Exploring Online Teaching: A Three-Year Composite Journal of Concerns and Strategies from Online Instructors

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Abstract

Using Fuller's concerns-based model for teacher development, this study identifies concerns and strategies experienced by 103 online instructors in a six-week online professional development course offered multiple times over a three-year period. The study reveals that online instructors identified concerns related to self, task, and impact. In the end, this study provides practical strategies for the rapidly rising population of online instructors who aspire to design and deliver effective online instruction.

Introduction

Online education has been increasing its landscape in higher education (Sloan Consortium Survey, 2008). Therefore, more and more instructors are joining the realm of online teaching from their desktops, laptops, and mobile devices (Schlosser & Simonson, 2010). However, online instructors continue to face some unique demands including the "whys" and "hows" of online teaching. In particular, literature has documented the following issues that pose distinctive challenges to online instructors as compared to their traditional teaching counterparts.

New Roles of Online Instructors

In a face-to-face class, the physical presence of the instructor allows for immediate communication to clarify any ambiguous information, and students may ask and receive answers more readily. Additionally, instructors can monitor students' learning progress and detect problems in real time. Instructors can also use body language, voice emphasis, or even charisma to engage students. Moreover, they can organize learning activities, such as group work, through multiple rounds of communication and clarifications (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

Online learning, however, requires "the reconstruction of student and instructor roles, relations and practices" (Vonderwell, 2004, p. 31). In an online course, the aforementioned traits in a face-to-face class are blocked by the network, and probably, the asynchronous communication, and exacerbated by the absence of social cues. The absence of instructors' monitoring may result in procrastination or even withdrawal if students do not have strong self-regulative skills, so the online instructor must fulfill multiple roles. Bawane and Spector (2009) prioritized a list of roles by synthesizing previous literature: An online instructor should have a (1) *pedagogical* role, to design and develop the online course and facilitate students' learning; (2) *professional* role, to comply with ethical and legal standards; (3) *evaluative role*, to monitor and evaluate students' learning progress; (4) *social* role, to maintain a positive atmosphere and promote interaction; (5) *technological role*, to select appropriate tools and resources for learning; (6) *advisory role*, to provide guidance based on individual needs and to foster better learning habits; (7) *administrative role*, to manage the course and logistics; and (8) *research role*, to conduct research and constantly improve teaching and learning.

Emerging Technologies

Emerging technologies pose particular challenges to online instructors. First, although the online teaching process must be

technology-mediated, online instructors may not naturally embrace the use of technology in their teaching. A study identified factors influencing faculty's use of technology in their online teaching, including perceptions of online instruction, past experience with online technologies, and specific experiences at the university (Osika, Johnson, & Buteau, 2009). The study indicated that if online instructors have had a negative experience in using technology, even in their traditional teaching, they are more likely to shy away from the use of technology. Second, a recent study found that the use of technologies, particularly learning management systems such as Blackboard or Moodle, can pose challenges to online instructors in that technologies are not always embedded with effective pedagogical practices such as activity design and assessment (Godwin-Jones, 2012). However, the foundational technology model-TPCK (Technology, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) indicated that technologies have to be systemically and meaningfully integrated with pedagogy and content in order to produce an effective learning experience (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

Overall, emerging technologies can pose unique challenges for instructors who are deciding on whether or not to select and integrate technologies into the teaching and learning process.

A New Mode of Interaction

There are three different types of interaction in an online environment that pose specific challenges to online instructors (Moore, 1989; Moore & Kearsley, 2012). The first type of interaction is student - content interaction. Online instructors need to be vigilant to students' online cues such as a lack of participation in discussions or lack of response to an instructor's e-mail inquiries. The second type of interaction is instructor – student interaction. This level of interaction should involve how an online instructor facilitates discussions, provides ongoing feedback, manages teamwork, encourages class morale, and so forth. The third type of interaction is student - student interaction. Because students are all geographically disperse, and delayed communication is common in an online environment, it is especially challenging for students to interact effectively, not to mention that it is also hard for the instructor to manage this level of interaction (Ko & Rossen, 2010).

In general, the three types of interaction remain a challenge for many online instructors because of the absence of immediate behavioral cues in an online environment. For this reason, it takes extra time for online instructors to interact with students and anticipate student responses to different tasks effectively (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

A New Mode of Online Learning and Assessment

An online learning environment reshapes how students learn. More specifically, student learning is facilitated by the unique characteristics of online learning tools such as hyperlinks, audios, videos, static pictures, 3D images, games, interactive quizzes, embedded annotations, and animations (Sherin, Reiser, & Edelson, 2004). Moreover, students can control their paths of exploring knowledge and work through computer-based activities at their own pace. For this reason, online students have to assume more ownership in their learning compared with their counterparts in a traditional class (Craig, Gold, Coldwell, & Mustard, 2008). Overall, quality learning experiences of online students not only depend on the efforts and preparation of the instructor, but also are largely determined by the efforts and preparation of the online students (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

Accordingly, an online learning environment also reshapes how instructors assess. To provide online instructors with a multi-dimensional reflection of students' progress, several types of online activities need to be assessed in an online environment: (1) online discussions; (2) individual projects; (3) individual participation in collaborative activities; and (4) self-reflection (Pratt & Palloff, 2009). To this end, online instructors should (1) include grading rubrics to assess discussions, assignments, projects, and collaboration; (2) include collaborative assessments such as peer reviews and peer evaluations, considering each student's contribution to team projects; and (3) design student-centered assessments that include self-reflection such as reflective journals (Pratt & Palloff, 2009; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

With the understanding of the abovementioned issues that pose particular challenges to online instructors as compared to their traditional teaching, the purpose of this study is to investigate *what* concerns are experienced by online instructors, and *how* these concerns are handled or addressed. To address the purpose of the study, the following guiding research questions were designed:

1. What are the major concerns that online instructors have experienced in their online teaching?

2. How did online instructors handle the identified concerns?

Theoretical Framework

The new modes of online pedagogy and technology can make many online instructors anxious and apprehensive. The questions naturally become: what concerns online instructors have experienced, and what coping strategies they have adopted to address these concerns. To this end, a teacher's concern model is presented to accurately assess concerns and strategies experienced by online instructors in this study.

In 1969, Fuller conducted a series of interviews and research studies to coin the concept of teacher concerns. He identified three developmental stages of teacher concerns across time.

1. Concern about *self* – concern about teaching adequacy and survival
2. Concern about *task* – concern about instructional duties and management
3. Concern about *impact* – concern about student learning

Fuller's research paved the way for many researchers to continue to examine the developmental and learning dynamics of both pre-service and in-service teachers over the past four decades (Boz, 2009; Conway & Clark, 2003; van den Berg, 2002; Watzke, 2007). His concern-steered model focused on teacher experience and has been of great influence on research that investigates facets of teacher professional development. Built on Fuller's work, Mok (2005) further posited that teacher concerns are context-specific, thus different contexts may invoke different concerns. The following section discusses the concerns-based model for teacher development and contextualizes it within an online teaching environment.

Concern about *Self* in Online Teaching

In this stage, researchers identified that many teachers, novice teachers in particular, have two types of concerns (Conway & Clark, 2003; Fuller, 1969; van den Berg, 2002). The first type of concern teachers usually experience is related to teaching self-adequacy, which involves preparation, knowledge of resources, methods of presenting the subject matter, and the assessment of learning. The second type of concern is related to their anxiety about survival in the initial stages of teaching such as coping with the first few days of school, keeping record, and using equipment. Clearly, concerns at this level are self-oriented. What triggers teachers' self-oriented concerns are the uncertainties of how knowledge, skills, preparation, and survival can be adapted smoothly to actual teaching. In general, self-adequacy concerns involve these questions: What is it? How will it affect me? And how adequate am I?

Contextually, in an online environment, self-adequacy concerns usually involve, but are not limited to, these questions: How much time does it take to prepare an online course? Am I able to engage students in online discussions? How do I assess student learning, especially team projects? What tools in a learning management system will I be able to use? What additional technological skills should I learn and update? How do I convert an activity that works well in the classroom setting to an online setting? What policies in particular do I need to set up in the syllabus? What kind of software, hardware, and operation is needed?

The laundry list of questions from online instructors can continue. To alleviate the concerns of self-adequacy of online teaching and the survival of the first few days, it is recommended that online instructors spend extra time to prepare their teaching materials (Bender, 2012;Ying & Cornelious, 2005). A study of 70 online instructors found that more than 35% of online instructors spent 4 to 6 hours to prepare for their courses per week; more than 25% spent 7 to 9 hours per week (McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, & Waugh, 2000).

Concern about *Task* in Online Teaching

The second type of concern is task-related. Particularly, task-related concerns are related to duties, materials, methods, classroom management, number of students, and assessment strategies, which need to be properly handled in any teaching situation (Boz, 2009; Fuller, 1969). Task-related concerns involve questions such as: Am I able to teach this equation effectively? Can I manage 30 students in my classroom?

In an online environment, instructors' task-related concerns primarily center on the balance of three types of interaction: content – student interaction, instructor – student interaction, and student – student interaction. Moore and Kearsley (2012) elaborated that:

> Simply making a video podcast presentation or putting lecture PowerPoint material on a Web site is no more teaching than it would be to send the students a book through the mail. As well as presentations of information, at least as much attention should have been devoted to finding out each individual's need and motivation for learning, giving each individual the opportunity for testing and practicing new knowledge, and for receiving evaluation of the results of such practice" (p. 136).

One typical online task that can generate concerns is, for example, interaction in threaded discussions - the beating heart of an online course. Baglione and Nastanski (2007) pointed out that: "The drawbacks of threaded discussion are that communication dynamics are limited, body language is unobservable and, therefore, learning possibly reduced" (p. 140).

Therefore, in order to meet individual needs and interact effectively in online activities, online instructors have to spend more time and efforts in their online teaching so as to ensure the balance of the three levels of interaction (McKenzie, Mims, Bennett, Waugh, 2000). Meanwhile, the increased amount of time and effort in facilitating the three types of interaction is often compounded by constantly changing questions related to online teaching tasks. For instance: How do I facilitate and motivate online discussion? How involved should I be in online discussions? How do I show I am listening and caring online? How do I assess collaborative projects? Have I justified the grade awarded to that student? Should I give a full score to the student who failed to submit his work before the deadline but claimed a technical problem regarding the Dropbox in the learning management system?

In an effort to alleviate such concerns, Mayes (2011) summarized that online instructors should "explicitly model problem solving, collaboration strategies, metacognitive behaviors, and self-regulation strategies through instruction and discussions" (p.10). In doing so, online instructors will have more opportunities to interact with students and receive feedback so as to perform and adjust their tasks effectively.

Concern about *Impact* in Online Teaching

In this stage, the teachers' concerns shift from one's own survival needs to the needs of their students. In other words, teachers are concerned about their inability to gain students' emotional support in this stage (Fuller 1969; Watzke, 2007). Fuller elaborated that "The specific concerns we have observed are concern about the ability to understand pupils' capacities, to specify objectives for them, to assess their gain, to partial out one's own contribution to pupils' difficulties and gain, and to evaluate oneself in terms of pupil gain" (p. 221). Clearly, the impact concern is about students' needs, not the teachers' needs as indicated in the self and task phases.

In an online learning environment, online instructors are concerned about how to build relationships to inspire trust, performance, satisfaction, and the development of progression amongst online teams (Tseng & Ku, 2011). Example questions online instructors usually ask at this stage include: Do students understand the expectations for the assignments? Was my feedback useful? Was the rubric clear and helpful? Do students feel the sense of an online learning community in my class? Do they learn as much as they do in a traditional class? What do I need to revise for future online teaching?

To address these concerns, Lehman and Conceição (2010) suggested that online instructors create two types of presence in an online environment so that instructional tasks can be completed as expected: telepresence (the sense of "being there") and social presence (the sense of "being together with others") (p. 3). By creating a sense of "being there" and "being together" for students and with students, students will feel that 1) the instructor has placed them at the center of online learning; 2) the instructor is available for the students; and 3) technology is transparent to the learning process, not a barrier to communications and interactions (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

In summary, the teaching concern model has shifted from a self-micro (self-related concerns) to a teaching duties-meso (task-related concerns), and eventually to a student needs-macro level (impact-related concerns). These developmental stages of concerns can be related to general teaching concerns or online teaching concerns when the context is an online environment (Mok, 2005).

Method

Context of the Study

The Preparing Online Instructors (POI) certificate program is a six-week fully online training course for online instructors in a southwestern public institution. To maximize their experiences in teaching and learning in a virtual environment, the POI program expects instructors to enroll as distance students. Instructors will benefit the most from this program through

hands-on experience as an online student, receiving feedback and engaging in continuous reflections in an actual online course. Acting as online students, instructors will also understand why some typical student behaviors, such as submitting late assignments, feeling frustrated with team members, and even dropping out, often occur in online courses. As a result, online instructors will develop skills in managing all aspects of an online course.

20 instructors are allowed to enroll in each session. The course requires at least 4-5 hours per week for readings, online discussions, and individual and team projects. The course has six modules: Online Course Design and Syllabus, Building an Online Classroom, Online Course Activities and Assessment, Online Instructional Content and Multimedia, Copyright and Fair Use, and Best Practices and Online Classroom Management.

Subjects

Participants for the study include six cohorts of online instructors in POI from Fall 2009 to Spring 2012. 103 participants out of 120 enrolled completed the course and shared a reflective journal with the class at the end of the course. 70% of the participants had taught online and/or blended courses before. 40% had taught online more than one year. 30% of the participants were novices who acquired their online teaching skills in the POI course. Of the 103 participants, 54% were males, and 46% were females. 82 participants were tenure track faculty members.

Methodology

This study used an interpretive case study methodology, which "…allows the immersion of oneself in the dynamics of a single social entity and enables the uncovering of events or processes that one might miss with more superficial methods" (Erickson, 1986, p. 238). Burns (1997) further commented that a case study methodology provides a source of hypothesis for future research; it is a particularly suited method to collect preliminary data to advance future major investigations. Although the case study methodology allowed the researchers to gain deep insights into online instructors' concerns and coping strategies, this study only focused on internal generalizability, which draws conclusions within the group studied and rarely makes explicit claims about the generalizability of the participants' accounts to other groups (Yin, 2008).

Data Collection and Analysis

Reflection journals from 103 participants were posted in the learning management system, Desire2Learn. The journals documented online instructors' learning experiences during their six-week professional development training course along with their previous online and blended teaching experiences.

A deductive thematic analysis is used to analyze the data. This method identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within qualitative data. It "… captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80). First, the researchers coded the data to identify broader patterns of concerns and coping strategies experienced by the online instructors. At this phase, it is important to trace online instructors' frequency of acknowledging any issues and strategies they experienced. Second, the researchers conducted discussions and analyses, during which data were re-evaluated so as to gain a greater consistency of interpretation. At this point, patterns and composed themes began to emerge and repeat. After several rounds of re-evaluating all data, all differences were reconciled through discussions between the researchers, and collated themes related to online instructors' concerns and coping strategies were identified. Sample data classified under each of the themes have been entered into the tables in the Results section below.

Results

The study found five self-related concerns experienced by online instructors. The data indicated that the vast majority of the participants felt that they spent more time preparing online courses compared to their traditional courses. Table 1 highlighted these self-adequacy concerns and various practical strategies experienced by the online instructors in the study.

Table 1: Concerns and strategies about *self* –teaching adequacy and survival

Concerns	Strategies
Preparation: Time and Class Preparation	**1.** Carefully planning one's syllabus to include a communication plan, policies, modules, assignments, rubrics, discussion expectations, netiquette, special technical requirements, and technical support contact information. Plan, plan, plan!

	2. Laying sound groundwork with a thorough and detailed syllabus will go a long way in dealing with potential stressors; **3.** Keep assignments clear and simple enough so that students can complete them, yet complex enough so that they remain challenging; **4.** Avoid the unrealistic hit-the-jackpot-the-first-time mentality, which causes tremendous pressure when trying to avoid errors.
Learning Management System (LMS): Clarity and Organization	**1.** Take advantage of tools in a LMS; chunk content into a meaningful and friendly way for easy navigation; **2.** Use a LMS to create group assignments and projects, so students do not clutter up the general conference area; **3.** Use tools in a LMS to manage grades clearly.
Presentation of Content Materials: Adapting Subject Matter to an Online Format and Amount of Information	**1.** Diversify content delivery to include audios, videos, images, concept maps, flow charts, and more; **2.** Condense video and audio lectures into 10-15 minutes, so it is easy to update in the future; **3.** Include well-drafted directions about what is expected for the lectures.
Assessment Design: Haphazard Feedback and Student Learning through Assessment	**1.** Design grading rubrics for discussions, assignments, and individual and collaborative projects; **2.** Include assessments for self-reflection such as blogs, essays, one-minute papers, and online journals; **3.** Design assessments that are clear and likely to work in the online environment; **4.** Diversify assessment techniques to evaluate diverse activities, such as syllabus quizzes, rubrics, peer reviews, interactive and self-evaluated quizzes, and online journals.
Instructional Technology: Overwhelmed by New Tools, Insufficient Use of Technology, and Students' Technological Issues	**1.** Try one tool at the time, be good at it, and incorporate it well into teaching and learning. You want to "Wow" the students, but not at the expense of confusing students and overwhelming yourself; **2.** Many Web 2.0 tools could be used to make tutorials or summations of modules. They will add some energy and personal attention to the course and hopefully make the students feel more engaged; **3.** Ensure that students understand what software and tools are expected; provide tutorial links; **4.** Take advantage of the technological trainings that most universities provide; **5.** Practice, practice, and practice.

The study found that the online instructors had more task-related concerns. Table 2 summarized the task-related concerns and coping strategies.

Table 2: Concerns and strategies about *task* – instructional duties and management

Concerns	**Strategies**
Discussion Management: Time and Class Size	**1.** Have small discussion groups; facilitate the first discussion and set expectations for future discussion activities; assign roles and responsibilities to students to facilitate group discussion; **2.** Prioritize responding to students; **3.** Provide an explicit expectation and evaluation for both the quantity and quality of participation; model richer and reflective discussions; **4.** To avoid students' last minute postings all on Sunday at midnight, have a pattern of two deadlines for postings, e.g., every Thursday midnight, the initial post is due, and every Sunday at midnight, the follow-up posts are due; **5**. Have an explicit policy about the instructor's facilitating role in online discussions.
Communication: Amount of E-mails from Students, Repeated Questions, and Access to Teacher	**1.** Create a FAQ sheet in the course site and encourage students to visit it before sending an e-mail to the instructor; **2.** Make very clear the availability and response time policy for the instructor in the syllabus, e.g., an overall response time for e-mails is less than 48 hours from Monday to Friday, longer on weekends;

	3. Include a tech support contact; **4.** Create a course folder in the Inbox. Set up e-mail rules that students need to include the course title and number in the subject line; **5.** Clear e-mails a certain number of times per day, or as regularly as possible.
Time Management: Keeping Records and Sanity Preservation	**1.** Set up online "class time" as if it were a face-to-face class where you don't let yourself go over so many hours per week to read posts in discussions; **2.** The syllabus and "rules of the road" need to be defined in an absolutely clear language with some of the information spelled out in more than one way. The more these matters are addressed early, the less "insanity" for the instructor; **3.** Use the tracking tools in a learning management system to see whether a student has visited the course. Do that more often in the first few days of class so that the instructor can follow up with absent students if needed.
Introduction to the Class: Initial Isolation and Remoteness	**1.** Find icebreaking activities that are comfortable for introverts, extroverts, and other personality types, e.g., have students create a two-slide PowerPoint with a maximum of four pictures and 30 words to introduce themselves; **2.** Ask all students to post a picture in their introductions.
Deadlines: Remembering Assignment Deadlines	Provide some level of redundancy e.g., assignment deadlines and exams dates can be repeated in the syllabus, course site, and weekly e-mails. Make sure that information placed in different areas is not contradictory.
Grading Scales/Rubrics: Feedback	**1.** Use rubrics or grading criteria; help students see the grade as something constructive not just something arbitrarily given to them; **2.** Set up self-graded quizzes using tools in a learning management system or a free web-based tool like "Hot Potatoes." This should decrease the grading load and encourage self-evaluation.
Academic Integrity: Online Cheating	**1.** Don't just have quizzes and exams. Diversify activities and assessment strategies; **2.** Use a tool such as Skype to actually see the student, coordinating some limited activities in real time.

The study found three impact concerns, which primarily center on enhancing student involvement and building a learning community. Table 3 summarized details of impact concerns and coping strategies.

Table 3: Concerns and strategies about *impact* – student learning

Concerns	**Strategies**
Student Engagement: Interaction	**1.** Have a syllabus quiz to test how well students know the materials and expectations; **2.** Don't just have "cool" stuff; design content and activities that really engage students such as discussions; **3.** Create attention-getters to introduce content, e.g., use YouTube videos, the talk of the nation, documentaries, case studies, digital stories, and film clips to connect students to the real world; **4.** Nurture the growth. The instructor needs to have ample communication with students at the onset, including the fostering of discussions, in particular, with plenty of guidance and praise; **5.** Have collaborative projects. Free web-based social networking tools such as in wikis and Google Docs are useful to engage and present group work; **6.** Teach and model self-regulated skills to improve students' online learning abilities; **7.** Convey the passion. When an instructor has a passion for what they are teaching, the students can feel it.
Learning Community: Social Isolation and Disconnection	**1.** Send a weekly e-mail on a regular date (e.g. every Monday) to summarize the past week and welcome students to the new week to make sure the students are all on track as a whole class; **2.** Effectively interact with "noisy students," "quiet students," and "disruptive students";

	3. Create a Virtual Lounge, Coffee Shop, Water Cooler, or Cyber Sandbox as the secondary forum to allow students to chat about non-academic topics.
Revision: Course Improvement	**1.** Keep a reflection journal for future revision, such as changing deadlines that don't work well in concert with each other and providing enhanced assignment descriptions as a result of student feedback; **2.** Sharing ideas and experiences with other online instructors.

Discussion and Conclusion

Using Fuller's (1969) three-stage concerns-based model for teacher development, this study identifies concerns and coping strategies experienced by 103 online instructors in three years of several offerings of the online professional development course.

Self-related Concerns and Strategies Regarding Online Teaching

Online instructors in this study expressed their concerns about teaching adequacy and survival. More specifically, they articulated concerns about preparation, assessment design, and technological usage, along with secondary concerns regarding the organization and presentation of materials. These same instructors also suggested many strategies to alleviate these concerns.

First, the study recommended that instructors create a detailed syllabus that is comprehensive to drive online course preparation. Second, considering the large amount of content itself, many online instructors pointed out that their expectations, lectures, audio and video recordings, presentations, or any delivery of content or material needs to be clear, concise, diversified, and, if possible and appropriate, include collaborative activity. Striving for shorter presentations of content, various mediums of delivery, and meaningful sequencing or chunking of the content ultimately can allow for optimum student engagement (Bender, 2012; Yang & Cornelious, 2005).

Regarding concerns about assessment design, the online instructors in this study emphatically drew attention to the need to clearly define one's expectations for every assignment, including discussions. The study also identified having assessments for self-reflection, using online-friendly assessment formats, and diversifying assessment techniques when evaluating different activities. Overall, these findings support what the literature suggested that online assessment strategies be multi-dimensional reflections of students' progress (Palloff & Pratt, 2009; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009; Vonderwell, 2004).

Last, but not least, is the major concern about technological usage, and this concern appears to create a great amount of anxiety for many instructors. Several key suggestions were made. First, one simply needs to try a few new tools. Find out what works for his/her needs. Second, slowly incorporate technological tools into the course (on a pedagogical need-basis). Likewise, Ko and Rossen (2004) advocated that instructors need to become "comfortable with […] basic skills, [then,] with experience, [they can…] build on [these experiences] and become more skilled" (p. 18). Third, one may always seek help from technology support trainings.

Task-related Concerns and Strategies Regarding Online Teaching

Online instructors in this study expressed many concerns about instructional duties and management. The top three concerns are related to managing discussions, communication, and time.

To address the concern related to discussions, online instructors in this study recommended having small groups, assigning roles and responsibilities to students, providing explicit expectations, using two posting deadlines, and diversifying different modes of discussions such as chats and video conferences. These suggestions support Lehman and Conceicao's (2010) "telepresence" concept, which not only promotes "being there" for students, but also allows instructional tasks to be completed as expected. Additionally, these suggestions align with advice given by Ko and Rossen (2004) to better develop and manage an online community of learners.

Regarding concerns about communication, the online instructors in this study encouraged a wealth of communication strategies such as a FAQ sheet, a clear availability and response time policy for e-mails, and technical support contacts. In fact, Ko and Rossen (2004) confirmed that a diversity of communication options is necessary in the online environment – including those mentioned above. Furthermore, the various forms and amount of communication only enhance the

student-content interaction and student-instructor interaction necessary for online courses, in accordance with Moore's (1989) and Moore and Kearsley's (2012) interaction-based studies.

In order to relieve anxiety over time management, the online instructors in this study indicated that it is important to set up an online "class time" to keep instruction moving and clearly relate expectations in multiple ways. These suggestions support what researchers called "online time management" for instructors in that online course design and teaching can easily be derailed, for example, by numerous online postings and e-mails from students. For this reason, an online instructor needs to focus on specific tasks and include specific details upfront (Ko & Rossen, 2004; Simonson, Smaldino, Blbright, & Zvacek, 2009).

Additionally, one strategy stood out among other task-related concerns. It was proposed that an online instructor may use a tracker feature in the learning management system to monitor who is accessing the course and certain materials along with how much the student is participating in interactive activities. This identified strategy supports Ko and Rossen's (2004) motion that instructors become very familiar with their LMS's or a particular software's tools, so they can take advantage of the tool itself and the convenience provided.

Impact-related Concerns and Strategies Regarding Online Teaching

Online instructors in this study expressed concerns about student learning. In particular, they articulated concerns about encouraging student engagement, building online learning communities, and improving the course. To assuage these concerns, they encouraged other online instructors to make use of engaging content and interactive activities along with being communicative; send weekly updates, control 'noisy' or 'disruptive' students, and create a social lounge; and extensively plan every semester, keep a reflection journal, and revise for future online courses.

Specifically, the findings of the study suggested employing stimulating delivery of content, interactive activities, and plenty of communication. Furthermore, online instructors in the study recommended especially communicating with one's students, at the beginning of the semester, with plenty of guidance and praise. Such guidance and praise may include announcements about upcoming due dates, encouraging students during difficult times or during challenging projects, clarifying what is misunderstood, and simply maintaining a presence, as presented in Ko and Rossen's (2004) and Lehman and Conceicao's (2010) studies. These actions will heighten student engagement in that students will understand what is expected of them and feel that they are not isolated – neither from the instructor nor from other students.

Moreover, in order to create an effective online learning community, online instructors in this study advised sending out a weekly email summarizing the past week and preparing the students for the following week's work, thereby communicating with the class as a whole and establishing the class's pace and goals for the week. Ko and Rossen (2004), likewise, endorsed sending weekly class emails, managing inappropriate student behavior, and creating a "student lounge" where students may socialize, helping build the online learning community.

A point worth noting is that many of the viewpoints above address Tseng's and Ku's (2011) study concerning the building of online relationships that will enhance trust, performance, satisfaction, and development amongst the class and especially between the student and instructor and the student with other students. Therefore, one can see Moore's (1989) and Moore and Kearsley's (2012) three levels of interaction, student-content, student -instructor, and student-student, taking place at this impact -level of concern and providing solutions to Tseng's and Ku's (2011) identified anxieties.

Finally, to enrich student learning, the online instructors in the study recognized that they would need to be willing to reflect upon and revise their online courses, so they could extensively plan, prepare, and implement these changes in their next online courses. As Ko and Rossen (2004) asserted, "Online education is an evolving field [… thus] lifelong learning is for everyone," including online instructors (p. 391).

Limitations and Future Considerations

This study is a case study that does not intend to be generalizable (Yin, 2008). With this caveat, other online instructors may experience different concerns and identify subsequent coping strategies, depending on specific situations and courses.

Future researchers may want to consider performing similar studies with other online faculty development programs. A possible future research agenda may include follow-up interviews, which could further inform this study and determine if identified challenges in the study were apparent, and if the online instructors' prescribed strategies prevented or alleviated

certain challenges. Furthermore, researchers may consider if such teacher concern - based pedagogy is a useful and/or transferable framework for other forms of online faculty development research/preparation such as e-mentoring, face-to-face workshops, or group training sessions (Burns, 1997).

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