it is not a yes or no question." In other words, factual questions that are answered and posted by one student do not allow for all students to participate in the discussion. The question prompts need to be open-ended as Dennen (2001) proposed in her research. Expectations as to how the students are to post and respond to other students were another shared component for engaging students in meaningful discussion (Beaudin, 1999; Conrad, 2002; Dennen, 2001; Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000). Deanne required an initial post minimum of 200 words. Karen and Natalie both stated that there is an expected due date for the students' initial response to the question and a due date for student-to-student responses. Deanne modified her course design in terms of making student-to-student responses required and graded. At one time she did not require responses and consequently students didn't respond to each others. Now it is required that students "respond to at least one other student during the week." Natalie and Karen stated that the students have to respond to at least two other students. All indicated that to meet the required student-to-student responses, mere affirmations or agreement with other students did not suffice to earn discussion points. As Deanne put it, "I tell them it has to be a thoughtful response that furthers the discussion." Karen has specified to her students that the students need to respond "as a probing question, play devil's advocate, offer a resource, [or] suggest an article." Jeremy had a similar style; he designed his discussion structure such that the students respond to other students by offering a solution, a possible website, or outside resource in their response.

Model Discussion Examples

The course syllabus is the typical location of model discussion examples. These examples provide to the students not only an example of what to do to earn the discussion points in the course but model good communication to ensure more positive and meaningful student-to-student interaction in the discussion. Deanne stated this well in her comment, "In the syllabus area, I have samples of ideal discussion board responses as well as an ideal response to a student. So there is no misunderstanding about what is expected." Karen learned that it was helpful if she provides both perfect examples and imperfect examples. As she shared, "What I originally did which gave them perfect examples, and they might know they are perfect, but they don't know what is perfect about them. I now have an assignment they do early on where I give them the imperfect example."

Defined Student Discussion Spaces

Jeremy shared, "my classes are pretty positive. I attribute that, I guess to the class café." The "class café" is the space that students may share and build community on topics outside the assignments or discussions in the course. Karen referred to this space as the "student lounge" and Natalie has named her student space the "Anthropology Café." The student space has also served the purpose of providing the students a space for questions and answers. Natalie said, "I tell them if you have a question, go ahead and post it there and if it is a general question, that way everybody can benefit for the answer." Karen has received private questions that she knows other students could benefit from hearing her response. When she responds to the student, she asks the

students to copy and paste the question and response to the student lounge because "that is really where it belongs because probably others do have the same questions."

Setting up a space in the structure of their online classrooms to support the personal social aspect of the online learning community is important. Harasim et al. (1995) write, "Social communication is an essential component of educational activity. Just as a face-to-face school or campus provides places for students to congregate socially, in online educational environment should provide a space, such as a virtual café, for informal discourse" (p. 137).

Structuring Group Collaboration

Karen stated the need for structuring group collaboration very succinctly in her statement, "Groups really need to have a purpose and a structure for what they are doing." She felt the result of group work is not just a project, but evidenced by collaboration within the group as well. Karen's modifications to her course design specifically work to avoid conflicts that can emerge in online group collaboration due to lack of physical and verbal cueing, characteristics of face-to-face collaborative efforts. Karen shared:

> To keep them from having one person just do all the work and the rest just put their name on it, not only am I checking in on them and asking them to copy me on all communication, but I let them know part of the purpose of doing this is for them to experience online collaboration. So it is about process and product. (K. Livingston, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Deanne has provided structure to her group collaborative projects with a "document that talks about what we know about group process and group theory and everything else." She has designed collaborative group spaces where groups are required

to work. She specifically states in her instructions to the students, "you are not expected to meet, I don't want you doing it in the other chat room, I don't want you to do it via telephone or anything else." Similar to Karen's approach, evaluation has involved the process as well as the final product from the group.

<u>Grading Policy and Rubrics</u>

Modifications to grading policies and additions of rubrics are examples of design changes that faculty have made to avoid the disruptive behaviors that have arisen from grading issues. Jeremy found if he raised his scale for earning an A grade from 90% to 93%, students were more likely to participate more fully in his courses. He shared, "they know that they just can't turn in the work or they know that they just can't slough off in one area and get away with it and still come up with an A." Grading student-to-student responses in discussions Deanne learned was essential to ensure participation. Karen learned that her peer review activity needed to be graded or "not everyone will do it and you want everyone to be involved."

Grading rubrics are another enhancement to the design of online courses that the interviewees found necessary to include to minimize problems that have arisen from grading issues. Grading without rubrics has the potential to take on a very subjective nature, and in general, providing a grading rubric spells out to the students the expectations and clears away some of the ambiguity around grading. As Jeremy said:

> I think rubrics have come around a long ways and online and I think that is a huge one because now it is not as subjective and they see why you took so many points off for whatever it is. Most of the time you don't really even use the rubric as an instructor because you know it so well, you can kind of see them, but if you know you have a problem student I will always copy and paste that rubric in something

and hand it to them so they exactly see where they went off, so I think rubrics have been a big one. (J. Langdon, personal communication, February 3, 2011)

Natalie indicated that originally when she first starting teaching she didn't use rubrics, but now she has found the value in their use. "When I first started teaching online and in the classroom I kind of came out with the graduate school mindset. I guess you know just show me; demonstrate that you know what we are talking about.

Late Policies

Requiring due dates, as noted in the earlier sections regarding structuring discussions and group collaborations, was a key modification several of the interviewees shared. Students missing due dates triggered a need to add late policies to courses to minimize the behavior of lack of or late participation in class activities. Late policies provided in the syllabus appear to be strictly adhered to by some of the faculty interviewed and just a measure to prevent late participation for others. Natalie was one who adhered strictly to her late policy. If students "don't meet a deadline, they get points off." Deanne designed a late policy that allowed students to post two times late, no questions asked, and then after that grades are reduced. She shared,

> I have a late work policy where they can post two late, and it covers everything, I don't care why, you had to buy new shoes to a death in the family, I don't really care and that way I don't have to judge what is a better excuse than another to post late. So I tell them you have to use it very judiciously, don't waste it early on because you know, you can.... I tell them, don't wait until the last minute [to post] because stuff can happen and if stuff happens, too bad. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

Jeremy was one that provided a late policy primarily to minimize late participation. He believed that because his students were adults that he hasn't had to rely

on his late policy very frequently. Only when a student "is always getting something in late" does he feel he needs to take off points.

Summary

The analysis in this chapter sought to illuminate the findings of this study as related to the research questions. The analysis of the first three research questions utilized the modified categories. Specifically, I identified and described the disruptive student behaviors in an online learning community shared in the interviews. I shared the faculty perceptions of the impact these behaviors had on their online learning community. I explained the various techniques that faculty have utilized to manage disruptive students. Finally for research question 4, I conveyed how online instructors believe they have modified their course designs to prevent or minimize disruptive online student behavior based on categories and themes that emerged as the interviewees discussed modifications to their course design from a general perspective as opposed to relating to specific disruptive behaviors that occurred.

In the following sections, I again return to the categories of disruptive behaviors from research question 1 and weave in the findings of all four research questions as a measure of summarizing the findings. Namely, I discuss the behavior, how the faculty perceived the behavior impacted the learning community, how the faculty managed the behavior and how design modifications to prevent disruptive behaviors have been implemented.

Demeans Other Students

The demeaning comments and offenses reported in the interviews ranged from name calling, making inappropriate comments about another student's profession, to criticizing and questioning the intellect of other students. Faculty perceived these student behaviors, publically shared in the discussion spaces, did negatively impact the learning community. This was evident from observed antagonistic behavior between students involved, as well as by examples of other students posting remarks that were in defense of the victims of demeaning and rude behavior.

Private communication was consistently the approach shared for managing this behavior. An interesting aside is that most learning management systems have a feature that allows faculty to edit or delete postings discussion spaces. Implementing this feature was not consistent with all. One felt it necessary to edit posts, while another shared that it was important to leave discussions in place as it occurred.

Examples of course design modifications to prevent this type of behavior were the addition of a "Netiquette or Communication Policy" as well as providing "Model Discussion" examples. Both of these additions to the course materials provide a guide to students with the expectations of proper use of discussions and a model of positive communication styles.

Attacks Other Students

Instances of students attacking other students in the discussion spaces was a behavior observed and shared by the interviewees. There was a division, however, between the interviewees on whether or not they perceived that this behavior still existed

in online courses. Several felt that this was not a problem any longer, though it had been a problem earlier in online courses. Those that did currently witness this behavior felt the attacks were typically posted as ethnic, racial or culturally biased comments.

The impact this behavior had on the learning community was stated as a concern that it may stifle some of the students in their comfort level for expressing and posting how they feel about course topics.

When comments of this nature were posted in the discussions, the strategy to manage was consistently a public approach. Typically, the public communication was in the form of a post or an announcement from the instructor as a reminder for the need to follow the communication and netiquette policies for discussion.

The addition of a "Netiquette or Communication Policy", as well as providing "Model Discussion Examples" were modifications to course designs to guide students and ensure more positive student-to-student interactions.

Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic

This category was a merger of two of the categories from question 3 on the faculty survey. The original faculty survey categories were "displays distracting behavior by calling attention to self" and "displays distracting behavior by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to the class activities." For both of these categories, the faculty responded on the faculty survey that they had observed these student behaviors and in the interviews related them as distractions by students to move the discussions off course topics. To manage the off-topic discussion student, faculty encouraged students to post to the defined student spaces. "Defined Student Discussion Spaces" devoted to off-

topic discussions was a modification to the design of his/her courses to allow for off-topic discussions and prevent or minimize these as distractions or disruptions to the graded discussion spaces

Lacks Participation in Class Activities

Lack of or late participation in discussion spaces, lack of participation in group collaborations, and lack of participation due to students being over committed in their lives were the themes that emerged as disruptive behaviors during the interviews. These behaviors, from the faculty perspective, had negative effects in the online learning community.

The quality of the discussion and conversation was negatively impacted by lack of participation, and late student participation was perceived as an interruption to the community. Posting public discussions or announcements was the common strategy for managing the problems with discussion. "Structuring Discussions" and adding a "Late Policy" to course materials were the recommended changes made to help prevent this behavior.

Lack of participation in group collaborations disrupted the group process. One common strategy to manage group related problems was to determine a method for group selection by pairing or grouping like students, in terms of personality types, together to help minimize this problem. When problems occurred, even with a group selection strategy, then responses from the faculty were to the group members to help resolve the issue. Modifications to course design by adding documents to help with "Structuring Group Collaboration", and including a "Late Policy", in terms of providing guiding

documents on how groups should work and deadlines group members need to make was the key course design modification that faculty implemented.

Interviewees shared that they addressed over committed students that lack participation in class activities privately to attempt to resolve their status in the course.

Exerts Authority on Other Students

The behavior exerts authority was portrayed by students who either felt a need to prove they knew more than the instructor or the other students or by students who had a strong opinion or personality type. From the "know it all" student who posted as though they know more than the other students or the instructor to the strongly opinionated student, each had an impact on how other students participated and interacted with these students in the learning community. Typically a private phone call or Skype conversation was used to manage this behavior. Again, modifications to course designs were made to guide students and ensure more positive student-to-student interactions such as the addition of a "Netiquette or Communication Policy," as well as providing "Model Discussion Examples."

Other Disruptive Behaviors Observed

Other disruptive behaviors observed primarily stemmed from grading issues. Disruptive behaviors with students engaging in mutinous behaviors typically have a grading issued involved. These behaviors were perceived as having an impact on the learning community with students spending energy over concerns about grades in general. Strategies for individuals involved making phone calls to the individuals, and when managing groups, the faculty typically addressed the collaborative group as whole.

Preventative measures with modifications to course design used by faculty included the addition of "Structuring Group Collaboration," "Grading Policy and Rubrics," and a "Late Policy."

The description and analysis of the data offered in this chapter have provided insights into the identification and descriptions of disruptive student behaviors, an interpretation of faculty perceptions of the impact these behaviors have on online learning communities, how faculty manage disruptive students, and modifications to course designs to prevent or minimize disruptive online student behavior. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings in the context of previous research and offer an interpretation about what I believe are the most salient lessons emerging from this study. Chapter 5 will also describe implications for practice and ideas for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was fourfold. First, it defined the behaviors of disruptive students in the online learning environment. Second, it addressed the perceptions held by online instructors related to the effect disruptive students have on the online learning community. Third, it explored how online instructors adjust their teaching strategies to engage disruptive students in constructive behaviors. Fourth, it investigated how online instructors modify their course design to prevent disruptive online behavior. Specifically this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?

2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?

3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?

4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

The purposes of this study were to gain a deeper understanding of types of disruptive student behaviors, the impact these behaviors have on the online learning community, and techniques for facilitation and design of online learning communities when disruptive student behaviors emerge. Harasim et al. (1995) contended that with

attention to instructional design and facilitation, computer conferencing, as used in discussion-based learning communities, can support rich and satisfying experiences in collaborative learning. Thus, the significance of this study rests with the potential to help close the gap in the knowledge base and help provide strategies for the facilitation and design of online learning communities impacted by disruptive student behaviors. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the analysis of the data. This chapter offers an interpretation of the findings relative to the research problems.

Chapter 5 will include three main sections. First, I will discuss the key findings from Chapter 4 relative to previous research. Second, I will present the practical implications that stem from the findings. I will conclude this chapter with some possible directions for future research and a brief conclusion.

Discussion

The analysis in Chapter 4 sought to illuminate the findings of this study as related to the research questions. The analysis of the first research questions resulted in a list of categories of types of disruptive student behaviors the emerged in the interviews. The list is similar, but does not include all the types of behaviors that were questioned in the third faculty survey question because not all of the behaviors that were noted as observed on the faculty survey were divulged during the interview process and thus did not emerge as categories and themes.

Here is the list of themes that were to used to guide the analysis of research questions 2 and 3 and to guide the narrative for research questions 1 through 3:

Demeans Other Students

Attacks Other Students

Displays Distracting Behavior By Moving Discussions Off-Topic

Lacks Participation in Class Activities

Exerts Authority on Other Students

Other Disruptive Behaviors Observed.

In Chapter 4, I identified and described the disruptive student behaviors in an online learning community shared in the interviews. I shared the faculty perceptions of the impact these behaviors had on their online learning community. I explained the various techniques that faculty have utilized to manage disruptive students. For research question 4, I reported general modification online instructors have made to their course designs to prevent or minimize disruptive online student behavior. The following section discusses and provides an interpretation of the findings relative to previous research. It is divided utilizing the four research questions to guide this discussion.

Research Question 1:Defining Disruptive Student Behaviors

The purpose of the first research question in this inquiry was to define online disruptive student behaviors. In the data, faculty discussed and recognized a number of behaviors that they perceived as disruptive or distracting to the online learning community.

The evolution and success of learning in the online learning community relies on positive contributions from all members of the community. Lock (2002) stated "the relationships, the intimacy, the negotiations, and the engagement of participants all influence the evolution of a community" (p. 396). Thus, when disruptive behaviors emerge they can be counterproductive to the growth of the community.

Communication was one of the four cornerstones of an online learning community identified by Lock (2002). Schwier (2001) viewed communication as pivotal in an online learning community, generating interaction, engagement and alignment among learners. Further, Hermann (1998) found that civil language in the form of being positive and friendly are important factors in creating and sustaining a community over time. Communication needs to be open and civil between all members of the learning community. In this study, the faculty identified and described disruptive student behaviors that involved comments from students that demean other students and instances of students attacking other students in discussions. Each of these types of communication behaviors would not be considered use of civil language nor would they be considered positive or constructive communication to the development of the online learning community. The demeaning comments and offenses reported in the interviews ranged from name calling, making inappropriate comments about another student's profession, to criticizing and questioning the intellect of other students. Instances in which students attacked other students were described as ethnic, racial or culturally biased comments that were offending to the other students. Ko and Rosen (2010) recognized the belligerent student when they described their student "Tom" who attacked another student during a heated debate in the discussions calling the student a right-wing bigot. The descriptions of this behavior I encountered in this study were consistent with the observations that Ko and Rosen described.

Another type of disruptive behavior described by the participants in this study was students in online courses that exert authority. This behavior was portrayed by students

who either have a need to prove that they know more than the instructor or the other students or students who have a strong opinion or personality type and use this characteristic to influence the community. The "know it all" student was recognized by Ko and Rosen (2010) in their description of "Janet" who tried to represent herself as an authority figure in the course. The strongly opinionated student can steer the class and act as a mutineer. Descriptions of this mutinous behavior were described by several of the faculty in this study, and their descriptions were consistent with Ko and Rosen's (2010) description of "Jerry" the student that tried to influence his class by getting the other students to believe that the instructor was teaching poorly.

Disruptive behaviors included lack of or late participation in discussion spaces, lack of participation in group collaborations, and lack of participation due to student being over committed in their lives. Given that participation and collaboration are two of the four cornerstones of an online learning community identified by Lock (2002), it is believable that faculty would perceive these as disruptive student behaviors. Participation is fundamental to the meaning of a learning community. Online learning communities depend on responsible, autonomous, motivated learners who must be willing to participate according to the goals and activities of the online learning community. Schwier (2001) claimed that until one participates in the online learning community, one cannot claim membership. Without participation, the community becomes merely a connection of digital resources.

Collaboration in an online learning community typically means group work and discussion based activities. Dennen (2000) defined collaborative learning as "a process

that involves interaction amongst individuals in a learning situation" (p. 329). Dennen's definition of collaboration encompasses the fourth and final cornerstone of the online learning community identified by Lock (2002), namely interaction. Learner-learner interaction defined by Moore (1989) is the inter-learner interaction, between one learner and other learners. Taylor (2002) reported that 75% of the interaction in the course he studied was accounted for by the interaction between the members of the course. Anderson (1999) identified five reasons why learner-learner interaction is important in an online learning community.

Research Question 2: Impact of Disruptive Student Behaviors

The purpose of the second research question in this inquiry was to gather the faculty perceptions of the impact that disruptive student behavior had on the online learning community. All of the disruptive student behaviors described were perceived by the faculty as having negative impacts on the online learning community and can be related in terms of Lock's (2002) four cornerstones of an online learning community: communication, collaboration, participation and interaction. Faculty perceived that the demeaning comments and offenses, publically shared in the discussion spaces, impacted the communication and interaction of the students. This was evident from the observed antagonistic behavior between students that emerged after demeaning remarks appeared. Examples of other students coming to the defense of the victims of demeaning and rude behavior are also an indication that the communication and interaction of the learners were impacted by demeaning student behaviors.

Communication, participation, and interaction also were perceived to be impacted with instances of students attacking other students in the discussion spaces as reported in the study. The impact this behavior had on the learning community was that it stifled students and inhibited them from interacting and participating. In reaction to this behavior, the comfort level for expressing and communicating feelings about the course topics is impacted.

The quality of the discussion and conversation was negatively impacted by lack of participation, and late student participation was perceived as an interruption to the community. Lack of participation in group collaborations disrupted the group process which was evident again that the four cornerstones of an online learning community (Lock, 2002) become unraveled when students do not meet course expectations. Students are expected to engage in the discussion by reading and responding to each in a timely fashion. In short, learners need to expend effort to remain engaged and connected to the online learning community.

It was perceived by the faculty involved in this inquiry that participation and interaction of other students were impacted from the "know it all" student who posted as though they know more than the other students or the instructor and the strongly opinionated student.

Each of the four cornerstones Lock (2002) identified is exhibited through the actions and behaviors of the members of the online learning community. Therefore, when it is found that disruptive student behaviors exist in online learning communities,

the perception by the faculty is that the behaviors jeopardize the evolution and success of learning in the community.

Research Question 3: Managing Disruptive Student Behaviors

The purpose of the third research question in this inquiry was to determine what teaching strategies online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community. The two strategies employed to manage disruptive behaviors that emerged from the analysis of the data were participation and communication (Lock, 2002). Characteristics of the different roles that instructors have in instructional settings as reported by Mason (1991) and Berge 1995) are evident in the actions that these faculty implemented to manage the behaviors.

The faculty reported that if they were actively participating in the online learning community, then disruptive student behaviors were less likely to arise, and if they did arise, then they were there to jump in and manage the behavior. The organizational/managerial role of the instructor comes in to play to ensure successful interactions are facilitated and monitored (Berge, 1995; Mason, 1991). According to Eisley (1992), managing the discussion in process is the second key principle for creating effective discussion-oriented online learning environments. Establishing a welcoming, friendly online environment is crucial to the development of an online learning community. Berge and Muilenburg (2000) suggested an important social role for the instructor at the beginning of a course is a private e-mail message to each learner to welcome them to the online learning environment.

The methods of communicating to students when disruptive student behaviors surfaced differed depending on the nature of the behavior but were expressed either privately or publically. Private communication was consistently the approach shared for managing demeaning comments and offenses. In contrast, when instances of students attacking other students in the discussion spaces emerged, the strategy to manage was consistently a public approach. The message from the instructor typically was in the form of a reminder for the need to follow the communication and netiquette policies for discussion. According to Berge (1995), instructors need to ensure a safe and socially welcoming environment for the learners, and the social role of the instructor is important, as she/he holds the responsibility of keeping the discussion on track and maintaining group harmony.

To manage off-topic discussion faculty reported that they encouraged students to post to the defined student spaces. In the design of the courses names for these spaces used were "student lounge, Anthropology Café, or class café" and were spaces defined for off-topic discussions.

Posting public discussions or announcements was the common strategy for managing the problems with the lack of or late participation in discussions. Hobbs (2002) found that when the instructor is more actively engaged in the discussion this increased the interaction between the learners and the instructor and increased the learners' perception of the learning.

Lack of participation in group collaborations disrupted the group process. One common strategy to manage group related problems was to determine a method for group

selection by pairing or grouping like students, in terms of personality types, together to help minimize this problem. When problems occurred even with a group selection strategy then responses from the faculty were to the group members to help resolve.

Typically a private phone call or Skype conversation was used to manage the behavior of students exerting authority. Other disruptive behaviors observed primarily stemmed from grading issues. Strategies for individuals involved making phone calls to the individuals and managing groups the faculty typically addressed the collaborative group as whole.

Research Question 4: Preventing Disruptive Student Behaviors by Design

The purpose of the fourth research question in this inquiry was to determine the modifications in the instructional design online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community. The interviewees responded to this question in a general sense during the interviews as opposed to relating to specific behaviors. The themes and categories that emerged were: Netiquette or Communication Policy, Structuring Discussions, Model Discussion Examples, Defined Student Discussion Spaces, Structuring Group Collaboration, Grading Policy and Rubrics, and Late Policy. These themes and categories are supported in the literature and research of online learning communities.

A netiquette or communication policy provides a guide to students outlining the expectations and proper use of the public forums in terms of appropriate behavior. As noted earlier, communication needs to be open and the level of civility in the communication is important as well. Hermann (1998) found that civil language in the

form of being positive and friendly are important factors in creating and sustaining a community over time. Sherry et al. (2000) conducted a study to look at success factors for online conversations and found that good design includes having a goal for each conversation and creating and publishing guidelines for online conversations.

The importance of structuring discussions was identified as a design feature that was effective in sustaining the learning community and allowing for positive and meaningful learning through student-to-student conversations over the course content. The intellectual/pedagogical role of an instructor in an online learning environment formulates questions that probe for learner responses in a discussion-oriented collaborative learning environment (Berge, 1995; Mason, 1991). Mason referred to this role as the intellectual role while Berge referred to this as the pedagogical role. Mason (1991) suggested the intellectual role is the most important role of the online instructor. This was supported in a study by Liu et al. (2005) which explored the instructors' perception regarding the four dimensions of instructor roles and found that, overall, instructors most strongly emphasized the pedagogical role.

Discussions start with a prompt in the form of an open-ended question as Dennen (2001) proposed in her research. Expectations as to how the students are to post and respond to other students are another shared component for engaging students in meaningful discussion (Beaudin, 1999; Conrad, 2002; Dennen, 2001; Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000).

Setting up a space in the structure of their online classrooms to support the personal and social aspects of the online learning community is important. Harasim et al.

(1995) write, "Social communication is an essential component of educational activity. Just as a face-to-face school or campus provides places for students to congregate socially, in online educational environment should provide a space, such as a virtual café, for informal discourse" (p. 137).

Often students are resistant to participating in collaborative activities based on past experiences where other students have not shared the load or from experiences where it has been difficult to coordinate efforts of collaboration with online technologies. The need for structuring group collaborative work to avoid potential conflicts due to lack of physical and verbal cueing, characteristics of face-to-face collaborative efforts, is an important design consideration. According to Palloff and Pratt (2007), the instructor can ease this degree of resistance by explaining why the activity is occurring, how it relates to the learning objectives, and by including the expectations for collaboration as guidelines.

Modifications to grading policies and additions of rubrics are examples of design changes that faculty have made to avoid the disruptive behaviors that have arisen from grading issues. Ko and Rosen (2010) include "explanation of grading criteria and components of total grade" (p. 123) as part of their checklist for creating an effective syllabus. Grading rubrics are another enhancement to the design of online courses that the interviewees found necessary to include to minimize problems that have arisen from grading issues. Grading without rubrics has the potential to take on a very subjective nature, and in general, providing a grading rubric spells out to the students the expectations and clears away some of the ambiguity around grading. Palloff and Pratt (2007) suggest that rubrics assist students via self-assessment by allowing the student to

compare their work to the standards established by the instructor and are particularly useful in assessing participation in discussions, which is an area that is often more subjectively assessed.

Requiring due dates, as noted in the earlier sections regarding structuring discussions and group collaborations, was a key modification several of the interviewees shared. Dennen (2000) suggested the use of incremental deadlines for group collaboration. Deadlines help students manage their time and seem to "foster a greater sense of within-group and self-responsibility" (Dennen, 2000, p. 333). Additionally, Dennen (2001) recognized that "a fair number of students are likely to complete their work in a deadline-driven manner" (p. 124) and suggested that deadlines should accompany each stage of the discussion. Students missing due dates triggered a need to add late policies to courses to minimize the behavior of lack of or late participation in class activities. Ko and Rosen (2010) include "policies on late assignments" (p. 123) as part of their checklist for creating an effective syllabus.

Implications

The intent of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of types of disruptive student behaviors and recognize the impact these behaviors have on the online learning community. Additionally, techniques for facilitation of disruptive student behaviors that emerge and design modifications to prevent disruptive student behaviors were explored. A number of practical implications flow from the findings and discussion. Individuals that may benefit from the findings in this study include: faculty currently teaching online

courses, faculty who are considering teaching online classes, instructional designers who support online faculty, and administrators who supervise online faculty.

The behaviors identified and described in this study provide a foundation for identifying behaviors of students that may considered disruptive. Instructors and designers may benefit from this study by gaining an awareness of the types of online disruptive student behaviors. The findings suggested that instructors may look for signs from the students regarding the impact disruptive behaviors have on the online learning community. Specifically recognizing signs of impact on the online learning community related to Lock's (2002) four cornerstones: communication, collaboration, participation, and interaction. Signs that may emerge include antagonistic behavior in the communication between students as well as stifled students inhibited from interacting and participating. Another sign that might emerge is an interruption to the community and group collaboration caused by the lack of and late student participation.

The findings and discussion on facilitation and design of online learning communities provide the most valuable lessons gleaned from this study for instructors and designers. Instructors and designers who wish to facilitate and design successful online learning communities may benefit from learning how others have managed disruptive behaviors. Specifically, they may benefit from knowing the importance of being presence in the online learning community and the use of and need for immediacy for reacting and communicating when disruptive student behaviors emerge. Benefits to knowing how practical modifications to course design can prevent or minimize disruptive student behaviors from emerging in online learning communities is also valuable to the

construction of an effective online learning community. Design modifications to prevent

disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities that emerged were:

netiquette or communication policies, structuring discussions, model discussion

examples, defined student discussion spaces, structuring group collaboration, grading

policies and rubrics, and late policies. In summary, as Harasim et al. (1995) wrote,

> with attention to instructional design and facilitation, these shared spaces [online
> learning communities] can become the locus of rich and satisfying experiences in
> collaborative learning, an interactive group knowledge-building process in which
> learners actively construct knowledge by formulating ideas into words that are
> shared with and built upon through the reactions and responses of other. (p. 2)

Administrators may benefit from this study by understanding the types of

disruptive student behaviors that faculty may experience in teaching online courses.

From this understanding they may be able to better support faculty who encounter

disruptive student behaviors. The policies for disruptive behaviors that many institutions

publish do not currently recognize the online classroom and thus administrators could

utilize these findings to modify and enhance policy statements for this inclusion of the

online setting.

Future Research

The field of distance education has grown in leaps and bounds over the last 30

years. Online education is no longer a novelty, and as stated in the introduction, there has

been an increase of nearly one million students taking online higher education courses in

the past year alone (Allen & Seaman, 2010). An increase of 21% of students taking at

least one online course in one year clearly suggests it is importance of researching online

education and the online learning community.

Three of the faculty in this study were very experienced online instructors and have been teaching online for 10 years or more. It appeared to me that these instructors with more online teaching experience had a different perspective on disruptive student behaviors than the two in the study with less experience. They appeared to experience fewer disruptive student behaviors than novice instructors. The novice instructors seemed to experience more disruptive behaviors that involved uncivil language and behaviors associated with communication. The experienced instructors shared that communication related disruptive student behaviors were less prevalent presently than when they first started teaching online. Jeremy stated, "I don't see it as much lately now. This is something that for some reason I saw much earlier on in online learning, I'm talking like in the early 2000s, 2002." Deanne shared,

> I found more of some of these things in the earliest days of our giving online classes because they really did not know how to do it and as we taught more online and as more students got used to taking online classes you had a community that kind of would help the others get them acclimated and get them socialized to know what they should be doing. (D. Fitzgerald, personal communication, January 31, 2011)

These statements suggested to me that the amount of time one has facilitated and designed online may have some correlation to the types of disruptive student behaviors that emerge. One potential area of future research could be for one to explore the relationship between presence of online disruptive student behaviors and level of online teaching experience level of instructors.

This research did not explore the views or perceptions of the students involved in the learning communities in which disruptive student behaviors have emerged and thus it

only represents a faculty perspective. Another future study could explore the perceptions that students have regarding disruptive student behaviors in online learning communities.

Conclusion

As colleges and universities embrace the Internet as a platform for conducting learning, the effectiveness of student learning and community building is increasingly questioned. The problems this study sought to address were that little had been researched on disruptive student behaviors, how these behaviors affect the online learning community, and how faculty manage and adjust their instructional strategies to design courses to counteract disruptive behaviors. Given that little in the way of a knowledge base existed to help guide the facilitation and design of online learning communities for dealing with disruptive student behaviors, it seemed evident to me that more knowledge and insight into the identification and descriptions of disruptive student behaviors and a better understanding of faculty perceptions of the impact these behaviors have on online learning communities was needed. Additionally, learning how instructors manage disruptive students and what modifications to course design they implement to prevent or minimize disruptive student behaviors could be beneficial in helping us understand how to better facilitate and design online learning communities.

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APPENDIX A

CONSULTANT EMAIL

Project Title: Disrupting the discussion: The story of disruptive students in online classrooms

Name of Investigator(s): Belle Doyle Cowden

Hello (name of consultant),

My name is Belle Doyle Cowden and I am an instructional designer at the University of Northern Iowa.

I am also a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Iowa and I am working on my dissertation. My dissertation study focuses on disruptive student behaviors in online courses.

The purpose of this message is to ask you for help in identifying faculty at your institution who you feel meet the criteria of my study.

From the nominations, I receive from you I will send a brief survey with the purpose of helping me identify 3-5 faculty to visit for interviews.

I have four questions in my research:

> First, I am interested in learning how disruptive student behavior is defined in an online learning community.

> Second, I would like to learn what impact faculty feel disruptive student behavior has on the learning community.

> Third, I would learn more about the teaching strategies instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in an online learning community.

> And finally, I would like to learn more about modifications in instructional design that faculty s implement to prevent disruptive behaviors in an online learning community.

In your position, can you nominate faculty who are teaching or have taught online classes who meet the criteria of my study? Names and email addresses is all I need for each.

Thank you for your time and assistance today.

APPENDIX B

FACULTY SURVEY

Project Title: Disrupting the discussion: The story of disruptive students in online classrooms

Name of Investigator(s): Belle Doyle Cowden

Name:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

1. To what degree is building a learning community important to the design of your online course(s)?

2. To what degree is student-to-student interaction important in your online course(s)?

3. Which of the following disruptive student behaviors have you observed in your online teaching? Check all that apply.

	A student ...
	... demeans other students.
	... expresses disapproval of values, acts, or feelings of other students.
	... attacks other students or the topic being discussed.
	... displays distracting behavior by calling attention to self (e.g., boasting, reporting personal achievements, or responding in unusual manner).
	... displays distracting behavior by expressing personal feelings and ideas unrelated to class activities (e.g., elicits sympathy through sharing personal problems).
	... lacks participation in class activities.
	... exerts authority or manipulates other students.
	... exhibits other disruptive behaviors.

Completing this survey implies your consent to participate in my study. I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration in this matter, and I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used, but no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent electronically.

Respectfully,
Belle Doyle Cowden, Ed. D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Northern Iowa
e-mail: cowden@uni.edu
phone: 319 273-7211

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Project Title: Disrupting the discussion: The story of disruptive students in online classrooms

Name of Investigator(s): Belle Doyle Cowden

Dear (participant),

I am a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Northern Iowa. My dissertation focuses on disruptive student behaviors in online courses. I am interested in exploring the following:

- How disruptive student behavior is **defined** in an online learning community;
- What **impact** disruptive student behavior has on the learning community;
- What teaching strategies instructors implement to **manage** disruptive student behavior in an online learning community;
- What modifications in instructional design instructors implement to **prevent** disruptive behaviors in an online learning community.

The purpose of this message is to recruit faculty to complete a 3-5 minute survey related to student behavior in online courses. Specifically I am seeking faculty whose online courses involve discussion-based student interaction where disruptive student behaviors have occurred.

After receiving your survey response, I may be in contact with you for further participation in my study. Further participation will involve 1-2 face-to-face interviews (60 min. each) and 2-3 follow-up email messages as needed.

Please understand that being a doctoral student, I am not able to provide monetary compensation for your invaluable time and participation.

Please note, names and contact information are collected on the survey responses for the purpose of conducting follow-up interviews for those selected. Completing my survey implies your consent to participate in my study. I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration in this matter, and I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/cowdenfacultysurvey

Respectfully,

Belle Doyle Cowden, Ed. D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Northern Iowa
e-mail: cowden@uni.edu
phone: 319 273-7211

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY

Project Title: Disrupting the discussion: The story of disruptive students in online classrooms

Name of Investigator(s): Belle Doyle Cowden

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

I have four questions in my research:

1. How is disruptive student behavior defined in the online learning community?
2. What impact does disruptive student behavior have in the online learning community?
3. What teaching strategies do online instructors implement to manage disruptive student behavior in the online learning community?
4. What modifications in the instructional design do online instructors implement to prevent disruptive student behaviors in the online learning community?

The first phase of my inquiry is the following brief survey (3-5 min.) asking three questions regarding aspects of your online course(s). After receiving your survey response, I may be in contact with you for further participation in my study. Further participation will involve 1-2 face-to-face interviews (60 min. each) and 2-3 follow-up phone conversations (15-20 min. each).

There are no foreseeable risks to participation. Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference. Please also note, the data from this study may be used in future studies.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate.

If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation, you may contact Belle Doyle Cowden at 319-273-7211 or my faculty advisor Lynn Nielsen at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-7759. You may also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used, but no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent electronically.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

Please note, names and contact information are collected on the survey responses for the purpose of conducting follow-up interviews for those selected. Completing this survey implies your consent to participate in this research project.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Project Title: Disrupting the discussion: The story of disruptive students in online classrooms

Name of Investigator(s): Belle Doyle Cowden

Introductory Questions

1. Tell me about the online course or courses that you teach. For example the title of the course, the program of study the course is part of, etc.

2. Describe the learning activities in your online course.

3. How do discussion activities fit in the overall design and facilitation of your online course?

4. How important is building a learning community in the design of your online course(s)?

Questions for Research Question 1

5. When you hear the phrase "disruptive student behaviors" in relation to online classes what comes to mind for you?

6. Describe disruptive student behaviors that have emerged in your online course(s).

Question for Research Question 2

7. Tell me about specific disruptive student behaviors that have occurred in your online courses and how you feel these behaviors have negatively impacted the learning community.

Question for Research Question 3

8. How do you manage disruptive student behaviors while teaching online courses?

Question for Research Question 4

9. When you encounter disruptive student behaviors, what modifications and changes to the design of your course do you make to prevent such behaviors?

Conclusion Question

10. Is there anything else that you would like to share?