

Examining patterns of student participation in online discussion boards

by

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B.S., Kansas Wesleyan University, 2003
M.B.A., Kansas Wesleyan University, 2005

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

This research examined the nature of the patterns of communication of discussion board users who were enrolled in undergraduate level online courses. For purpose of analysis, this study used Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework (1992). Data were collected from discussion board posts of eight undergraduate online courses that were offered by a small, private, religiously-affiliated, liberal arts university. An examination of these data was further informed by Garrison, Anderson, & Archer (1999) Community of Inquiry model. Using Garrison et al.'s ideas, the researcher described the nature of the interactions between students and faculty with respect to social, cognitive, and teaching presence in online discussion boards.

The findings of this research suggest that understanding the presence of social, cognitive, and teaching presence as well as the nature of the patterns of communication in the discourse is important in developing quality distance education discussion boards. More specifically, they showed that evidence of social and teaching presence was regularly present in an examination of the online discussion boards. Conversely, the data showed very few examples of cognitive presence. Based upon the findings of this research, ideas for how constituents of online education can continue with and improve upon the practices found here relative to social and teaching presence as well as how to re-envision and improve upon cognitive presence and overall-intention for discussion boards were also offered.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. W. Franklin Spikes

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Dedication	xii
Chapter 1 - Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Rationale for the Study	5
Statement of the Problem.....	6
Statement of Purpose	6
Research Questions.....	7
Significance of the Study.....	7
Limitations of the Study	7
Assumptions of the Study.....	8
Definitions	8
Methodology.....	9
Summary.....	10
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	11
An Overview of the Field of Adult Education in the United States	11
The Early Colonial Period (1600-1779)	11
The Period of the Civil War to World War I (1860-1920)	13
The Period of the Modern Era (1921-1961)	15
The Period of the Modern Era to Present (1960 – 2016).....	18
Distance Education	19
Community of Inquiry	20
Summary.....	30
Chapter 3 - Methodology.....	31
Background.....	31
Purpose and Significance of this Study	32

Research Questions.....	33
Research Environment.....	33
Data and Data Collection.....	35
Courses.....	35
Course 1	36
Course 2	36
Course 3	37
Course 4	38
Course 5	39
Course 6	39
Course 7	40
Course 8	41
Data Analysis.....	42
Analysis Process	46
Researcher’s Role	49
Subjectivity Statement	50
Summary.....	52
Chapter 4 - Results.....	53
Synthesis	53
Summary.....	59
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Implications	60
Summary of the Research.....	60
Discussion of the Findings.....	63
Teaching Presence.....	63
Social Presence	65
Cognitive Presence.....	67
Research Question 1	69
Research Question 2	71
Research Question 3	73
Implications and Future Research.....	75
Conclusion	76

References.....	78
Appendix A - IPEDS Snapshot Enrollment Data	85
Appendix B - IRB Letter of Approval – Kansas State University.....	86
Appendix C - IRB Letter of Approval – Participating University.....	87
Appendix D - Data Sample.....	88
Appendix E - Holistic Codes from First Round Coding.....	89
Appendix F - Sample Analytic Memos	93

List of Figures

Figure 1. Diagram of Community of Inquiry Framework	22
Figure 2. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis Framework	45

List of Tables

Table 1. Summary of Courses.....	42
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Dedication

Douglas William Seymour

July 10, 1957 – March 6, 2004

Dedicated to my father, Douglas William Seymour, who passed away in March 2004. My father was smart, funny, and one of the most amazing people I have ever met. I told him once as a child that one day I wanted to be a doctor. Well dad, I don't think this is quite what I meant all those years ago, but dreams do come true!

I also dedicate this work to my family. To my mom, Julie, who has raised me to be strong and independent, and to never give up on my dreams. To my brother, Brian, and sister, Breanna, who have always been there to laugh with or lend a shoulder to cry on, you helped me to continue on throughout this process. To my husband, Kevin, who endured a lot of years to see this dream come true! He picked up the slack, helped with the kids, and gave me the freedom to work on this as much as I needed. To my twins, Lane and Heath, who listened to “No” and “Mom has to work” way more than they wanted to. I hope that you can learn from my dedication and passion for education and to set goals high and achieve them through perseverance and hard work. To my grandma, Darlene, I am so thankful for your unconditional love and support. You helped keep the household in line while I dedicated all my time to this research. To Shay and Dakota, I hope that I can be an inspiration in your lives to go for your dreams and to believe that anything is possible! I love you all!

I also dedicate this to all my family and friends who in one way or another helped to make this all possible.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of this study including a discussion of the fundamental theoretical and practice-related concepts upon which it is based. It includes the problem statement and purpose that are associated with this research and lists the research questions which guide it. Additionally, the research methodology that was used to complete this research as well as the assumptions and limitations that are associated with it presented.

Background

Currently, higher education institutions are using distance education as a means to reach new students and insure their place in an increasingly competitive market place. Moore and Kearsley (2012) wrote that education reflects teaching and learning aspects and that what is being studied is education, therefore “because our subject for study is learning *and* teaching we should use the term *education*, the term that correctly describes a relationship that has *two* sides, teacher and learner” (p. 1). In this study, the term distance education was examined in regards to that definition as a construct. Many other widely used terms that are synonymous with distance education are online learning, e-learning, distance learning, asynchronous learning, distributed learning, and home study (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Structurally, however, distance education occurs in several different levels. Moore and Kearsley (2012) write about several of them in terms of single-mode institutions, dual-mode institutions, and virtual universities and consortia. For this research, dual-mode is the important structure as they define it as an “institution that adds distance education to its previously established campus and class-based teaching” (p. 4). Single mode institutions utilize all their resources to teach distance students. Virtual university is when students can be located in a different place from the instructional media and staff.

The Babson Survey Research Group directed by Allen and Seaman (Allen & Seaman, 2014) examined the state of online learning in 2,800 colleges and universities. The resulting data appeared in *Grade Change - Tracking Online Education in the United States* (Allen & Seaman, 2014). They reported that “7.1 million students took at least one online course during the fall 2012 semester” (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 15). The same study indicated that 1.6 million students took an online course in 2002 and in 2012, 7.1 million, enrolled in an online course, a “compound annual growth rate of 16.1 percent” (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 15). Later in the report, the authors stated,

Academic leaders are very optimistic that online learning will continue to impact an increasing fraction of higher education students. Nearly two-thirds responded that this was “Very likely,” with an additional one-quarter calling it “Likely.” Only one percent said that it was “Not at all likely” that a majority of students would be taking at least one online course in the next five years (p. 20).

The latest iteration of the survey was published online in February 2016 reported a “total of 5.8 million fall 2014 distance education students” with “2.85 million taking all of their courses at a distance” (Allen & Seaman, 2015, p. 4). The “other 2.97 million students took some, but not all, courses at a distance” (Allen & Seaman, 2015, p. 4). Also stated in the report is “a large majority of all institutions with distance education students report that online education is critical to their long-term strategy” (Allen & Seaman, 2015, p. 24).

With this growing trend in higher education, Smith (2010) stated “the adult learner population is increasingly diverse with respect to age, gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, work experiences, educational background, learning styles, and epistemologies” (p. 147). With access to education from online delivery instruction, technology and the Internet, students can be located anywhere in the world and be taking a course or completing an entire degree program.

Smith (2010) continued “educators, therefore, embrace the need to change their learning design and facilitation approaches” (p. 147), thus situating the rationale for this study.

As the development and implementation of this form of instructional delivery changes the nature of the modern college campus, so too is the composition and diversity of the student body who is participating in distance education programs changing. This diversity has been sparked by the ubiquitous nature of the Internet and the worldwide opportunity that it offers to students to be engaged in all forms of degree and non-degree related learning initiatives. Equally important to many colleges and universities are the prospects of increasing enrollments and expanded revenue streams that may occur as a result of adding, enhancing, or moving to distance education. Even though there is an increasing interest in distance education from the viewpoint of a practical approach to delivering courses, the body of knowledge which supports how to practically develop and implement concepts of distance education is still evolving. Thus, developing a better understanding of such matters as the dynamics of online teaching and learning, effective online instructional strategies, and student-to-student and faculty member-to-student communication patterns and interactions in online programs is in order.

With limited knowledge surrounding the discourse that takes place inside an online discussion board, this study sought to explain the nature of the patterns of communication among discussion board users. I wanted to understand the nature of discussion boards including who introduced topics and how, what patterns existed within the discussion boards, and if and how the concept of Community of Inquiry (Garrison et al., 1999) was evident in discussion board posts. This study is relevant for all academic constituents such as administrators, faculty, and instructional designers who are looking to build online courses and programs. It is hoped that this research will allow these groups of people to better understand the nature of discourse that is

present in an online course, determine how the elements of social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence are present, and inform discussion in an online academic learning environment. For social presence, I was inspecting for evidence that student personalities are emanating themselves inside the discussion board postings. For teaching presence, I was searching to understand by finding evidence that faculty members were participating, responding to questions, clearly stating expectations, and available to the students of the course. For cognitive presence, I was inspecting the discussion boards for the presence of understanding of material presented, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as making connections of what the students believed was factual and developing systems of truths in the materials presented. This study examined data from discussion boards utilizing the framework developed by Norman Fairclough (1992). This framework is relational and begins analysis with an in-depth look at the written text of the discussion board, followed by analysis of the process of how this text is produced and consumed, and lastly with application to the broad societal currents surrounding the text in the study. The aim was to look at all three of the dimensions and find the relationships with the text being studied based on what is found in each dimension. Since discussion boards are all text, this methodological framework allowed me to explore communication in the discussion boards and go beyond just the written word. Along with this methodological framework, I used the lens of Community of Inquiry to help examine the text production with the areas of social, teaching, and cognitive presence. Discussion board posts were analyzed in a three-dimensional approach that first began with analysis of text in a grammatical sense, and then considered discursive practice that looks into production and consumption of the text. Finally, the last step examined social practice and how the relationship forms between the three-dimensions of text, discursive practice and social practice.

Rationale for the Study

To many, the birth of online courses and distance education was seen as a fad. However, according to Allen & Seaman (2013, 2014, 2015) there is continued growth in the amount of people taking a course delivered online. This study is important to a new and rapidly growing field in that it is anticipated that it will help with the practice of developing new strategies when utilizing discussion boards in online courses as well as aid in the expansion of literature for distance education and building online communities. Early research (McConnell, 2000; Dutton, Dutton, and Perry, 2002; Fjermestad, Hiltz, and Zhang, 2005) was focused on comparing face-to-face courses with this new online delivery mechanism to determine if courses that used these two formats were of the same quality. As distance education became common place in university offerings, researchers began to add to the body of literature in many areas, such as implementation, administrative support, and faculty support, theoretical and practical approaches. To date, one area with little published research is discussion boards along with little research utilizing undergraduate students in the population. The Babson Research Group's latest publication (Allen & Seaman, 2015) stated for the fall 2014 data "there are nearly five times as many undergraduate enrollments (4,862,519) as graduate enrollments (966,307) among students taking at least one distance education course" (p. 17). However, the report also stated "universities often start with graduate programs when implementing distance education, as their shorter duration makes them more cost-effective to develop and deliver than undergraduate programs" (Allen & Seaman, 2015, p. 17). Through the use of the data reported by these universities and colleges and the consistently published reports from The Babson Research Group, it becomes clear that research is needed for the undergraduate population as they are the majority population taking online courses.

Statement of the Problem

While many institutions are delivering anything from individual online courses to full online degree programs, little is known about the both the patterns of communication that take place inside online discussion boards and the power dynamics present therein. In general however, the related literature about distance education focuses upon examining perceptions of effectiveness, quality, and satisfaction.

Scholars (Rogers, 2006; Dieter, 2011; Sutton, 2012) have researched asynchronous learning networks in order to define a new system of delivery and many of these researchers compared this new delivery system to traditional face-to-face courses. Seok, DaCosta, Kinsell, & Tung (2010) reported in their study which explored effectiveness of online delivery that there were differences in perception on effectiveness between the students and the teacher. A large number of studies have been conducted on the individual's satisfaction with online learning (Lee, 2010; Lu & Chiou, 2010; Wickersham & McGee, 2008; Wyatt, 2005; Young & Norgard, 2006).

While there is a large amount of research that has occurred over the last decade about equality and effectiveness of distance education (Seok, DaCosta, Kinsell, & Tung, 2010; Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000) there remains a growing need for more research in order to advance our understanding of distance education practice within higher education settings. This research is designed to contribute to that knowledge base with a specific focus upon the creation, development, and building of discussion boards in online courses.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research was to examine the nature of the patterns of communication of discussion board users in undergraduate distance education courses. More particularly, it is

intended to differentiate the patterns, power struggles, and significant meaning behind the language presented through the discussion board threads.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions

1. What is the nature of the patterns of communication inside the discussion boards?
2. Does the structure of the language that is used by students in online discussion boards create and/or maintain power relationships? If so, how and to what extent?
3. Are the verbal interactions that are present in online discussion boards reflective of various social and historical factors? If so, how and to what extent?

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to fill in the gap in the distance education research literature concerning the nature of verbal interactions in online discussion board threads in asynchronous learning networks. Likewise, it is hoped that the findings of this research will better inform faculty, administrators of online courses and programs, as well as instructional designers about developing better practice designed to facilitate community building, foster a better learning environment for students taking online classes that utilize discussion boards as the primary online classroom and add to the knowledge base surrounding characteristics for building communities of inquiry within distance education environments.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in the following two ways. First, only data from discussion board posts of undergraduate courses were examined. Graduate level courses were not included in this research. Secondly, it included only those courses to which the researcher had access due to the nature of the online program that served as the basis for this study.

Assumptions of the Study

For the purpose of this study it was assumed that the data are truthful, meaning that the participants in the class who are posting on the discussion boards are posting statements which are accurately reflective of their thoughts.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this research.

Asynchronous Learning – “use of the internet for access to a learning environment at times and locations to suit the user” (Mason and Rennie, 2006, p. 7)

Community of Inquiry – A methodological framework “that constitutes three elements essential to an educational transaction – cognitive presence, social presence, teaching presence” (Garrison, et al., 1999, p. 87)

Computer Conferencing – also called computer-mediated communication (CMC) and refers to “the kind of software that facilitates textual interactions amongst students and the tutor” and “was an early word for e-learning” (Moore and Kearsley, 2012, p. 28)

Correspondence courses – “courses of instruction that were delivered by mail” (Moore and Kearsley, 2012, p. 23)

Critical Discourse Analysis – “is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 352)

Discourse Analysis – “the analysis of language-in-use” (Gee, 2005, p. 5)

Discussion board – “a variation of a bulletin board system that allows learners and tutors to engage in an extended, structured dialogue on topics of relevance to their course of study” (Mason and Rennie, 2006, p. 39)

Distance education – “is teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization” (Moore and Kearsley, 2012, p. 2)

Face-to-Face – (f2f) “meetings that take place in person, i.e. with the participants in the same room” (Mason and Rennie, 2006, p. 47)

Netiquette – “common term for ‘network etiquette’ or the ‘rules of engagement’ for online practitioners” (Mason and Rennie, 2006, p. 84)

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to examine the nature of the patterns of communication of discussion board users in undergraduate distance education courses. In order to examine text the methodological approach offered by Fairclough's three-dimensional concept of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (1992) was used. This framework gave a guiding pathway on how to conduct the analysis. The lens of Garrison et al's Community of Inquiry Framework (CoI) (1999) was used to inform the analysis of the data that resulted from this research. This model uses social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence as elements of the educational experience through an educational transaction. Garrison defined a learning community as individuals who collaboratively engage in critical discourse and reflection in which they construct meaning and mutual understanding (as cited in Lambert & Fisher, 2013). From this combination of theoretical and methodological frameworks, I felt I could gain deeper understanding into the development of discussion boards which would in turn provide some evidence into the approach of creating discussion boards and to expose what the purpose of using the online discussion board feature with distance education courses.

Summary

This chapter provided information on the background of this study and a brief overview into what types of research was being conducted within distance education. Also included in this chapter are sections pertaining to the rationale for the study, the statements of the problem and purpose, guiding research questions, as well as the limitations, assumptions, and definitions of terms of the study. Next, in Chapter Two, a review of past and current literature that is related to this research is presented.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A review of the literature which has guided the development of this study is presented in this chapter. It begins with a discussion of field of adult education in the United States. This is followed by information about the evolution of distance education. Also included in this chapter is a description of the Community of Inquiry Framework which informed the analysis that was conducted in this study and Critical Discourse Analysis, the means by which the data for this research were examined.

An Overview of the Field of Adult Education in the United States

As the delivery of distance education and online courses for adult learners in higher education, many academics began to question the quality and equivalency of them to their face-to-face counterpart and initiate research to examine this matter. Clearly, distance education holds an important place in the field of adult education today. Because of this, it is useful to understand the historical evolution of its precursors prior to examining the recent developments of distance learning. Accordingly, a discussion of key points associated with the growth of the field of adult education follows. Timeframes that were used were developed by Knowles (1977). Subsequent to this discussion, information about specific aspects of distance learning is presented.

The Early Colonial Period (1600-1779)

Three of the leading scholars on the history of adult education, Stubblefield & Keane (1994) and Knowles (1977), have described the evolution of adult education from its early practices to a formal field in the United States today. A recording of the history began with the settlement of what is now the United States (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). Stubblefield & Keane (1994) stated “much of adult education in the early colonial period owed less to formal

institutions, educational or otherwise, than to everyday living” (p. 19). Harvard College (established in 1636) owned the only printing press in the colonies. The press was primarily used for printing Bibles, cookbooks, almanacs, manuals and practical items in households at the time for teaching literacy (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). With limited formal education establishments and colonial governments that lacked funding, like-minded individuals began to congregate and form libraries, societies, and institutions (Stubblefield & Keane, 1994). Knowles (1977) also noted that for most of the colonies, education was unorganized and “primarily vocational” (p. 4). Knowles (1977) wrote “the notion that every person can get ahead if he is willing to work hard” (p. 4) began to take shape in the United States while at the same time the British notion that only the prominent would be literate and educated began to fade. For most of the colonists, skills were what was needed in order to gain the supplies to survive, therefore, colonial legislatures began to pass laws requiring apprenticeships to children of the poor (Knowles, 1977). Universities were on the rise in the late 1600’s, but the public education system as we know it today was originally formed from the passing of two laws in 1642 and 1647 which made it mandatory to teach children to read by parents and masters (Knowles, 1977). “[By] the end of the Revolution town schools were a common phenomenon” (Knowles, 1977, p. 6) which then led to private vocational schools and secondary schools.

Knowles (1977) suggested “the most spectacular offspring of the hunger for knowledge that characterized this period was the lyceum” (p. 16) which began during the American Revolution and is contributed to the pioneering of “developments in the methods and substance of adult education” (p. 16). “Lyceums are associations formed for the mutual improvement of their members and the common benefit of society” (Knowles, 1977, p. 17). Knowles (1977) stated “the lyceum movement was significant in many respects” (p. 18) as it laid the foundation

in adult education because of an integrated “national system of local groups organized primarily for adult educational purposes” (p. 18). As growth continued in the early United States with the westward expansion and the creation of systems to education children, a need arose to educate youth who were already working, so the establishment by large cities of evening schools arose (Knowles, 1977). While this was not directly for adult education, this laid the path for what would become “one of the most important institutions for the education of adults in our country” (Knowles, 1977, p. 30).

Colleges and universities began to grow in the early 1800’s as the United States government began to pass laws and acts for public land to be given to states for “the establishment of state land-grant colleges” (Knowles, 1977, p. 31). The Morrill Act of 1862 proved to be the most important historical event to lay the foundation to formal adult education because it would be the event that created the Cooperative Extension Service, “which was later to provide the home base for the most extensive adult education program ever created” (Knowles, 1977, p. 31).

The Period of the Civil War to World War I (1860-1920)

In the early 1880’s, “Bishop John H. Vincent cofounded the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 24). This organization delivered readings through the mail. This development occurred simultaneously with the expansion of the railroad system. In 1883, this organization was renamed from the Chautauqua Correspondence College to the Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts and was authorized by the State of New York to award diplomas and degrees by correspondence (Bittner & Mallory, 1933). Along with Chautauqua, a private vocational school established mining safety courses through correspondence as well (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). This became a highly successful course

because of the close ties with corporate management to improve the worker's skills with a reduction in cost on the training expenses (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). Soon this type of delivery method was growing and began to encompass a wide range of subject matter. "The principal motive for the early correspondence educators was the vision of using technology to reach out to those who were otherwise unprovided for" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 25). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) stated "we might argue that technology is a major thrust of learning today, but there is still job-training, literacy, civic education, liberal and leisure learning, along with community-based social-action initiatives" (p. 7). As a summer professor at the Chautauqua Institute, William Rainey Harper, brought his interest in correspondence teaching and his experience to his presidency at the University of Chicago in 1892 where he merged correspondence study with formal university education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

One large group of individuals who were about to change the history of distance education were women. Because many women were not allowed to be admitted to universities they began to chart new pathways to learning through their participation in correspondence programs. "Correspondence instruction at the land grant universities was developed on the policy foundation of the 1862 Morrill Act"(Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 26) which indicated that educational opportunities would be available to anyone with any background. Over the years, correspondence learning programs continued to grow in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors. This resulted in the creation of two major professional organizations, the National Home and Study Council (NHSC) and the National University Extension Association (NUEA) to oversee standards of practice (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

The Period of the Modern Era (1921-1961)

This period was chronicled as one of great changes. “The total [world] population increased in size by over one third” (Knowles, 1977, p. 76) and the balance between urban and rural jumped to “predominantly urban” (Knowles, 1977, p. 76). The nation saw turmoil with World War I, followed by economic growth that would then be hampered by The Great Depression, and then the upheaval of World War II (Knowles, 1977, p. 77). After World War II, a resurgence in jobs occurred by the increase and expansion of the industrial trade. Knowles (1977) chronicled significant educational developments from business and industry as the number of companies providing educational opportunities for their employees, subject matter of industrial education broadened and deepened, industry providing facilities designed specifically for education, and industry developing closer cooperation with formal education institutions.

An influential scholar during this period was Eduard C. Lindeman. He had a deep belief in democracy for the United States and this belief also led him to believe that in order to have democracy, educating adults was the key to keeping our country a democracy. In 1926 his book, *The Meaning of Adult Education* was published. In it he wrote adult education began where vocational education left off and “its purpose is to put meaning into the whole life” (1926, p. 7). He also wrote that “whole of life is learning, therefore education can have no endings” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 6). Lindeman further suggested that adults need intelligence and an “intelligent person sees facts” (1926, p. 2) as well as needing power over their environment and that “man succeeds in accommodating himself and his purposes to the order of nature by means of adjustments *to* and *with*, not against natural processes” (1926, p. 33) leading him to state “knowledge is surely one of the chief aspects of power” (1926, p. 43). Lindeman (1926) believed that adult education was a continuous process of evaluating human experiences by

being alert and in this process adults were discovering new meanings. In *The Meaning of Adult Education* he closed by stating “if adult education is to produce a difference of quality in the use of intelligence, its promoters will do well to devote their major concern to method and not content” (Lindeman, 1926, p. 179). In a later article Lindeman (1944) stated

We may then conclude that one of the first of all the needs to be met by adult education is this: adults need to learn how to make important choices respecting issues they are obliged to confront. Adult education is, therefore, a mode of social adaptation (p. 115).

Lindeman (1944) believed that citizens needed to “put knowledge to use in the interest of human welfare” (p. 117). He also was out-spoken for social justice, by stating

We speak of the issues of freedom, of equality, of security, but these are items within the large context of knowing. There can be no genuine freedom or equality or security in a society which discounts intelligence (p. 117)

Lindeman believed in order for the country to keep progressing the adults needed to sustain intellectual growth and social understanding (Lindeman, 1944). In Lindeman’s (1945) work, *The Sociology of Adult Education*, he scolded the American sociologists for not researching adult education. Lindeman (1945) stated “adult education offers the sociologist a wide assortment of opportunities for research” and “for making a contribution to democratic progress” (p. 6). He also stated “wherever adult education takes root in a given culture the result is the emergence of new social forms” (Lindeman, 1945, p. 7). Lindeman brought a new kind of thinking for those interested in adult education and democracy by stating “what distinguishes adult education is the fact that its purpose is definitely social” (Lindeman, 1945, pp. 8-9). The United States was facing great challenges and this required decision to be made for future of the country.

Lindeman (1945) stated on the crucial issues “our future as a nation depends but also on the future quality of life in the world. It is these very issues which furnish adult education with its program and its mission” (pp. 12-13).

This period saw great growth in the number and size of college and universities in the United States with “their student bodies, faculties, and physical plants were multiplied by six between 1920 and 1960 (Knowles, 1977, p. 83). In addition "the core curriculum would provide students with basic education” (Knowles, 1977, p. 83) leading colleges and universities to develop “the university into closer relationship with the people” (Knowles, 1977, p. 83).

The Cooperative Extension was instrumental in adapting to the changes in agriculture and the rural population. The Cooperative Extension service began with a narrow concern for “individual farmers as a producer of food and fiber toward a broad concern for farmers and their families as whole human beings” (Knowles, 1977, p. 90). Eventually, it became concerned with conservation, efficient crop production, livestock, leadership and community improvement (Knowles, 1977).

Foundations became another driving source of adult education. In 1923, The Carnegie Corporation of New York president Frederick P. Keppel persuaded the trustees to “include adult education and the arts in their list of interests” (Knowles, 1977, p. 94). The Corporation held several meetings and finally established the “American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) at a conference held in Chicago on March 26 and 27, 1926” (Knowles, 1977, p. 95). Once the AAAE was founded the “Carnegie Corporation contributed a total of \$4,850,000 to the support of adult education” (Knowles, 1977, p. 95). “Foundations provided a large share of whatever risk capital was available to the field for experimentation and new developments” (Knowles, 1977, p. 97) throughout this period.

Throughout this time period, government involvement increased in order to help restore a nation from turmoil of war and depression to the rise of the economy. The nation began to see many government agencies forming. Soon to follow was the formation of labor unions.

Libraries became greatly involved in the education of adults during this era. Another big boost was the “passage of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights” that led to “tremendous impetus to the back-to-school movement of returning veterans” (Knowles, 1977, p. 137).

Finally, adult education began to take shape in the religious institutions. A major component for religious institutions was the ability to “train lay and professional leaders” (Knowles, 1977, p. 146) by a new process of “group techniques into the educational activities” (Knowles, 1977, p. 146). At the beginning of this time period, the term adult education was rarely/never used, but because of the developments in this era, by 1960 this was a widely used phrase (Knowles, 1977).

The Period of the Modern Era to Present (1960 – 2016)

In the late 1960’s to the early 1990’s, there were many organizations forming as well as many name changes in order to help brand correspondence learning. Adult education could use mail, radio, and some television as a delivery platform. For example, “by the end of the 1970’s, there were about 150 educational TV stations broadcasting instructional TV programs” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 30). But also “by the 1980’s, there were around 200 college-level telecourses produced by universities” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 31). This demonstrated the growth of formal and informal adult education delivery options.

Finally, with the development and launch of the World Wide Web or the Internet in the late 1990’s, the computer and Internet changed the delivery method of correspondence learning. Adult education is mostly associated with formal learning provided by colleges and universities. As more people were able to gain access to the personal computer and the Internet, once again non-profit and for-profit sectors were finding renewed financial prosperity allowing any

individual with the means and technology to enroll in courses and full degree programs. “Adults engage in learning throughout their lives in a variety of venues and formats” (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 18). Currently the field struggles with “what counts as adult and continuing education” (Kasworm, Rose, & Ross-Gordon, 2010, p. 2). “As the industrial economy of the early 20th century created remunerative work” (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 19) this had led to the workforce of today putting a “premium on an educated workforce” (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 19). Today the field of adult education is concerned with areas related to participation, access, adult development, diversity, social justice and globalization (Hansman & Mott, 2010).

Distance Education

Most of the early research on computer-mediated-communication (CMC), an early form of distance education, began in the 1970's. Hiltz and Turoff (1978) discussed the impact that such technological initiations could have on management, social and professional services, science and technology, and education. Several researchers also began studying such related issues as interface design, access, operational practices and software to support CMC's (Vallee and Johansen 1974; Johanson, Vallee and Spangler 1979; Kerr and Hiltz 1982). In a study by Phillips, Santoro, and Kuehn (1988) computer conferencing was evaluated in relationship to human-computer interaction. This work laid the ground work for researchers to study CMC in education since much of the early accessors to the Internet were with the Department of Defense and major universities. Many of the studies on CMC for distance education within universities were articles focused on strategies, systems, software selection, and implementation issues (Harasim 1989; Mason and Kaye 1989; Hiltz 1994; Berge and Collins 1995; Palloff and Pratt 2001; Fisher 2003; Bourne and Moore 2004). Hiltz's (1986) research was instrumental in using CMC's to construct a new learning environment by developing the “Virtual Classroom”. This

research led to the finding that CMC led to the “chance to participate in a different kind of learning experience, one based on an active learning community working together to explore the subject area of a course” (Hiltz, 1994, p. 262). In related research, others began to examine if asynchronous networks and CMC were effective teaching medium for delivering learning outcomes at least equivalent to those of face-to-face courses (McConnell, 2000; Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000; Dutton et al., 2002; Swan, 2003; Fjermestad et al., 2005). As empirical data began to be developed in support of distance education initiatives, various conceptual frameworks began to aid in the understanding of these emerging practices.

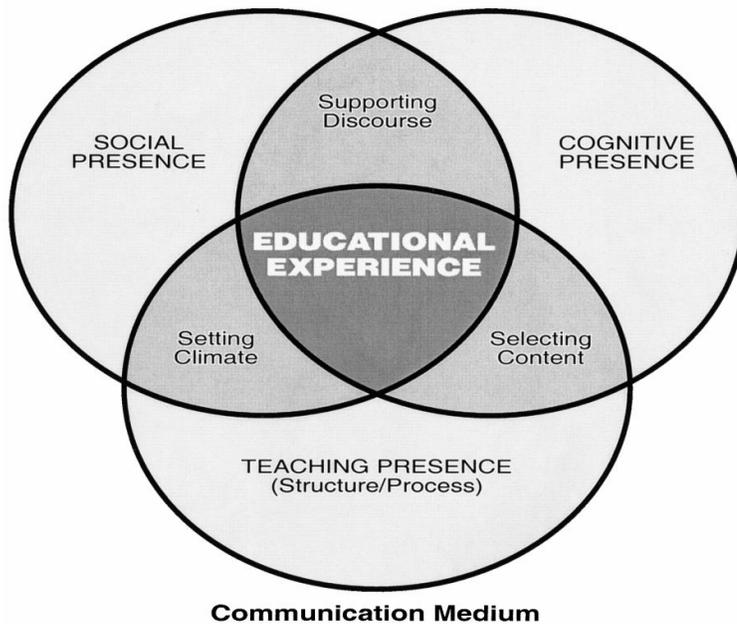
Because of the debate from academics on the equivalency between face-to-face courses and their online course counterparts, the initiation of research on delivery, quality, and equivalency was studied. The literature includes a number of works which are related to the historical development of distance education in the United States. Representative of the larger body of it are Bittner and Mallory (1933), MacKenzie, Christensen, and Rigby (1968), Pittman (1990; 1998; 2003), Watkins and Wright (1991), Wedemeyer (1963; 1966), Wedemeyer and Najem (1969), and Dressel and Thompson (1973). More recently, Michael Moore has studied and written about the evolution of distance learning. His works include *Contemporary Issues in American Distance Education* (1990), and *Distance Education: A Systems View* (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, 2005, 2012). He also developed the Transactional Distance Theory, which was designed to help scholars and researchers look at hypotheses for research studies into distance education both in design and developments (Kang, 2009).

Community of Inquiry

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework was an outcome through the work of Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer at the University of Alberta (Garrison, et al.,

2000). It was described by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2010) as being “generic in that it is conceptually grounded in theories of teaching and learning in higher education” (p. 6). As this research was being conducted at a time when there was a lack of theoretical models and it was “designed for (use in) exploratory and descriptive studies” (Garrison et. al., 2010, p. 6). The CoI model identifies social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence as elements that emerged from the data analysis of written transcripts from computer conferencing as a medium to facilitate educational experiences. Garrison et al. (1999) defined cognitive presence as “the participants in The Community of Inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication (p. 89). Next they defined social presence as “the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community” (p. 89). Finally, teaching presence was described as having two general functions. The first is established by the teacher and consists of “the design of the course regarding presentation and organization of the learning materials and objectives” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 90). The second function is facilitation and that can be a role for the teacher but also any of the participants. Facilitation is described as being the function “to support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 90). Diagram of the Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison et al., 2000) follows in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Diagram of Community of Inquiry Framework
Community of Inquiry



Garrison et al., (2000), p. 88

Garrison et al. (2000) in their seminal piece introduced the CoI framework as a “conceptual framework that identifies the elements that are crucial prerequisites for a successful higher educational experience” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 87). One key outcome of this study was that computer conferencing had considerable potential to create of community of inquiry for educational purposes (Garrison et al., 2000).

Garrison et al., (2010) based this idea on Lipman’s (1991, 2003) definition of a community of inquiry from analysis of classroom experiences as “students listen to one another with respect, build on one another’s ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another’s assumptions” (2003, p. 20).

Garrison et al. (1999) stated that “learning occurs within the Community through the interaction of the three core elements” (p. 88) which are cognitive presence, social presence, and

teaching presence and he wanted to study and determine how crucial these components are of the higher education experience as education is moved into computer mediated environments. As part of the education experience, students are wanting to learn new material and master concepts. Lipman (1991) has evidenced the importance of community and more specifically described important characteristics of the community of inquiry to include question, reason, connection, deliberation, challenge ideas, and a development of problem-solving techniques.

While not inclusive of the many number of studies which use Community of Inquiry framework, a description of several studies that are relevant to this research follows.

Haythornthwaite and Kazmer (2002) analyzed graduate students' experience concerning the integration of the online community into their space of the student's home, work, and social environments. They studied seventeen graduate students who were enrolled in a library science degree program and collected data in the forms of questionnaires and interviews. They "explored students' involvement with the online learning community, and how this affected and was affected by their relationships with family, work, volunteer, and peer groups"

(Hawthornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002, p. 436). Their study revealed how long the student had been in the program affected their experiences with interacting with the group and this was because learning the technology and way to interact with the group could be stressful for new students but as soon as they were comfortable with the new technologies then developing a strong sense of community was less difficult (Hawthornethwaite & Kazmer, 2002). The study also revealed students must prioritize time in order to maintain participation in the online community for the degree and this typically led to adjustments on "time spent with spouses, adjustments to workloads, less time spent with family and friends and removing volunteer work" (Hawthornethwaite & Kazmer, 2002, p. 459). While there was a reduction and adjustment in

these items, students reported losing friendships, but talked to a great extent about the new friends made and the support that was being given from the new community (Hawthornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002). The online community along with offline friends and family aided with the students' ability to cope with the academic undertaking and balance "daily responsibilities, obligations and management of demands to fulfill this degree" (Hawthornthwaite & Kazmer, 2002, p. 460).

Conrad (2005) conducted a multi-year, multi-methods study of seventeen online graduate students to get a sense of the cohorts' development of a sense of community. He stated that online learners "creation of community simulates for online learners the comforts of home, providing a safe climate, an atmosphere of trust and respect, an invitation for intellectual exchange, and a gathering place for like-minded individuals who are sharing a journey that includes similar activities, purpose, and goals" (p. 2). The definition of community at the beginning of the study "had words such as group, technology, and exchange" (p. 6) as associated words and then by the end of the study "family and friendships" (p. 7) became words associated with community. Conrad (2005) found "adult learners felt that they themselves were the primary architects of their well-developed sense of community" (p. 8). By the end of the study, learners were listing several groups like spouses and administrators as part of building the community, and finally, Conrad (2005) reported "whatever dissension existed over contributions to the creation of community centered on the contribution of instructors" (p. 12). The results of this research further indicated good instructors made a good sense of community and associations of a good instructor was one who participated, gave timely and appropriate feedback, and was prompt and knowledgeable (Conrad, 2005). It is clear establishing a community for online learners is an important piece for success and "learners experienced community both cognitively

and emotionally, using it as a tool to enhance the quality of their learning and as a comfort” (Conrad, 2005 p. 17).

Akyol and Garrison (2009) published a book chapter on adult online learning proposing using Community of Inquiry to create effective online communities. In this study, Akyol and Garrison (2009) used fifteen students in a graduate course to collect data to “explore how the community of inquiry develops for adult learners as well as how the community of inquiry supports and moves adult learning toward intend goals” (p. 56). Data were collected from the CoI Survey, interviews on social, cognitive, and teaching presence, and then coding from the transcription of the interviews (Akyol and Garrison, 2009). Akyol and Garrison’s (2009) research findings showed that “students’ sense of community of inquiry developed according to their sense of teaching presence, cognitive presence and social presence” (Akyol and Garrison (2009, p. 57). The majority of the participants in the study agreed upon the majority of the teaching presence was found on the discussion boards but reference “appreciation of frequent communication, immediate feedback, availability, good balance on learning activities, good facilitation, correcting misunderstand, and modeling the use of tools” (Akyol and Garrison, 2009, p. 57). Social presence was mostly referenced by the discussion board threads. Cognitive presence was mostly referenced by resources and learning activities and agreement among students that “they knew how to use and apply knowledge and develop their solutions” (Akyol and Garrison, 2009, p. 59). “This study found a direct impact of teaching presence on perceived learning and satisfaction” (Akyol and Garrison, 2009, p. 62). “CoI emphasizes collaboration” (Akyol and Garrison, 2009, p. 63) therefore cognitive presence was resonating with the discussion boards and “students were able to create knowledge collaboratively by adding to each other’s ideas, or integrating those ideas and information” (Akyol and Garrison, 2009, p. 63).

Akyol and Garrison (2009) concluded online learning is particularly appropriate for adult learners and this increases the need for developing better learning environments.

In another example, Clarke and Bartholomew (2014) developed an analytical tool they could use to categorize types of comments made by instructors. There are discerning studies about how much an instructor should participate in discussion boards and this study was conducted to take a deeper look into the discourse of discussion boards. Clarke and Bartholomew (2014) “believe a better understanding of asynchronous discussions can lead to continued research on this important pedagogical approach” (p. 2). Data for this study came from approximately one hundred students in a master’s program in education. Results from this study include codes developed from the content analysis. The most common were “social comments” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 11) followed by “teaching” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 13). The researchers defined a teaching code comment as one “whose purpose was to facilitate and direct student learning” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 13). The final code category with the least amount of frequency were “cognitive codes” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 13). These types of codes were associated with “student exploration, construction, resolution, and confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 13). From the perspective of the teachers in this study, they reported their role in discussion boards to be more a “facilitator rather than direct instructors” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 16). This led the researchers to report this to possibly be an indication on why social codes were the most frequent and cognitive codes the most infrequent (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014). An important finding in this research was “forums were relatively open and the questions asked students to engage in readings, digest the material, process and reflect upon the topics” (Clarke and Bartholomew, 2014, p. 18). Clarke and

Bartholomew (2014) concluded “digging beneath the surface level we can learn more about how this medium supports different types of discursive relationships and can help us create more effective online pedagogy” (p. 20).

In a research study by Cho and Tobias (2016) named *Should Instructors Require Discussion in Online Courses? Effects of Online Discussion on Community of Inquiry, Learner Time, Satisfaction and Achievement*, the authors discuss the relationship between discussion boards and student learning experiences “measured with community of inquiry, learner time, satisfaction, and achievement” (p. 123). The study’s purpose was to explore “the extent to which the online instructor should involve themselves in discussion, if at all, to enhance students’ online learning experiences” (Cho & Tobias, 2016, p. 123). The study contained three groups in an online course who had a required element in the course to create one original reply and one response in accordance with the week’s content. The first group had no discussion board interaction with the instructor. The second group had the instructor pose a question each week on the discussion board, but no other interaction by the instructor. The last group had the instructor pose a question for the week and participate in the group’s discussion. The researchers used the CoI instrument and a survey to gather results. A significant finding was that “teaching presence and cognitive presence were not statistically lower than in Conditions 2 and 3, in which students had active interactions with classmates or the instructor” (Cho & Tobias, 2016, p. 133). In regards to social presence, they concluded “interaction with the instructor seems the most important factor that explain students' social presence in online learning community.” (Cho & Tobias, 2016, p. 133) and also “an online instructor should be present online in various ways, such as course design, email communication, or timely feedback” (Cho & Tobias, 2016, p. 135). They also stated from their findings “we suggest that online instructors thoroughly consider the

nature of their course before requiring discussion instead of mechanically including it as a mandatory student activity” (Cho & Tobias, 2016, p. 135). Cho and Tobias (2016) suggest “instead, the inclusion of discussion should be decided with the consideration of various factors including teaching philosophy, course content, intended learning outcomes, and learner characteristics” (p. 137).

In an attempt to also look into the methodological framework of critical discourse analysis, there is not as much empirical research in regards to discussion boards and critical discourse analysis. However, I have summarized two studies relevant to this research.

In a study about the relationship between social presence and critical thinking, Costley and Lange (2016) utilized CoI and discourse analysis to examine “levels of social presence and critical thinking in each post” (p. 89) of asynchronous online forums. The researchers used random sampling to select the threads for analysis. They then applied two coding schemes developed for critical thinking and social presence to these randomly selected posts (Costley & Lange, 2016). The researchers also analyzed surrounding posts in order to gain perspective and insight into the conversation in the threads (Costley & Lange, 2016). This research showed “there was a negative relationship between social presence and critical thinking” (Costley & Lange, 2016, p. 101). An important statement in their discussion which holds relevance and adds to the importance and purpose of this study was,

Furthermore, using specific contexts to examine differences between posts, rather than within posts would be helpful to see why "turns are valued, sought, or avoided" by participants (Sacks et al., 1974). This could possibly contribute to an imbalance between social presence and critical thinking. This can be explained through turn-taking and how participants keep within the context of the discourse by taking or avoiding turns in the discussion based on the context of previous turns taken by other participants (Costley & Lange, 2016, p. 104)

While this study approached analysis from a quantitative aspect, this area has not been largely researched, therefore there is a need to research and explore this topic from a variety of perspectives and angles in order to better understand the component of discussion boards in distance education.

In the second study, Perveen (2015) analyzed data from “Moderated Discussion Board (MDB) of Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP)” (p. 243) for the purpose of understanding “the academic power relations of the students and instructors” (p. 243). The researcher selected an English language skills improvement course and developed a rubric based on the theoretical frameworks of Fairclough and van Dijk in which to analyze individual discussion board posts (Perveen, 2015). The analysis revealed that students would ask questions and would keep asking questions until a satisfactory answer was received (Perveen, 2015). This analysis also led to the finding of a friendly, communicative environment within the discussion board and with “an absence of the use of sexist language” (Perveen, 2015, p. 257) and “rather equality and respect for both genders” (Perveen, 2015, p. 257), but “the instructor remains the powerful source of information” (p. 257). In this discussion, the researcher claimed

Although CDA has come forward as a major multidisciplinary approach over the past two decades to the study of contexts and texts and some work has also been done about the social networking discussions, not much attention has been paid to academic electronic discussion boards discourse. Much attention needs to be paid to this area to identify the ideologies of either side, as students and teachers are the backbone of any society (Perveen, 2015, p. 245)

This study demonstrated the need to understand the element of discussion boards as a component of a course for distance education.

Again, while this list is not exhaustive, it does give a representation to how researchers have used the framework to guide their research on different elements related to distance education. In order to fully understand distance education, many more studies looking into all

elements of the experience will be important so that the literature continues to grow and that the growth in literature can guide practical and theoretical approaches to deliver successful distance education courses and programs.

Summary

This review of literature summarizes fundamental pieces related to the area of distance education. Specifically, literature was reviewed that summarized the evolution of adult education in the United States. A review of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework as well as a review of the Community of Inquiry framework as a necessary element to situate and give foundational knowledge to this particular study were also provided. In Chapter Three which follows describe the methodology that was used to conduct this research.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter presents a discussion of the theoretical and methodological frameworks utilized in this study. It begins with the background discussion on the qualitative nature applied to this study. Also included in this chapter is a review of the purpose and significance for the study and the research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the research environment, the data collection, main characteristics of the courses and the data analysis process. The chapter concludes with the researcher role.

Background

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world (Creswell, 2013). It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

Creswell (2013) stated that there are several reasons why researchers conduct qualitative research. In the case of this study, some of Creswell's reasons for engaging in qualitative analysis were a “need for a complex, detailed understanding of the issue”, “hear (ing) their voices, minimize(ing) power relationship”, “understand(ing) the contexts or settings” and “help(ing) explain the mechanisms or linkages” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

Lev Vygotsky (1978), in his work *Mind in Society*, described a process of learning that is considered to be a pillar of the current theory of social constructivist learning. He introduced the

idea of the “zone of proximal development” and described it as being “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1974, p. 86). While Vygotsky’s work predated the constructivism movement, his thinking was clearly in line with its current intellectual direction. He noted that children would make inferences and meaning of what they were experiencing by communicating both with other students and with the teacher, therefore constructing individualized meaning out of their own personal experiences and social interactions. He also was instrumental in connecting learning with social interactions and not just considering that learning occurred through the acquisition of factual knowledge (Vygotsky, 1974). This framework has become a commonly used way to look at face-to-face education as well as distance education today. Likewise, the concept of learning occurring as part of a social structure has become an important factor in the process of conducting critical discourse analysis.

Purpose and Significance of this Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the patterns of communication of discussion board users in undergraduate distance education courses and add to the existing body of research involving the creation, development, and nature of patterns of discussion boards in online courses. More particularly, it was to differentiate the patterns, power struggles, and significant meaning behind the language presented through the discussion board threads. This research can be used to better inform faculty, administrators of online courses and programs as well as instructional designers about developing a better practice to facilitate community building and foster a better learning environment for students taking online classes that utilize discussion boards as the primary online classroom.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What is the nature of the patterns of communication inside the discussion boards?
2. Does the structure of the language that is used by students in online discussion boards create and/or maintain power relationships? If so, how and to what extent?
3. Are the verbal interactions that are present in online discussion boards reflective of various social and historical factors? If so, how and to what extent?

Research Environment

This section of the chapter provides an overview of the context of the research environment of the university and learning management system that was used in this analysis. The research data were collected from a religiously affiliated, liberal arts university in the Midwest. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education the institution is classified as Basic Baccalaureate: Diverse Fields. The institution is a non-commuter university. The average annual enrollment at the university is approximately six hundred and fifty students. Undergraduate enrollment data for the participating institution is shown in Appendix A and is presented by gender, age, and, race of students. These data are drawn from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). It is a survey system that is used by the National Center of Education Statistics to annually collect data about higher education institutions which receive federal student aid funds. The university has an enrollment of primarily white under twenty-five years old. There are slightly more women enrolled than there are men. For this study, these data are a snapshot of the undergraduate enrollment data for the academic years of the data examined in this study and are historically consistent with university demographics overall.

I had access to eight courses that were taught in an online format. The university just recently began offering online courses because it had just received Higher Learning Commission approval to offer full programs. Therefore, my access to these courses was limited due to the recent approval to offer courses and programs. The university only had one graduate program, so there were more options to gain data from undergraduate courses and because of the problem statement, more research was needed on the undergraduate population. The discourse in them was primarily structured under the control of the faculty member assigned to teach the course and the constraints of using the learning management system for organization of the course. As part of the decisions by the administration of the university and in order to comply with accreditation of the institution, a standardized learning management system is used for all courses at the university. As part of this standardization process, each course begins with a common template that contains relevant institution-wide information and then the faculty member populated the course template with the relative material appropriate for the course. A standard, built-in interface of the learning management system is the discussion forum option that was utilized in the online asynchronous learning environment. While the system sets parameters on the function of the discussion boards there are many items that are determined by the course's faculty member. On the other hand, the physical view or layout of the course discussion boards is identical throughout each course as this is dictated by the learning management system interface. The faculty member then can choose whether to alter the structure and flow of the discussion board by how they choose to have the students leave posts on the discussion board.

Data and Data Collection

The data used in this research consisted of discussion board postings drawn from eight undergraduate online courses that were offered at a small private Midwestern university during the 2014-2016 academic years. These eight courses were taught by five different faculty members. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals from Kansas State University (Appendix B) and the university (Appendix C) where the courses were taught. The first step in the analysis process was to ask the learning management system administrator for access to each course. Once access was gained, I copy and pasted the discussion board threads into a Microsoft Word document. I was granted permission to one course at a time in order to save all the data in a structured and cohesive manner. Appendix D provides an example of the physical properties of the learning management system as well as a sample of the data to be extracted from each course. Along with copying all of the discussion board data, I also downloaded a copy of the course syllabus. Once all of the data had been extracted from the learning management system, the documents were stored on a password protected computer along with a backup to an external hard drive and thumb drive. The following section contains a description of the major characteristics of the individual courses.

Courses

A focus of the university was to create and offer most online courses during the summer term in order to provide an opportunity for a student to be enrolled while being at home for the summer. The majority of the courses that were examined in this research were ones which were developed for the Liberal Studies program. Liberal Studies consists of an approved set of courses that a student must take in order to fulfill graduation requirements from the university. The mission of the Liberal Studies program is to give students broad knowledge about the

wholeness of life in order to establish a well-educated person and sustain life-long learning.

With all of this in mind, a description of each of the courses that were examined in this research follows.

Course 1

This was a freshman-level course examining the concepts and philosophies of ethics. There were no prerequisites for this course. It was an eight-week course which was offered in the summer term. There was one discussion forum a week for each of the eight weeks. The discussion forums were a required assignment in the course and worth forty percent of the total grade. The discussion questions asked each week were posed by the faculty member and derived from the required course textbook. The expectation was that the students would have the materials required for the week read before the beginning of the week and they were to engage in the weekly discussions with civility and respect for divergent opinions. There was no criteria expectation written for original posts, replies, or how often to respond.

The faculty member posted the guiding discussion post as the first thread at the beginning of the week. Each member of the class then created an original post in response to the faculty member's guiding discussion post. There were replies to original posts by the other students in the course and the faculty member.

Course 2

This was a freshman-level course covering the historical and theological events and themes of the Old Testament. This course was taught by the same faculty member in Course 1. It was a traditional sixteen-week course offered in the spring semester. There were no prerequisites for this course, but it counted towards credit for the Liberal Studies Program. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth one hundred fifty points of

the total grade. The discussion questions asked each week were posed by the faculty member and derived from the required course textbook. The expectation was that the students would have the materials required for the week read before the beginning of the week and they were to engage in the weekly discussions with civility and respect for divergent opinions. There was a clear expectation from the syllabus to reply to the weekly discussion questions, reply to at least one other student in the course, and the discussion forum closed and became read-only at the end of the timeline for that discussion thread. The faculty member did express that students did not have to agree with one another or the instructor on philosophical questions. This course also used a rubric to grade the discussion board posts, but there was no reference to how much of the total grade the discussion boards were worth.

The course had one difference from the rest of the courses and that difference was that there was no introduction week for the students enrolled in the course. The very first week began with discussion materials. This course appeared as if most of the time this was a guiding question/statement was offered by the faculty. The student then did an original post based on that guiding premise. The faculty member then responded to the student's original post. There were just a few instances where another student did post a reply after the faculty member responded to the original post, but in almost all cases the only reply was by the faculty member.

Course 3

This course was a freshman-level course studying the history of civilizations before 1500 A.D. It was an eight-week course offered during the summer semester also containing no prerequisite requirements. This course counted for credit in the Liberal Studies Program. The discussion forums were a required element and worth twenty percent of the total grade. The discussion questions asked each week were posed by the faculty member and derived from the

required course textbook. The expectation was that the students read the appropriate materials for the discussion thread. The discussion thread would be open for two weeks. In the first week the students were to respond to the stated questions about the readings in two to three paragraphs. Then in the second week, the students were asked to come back to the discussion thread and respond to a peer student's original post in two to three paragraphs. The discussion threads would only be open for the two weeks and then the discussion becomes read only and allows no other posting. The professor explained in the syllabus the expectation that student posts are to use online netiquette. The faculty member would also participate and post in the discussion boards but not on a regular basis.

Course 4

This course was a freshman-level course dealing with the history of civilizations after 1500 A.D. This course was taught by the same faculty member in Course 3. It was an eight-week course offered during the summer semester. It required no prerequisites. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth twenty percent of the total grade. The discussion questions asked each week were posed by the faculty member and derived from the required course textbook. The expectation was that the students read the appropriate materials for the discussion thread. Then the discussion thread would be open for two weeks. In the first week the students were to respond to the stated questions about the readings in two to three paragraphs. Then in the second week, the students were asked to come back to the discussion thread and respond to a peer student's original post in two to three paragraphs. The discussion threads would only be open for the two weeks and then the discussion becomes read only and allows no other posting. The professor makes note in the syllabus the expectation that student

posts are to use online netiquette. The faculty member would also participate and post in the discussion boards but not on a regular basis.

Course 5

This course was a sophomore-level course studying terrorism. It was an eight-week course offered during the second half of the spring semester. There were no prerequisites for this course. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth one hundred and forty points of the total grade. There were four discussion threads for the entire course. The discussion questions asked each week were crafted by small groups of students and approved by the faculty member. The expectation was very clear for the discussion threads. The groups had to submit their questions the week before their group was assigned to present the discussion questions. Initial posts were required to be completed by Wednesday and responses to two other classmates by Sunday. All students initial posts would be two hundred and fifty words to three hundred words and be supported by evidence that was cited in APA format. A student response to an original post was to be substantive in content and a minimum of two hundred words. The professor also stated points would be deducted for incorrect APA citations. The professor also made it clear that student posts should be free of spelling and grammar errors. The professor frequently reminds the students that the discussion board utilization is for building learning communities and used to enhance the learning experience. The professor also made use of a rubric for grading discussion board threads. In this course, the faculty member does not post at all in the discussion board forums.

Course 6

This course was a sophomore-level course dealing with risk assessment and communication between businesses, organizations, and emergency services. This course was

taught by the same faculty member in Course 5. It was an eight-week course offered in the second half of the spring semester. There were no prerequisites for this course. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth one hundred and forty points of the total grade. There were four discussion threads for the entire course. The discussion questions asked each week were crafted by small groups of students and approved by the faculty member. The expectation was very clear for the discussion threads. The groups had to submit their questions the week before their group was assigned to present the discussion questions. Initial posts were required to be completed by Wednesday and responses to two other classmates by Sunday. All students initial posts would be two hundred and fifty words to three hundred words and be supported by evidence that is cited in APA format. A student response to an original post was to be substantive in content and a minimum of two hundred words. The professor also stated points would be deducted for incorrect APA citations. The professor also makes it clear that student posts should be free of spelling and grammar errors. The professor frequently reminds the students that the discussion board utilization is for building learning communities and used to enhance the learning experience. The professor also made use of a rubric for grading discussion board threads. In this course, the faculty member does not post at all in the discussion board forums.

Course 7

This course was a freshman-level course exploring spirituality considerations in emergency response and recovery. It was a traditional sixteen-week course offered in the spring semester. There were no prerequisites for this course. This course did count towards credit for the Liberal Studies Program. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth one hundred and thirty points of the total grade. The discussion questions asked each

week were crafted by the faculty member. Initial posts were original thoughts to the discussion questions. There were no requirements for initial posts or replies, but a generic statement of importance that each member participate during the allotted time frame. The professor also gave examples of approaches for composing replies that could include alternate perspective, share stories, ask question, provide additional resources, or discuss why you agree or disagree. The professor also made reference to response requirements to follow proper netiquette. The professor made use of a rubric for grading discussion board threads. In this course, it was common for the professor to post frequently in the discussion threads.

Course 8

This course was a sophomore-level course examining the interplay of biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects of sexuality. It was a four-week course offered in the second term of the summer semester. There were no prerequisites for this course. This course did count towards credit for the Liberal Studies Program. The discussion forums were a required element of the course and worth twenty-five points of the total grade. The discussion questions asked each week were crafted by the faculty member. Initial posts were original thoughts to the discussion questions. There were no requirements for initial posts or replies. It was common for the faculty member to post frequently within the discussion threads.

A graphical representation of the major characteristics of each course is shown in Table 1 which follows.

Table 1. Summary of Courses

Course	Level	Length(weeks)	Term	Enrollment	Expectations by Faculty for Posts	Point or Percentage (%) of Grade	Faculty Role
Course 1	Freshman	16	Summer2016	3	Not stated	40%	Consistent Participation
Course 2	Freshman	16	Spring 2016	10	1 Original post ; 1 reply minimum	150 points	Consistent Participation
Course 3	Freshman	8	Summer 2015	3	1 st week original post. 2 nd week one reply	20%	Sporadic participation
Course 4 *	Freshman	8	Summer 2015 2016	6 ,1	1 st week original post. 2 nd week one reply	20%	Sporadic participation
Course 5	Senior	8	Spring 2016	22	Original post by Wednesday. Replies to two others by Sunday	140 points	Never participated
Course 6	Sophomore	8	Spring 2016	23	Original post by Wednesday. Replies to two others by Sunday	140 points	Never participated
Course 7	Freshman	16	Spring 2016	22	Not stated	130 Points	Consistent Participation
Course 8	Sophomore	4	Summer 2015	10	Not stated	25 points	Consistent Participation

Table 1. Summary of the major characteristics of the courses used for data analysis. The * denotes that for the purpose of this research the two sections of Course 4 were combined.

Data Analysis

Discourse analysis is one methodology which allows the researcher to analyze and look for patterns in text. According to Taylor (2001), “discourse analysts are looking closely at language in use, and furthermore, they are looking for patterns” (p. 6). While appraising

language in use and patterns in the language in use, the approaches to discourse analysis vary widely. Discourse analysis is defined as “the analysis of these patterns” (Jørgensen, & Phillips, 2002, p. 1) and that when one is researching discourse analysis, no clear answer clarifies what it is, how it functions, or how to analyze data. A discourse analyst measures and critiques significant patterns in language. This research utilized the following definition of discourse analysis; “underlying the word ‘discourse’ is the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people’s utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life” (Jørgensen, & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). There are many different approaches that have been used in the process of discourse analysis. Despite this there are some common elements of analysis that exist between most of them. Jørgensen & Phillips (2002) have suggested, “the approaches are similar to one another in their social constructionist starting point, their view of language, stemming from structuralism and poststructuralist linguistics, and their understanding of the individual based on a version of structuralism”(2002, p. 3). In addition, several other ideas guided me as I conducted this study including that social constructivism seeks to understand the world in which humans live and people “develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). With this in mind, I was led to “look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Ultimately, by understanding the conceptual foundation of discourse analysis, one can then add in the additional component of social practice that differentiates discourse analysis from critical discourse analysis.

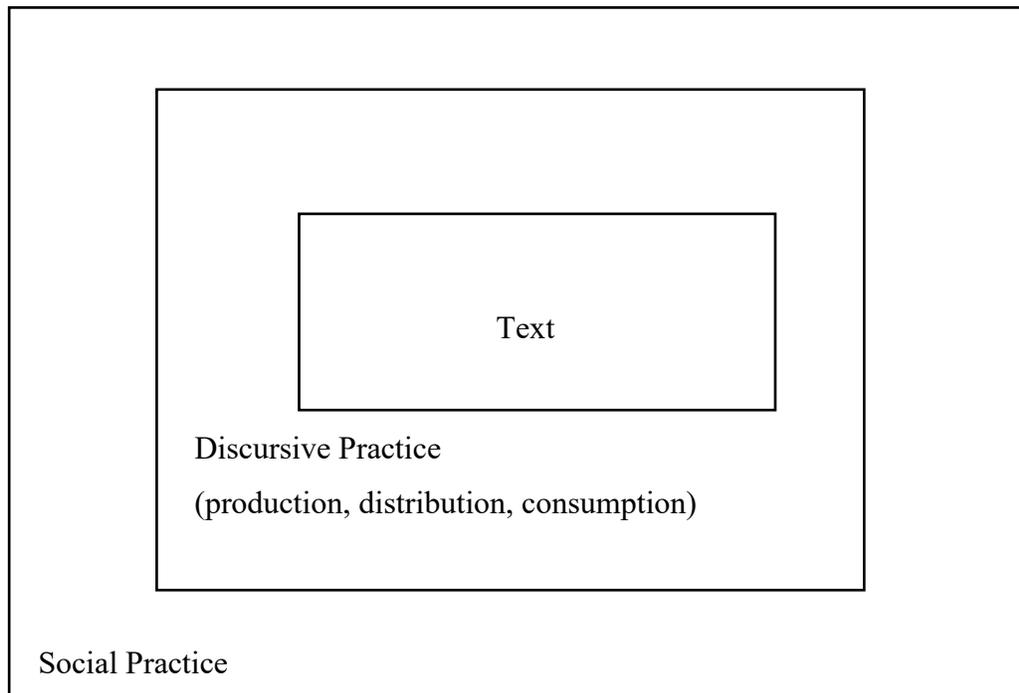
When looking at critical discourse it is important one takes into account social society and power relationships. This framework comes from a structuralist viewpoint with a belief that discourse reproduces power (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 2005; Rogers,

Malancharuvi-Berks, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph, 2005; Van Dijk, 1993). In any particular situation, there is the likeliness that there will be someone or something that is clearly in control. Fairclough (1989) describes this as “power in discourse” (p. 43). He further described this idea as being the “whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect on power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 55). He goes on to say that “what I have called the ‘power behind discourse’ is also a hidden power, in that the shaping of orders of discourse by relations of power is not generally apparent to people” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 55).

Fairclough (1992) regards “language use as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or reflex of situational variables” (p. 63). For example: discourse is a social practice (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2004); and “language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 22).

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) suggest “the aim of discourse analysis is to map out the process in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalized that we think of them as natural” (pp. 25-26). Several approaches can be used to conduct a critical discourse analysis, but by utilizing Fairclough’s three-dimension framework, one can look deeper into the text to find meaning, and answer how the text has become natural in the dialogue and what ultimately gets taken as truth. This discourse analysis framework is shown in Figure 2 which follows.

Figure 2. Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis Framework



Fairclough, (1992), p. 73

Rogers (2006) stated “these functions of discourse represent a way of approaching analysis in that they help connect the features of the discourse to the functions of the activity in which it is used” (p. 67). This study will approach the online course as a distinct learning environment. Due to the nature of discussion boards, “the learning environment is constructed with and by the discourse” (Rogers, 2006, p. 66).

In order to understand the power dynamics that were present in the discussions boards, the researcher utilized multiple rounds of coding analysis in each of the three dimensions of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework.

Analysis Process

The same process was used to examine each of the eight courses. The first step was a reading of the entire discussion board postings. I did holistic coding to get a broad overview of the data in the discussion boards for these courses. “Holistic coding is an attempt to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 142). This approach was chosen because, as Saldaña (2013) stated, “holistic coding is applicable when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data” (p. 142). Subsequently, Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach was used for the majority of analysis that followed.

Throughout the entire process, I also kept analytical memos. Saldaña (2013) described analytic memos as “researcher journal entries or blogs – a place to “dump your brain” about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them” (p. 41). According to Saldaña (2013) the “purpose of analytic memo writing are to document and reflect on: your coding processes and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data” (p. 41). In the process of writing analytic memos, I began to understand the significance of these findings and relate them to my research questions, the literature, and the framework. I also used Saldaña’s (2013) “shop talk” (p. 206) in order to make sense of my analysis process and findings. He described this process as talking “regularly with a trusted peer, colleague, advisor, mentor, expert, or even a friend about your research and data analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 206). I utilized my committee chair, methodologist expert and mentor, as well as a friend from a CDA course in order to “provide a “reality check” and possibly stimulate additional insight” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 206) all throughout the analysis and writing phase of this research study.

The first dimension of analysis tried to answer questions in the discussion board text regarding turn-taking, interactional control, politeness, and ethos (Fairclough, 1992). For example, one important aspect of this dimension is looking at “how topics are introduced” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 234) and for the analysis of turn-taking an introduction of a topic comes from the leading questions initiated by the faculty member. Topic control was further analyzed from holistic coding of the data. By using holistic coding, a pattern of topics of each discussion thread could be observed to discover if new topics were introduced that differed from the leading discussion posted by the faculty member. Then I looked for key words that helped discover topic control and exchange structure. These key words included: think, believe, what, about, however, also, but, because, and point. Another aspect of text analysis was to investigate interactional control. The analysis consisted of answering questions such as “how are topics introduced, developed, and establish, and is topic control symmetrical or asymmetrical; how are agendas set and by whom; how are they policed” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 234). Once I examined the patterns of topic control and interactional control I moved on to politeness.

Politeness looks at politeness strategies and which strategies are included in the data. Fairclough (1992) stated these strategies are “negative politeness, positive politeness, and off record” (p. 235). For example, as part of the analysis process, I did a search for key words that included: agree, disagree, don’t or do not, like, or accept to determine if an author of a post was validating the use of negative or positive politeness within the post. Positive politeness is when the students are writing comments or trying to give off the impression of their statements being approved by others in the course or seeking to have other relate to their comments. Negative politeness is when students are writing comments to be free from imposition or not be opposed upon from other students in the course.

In order to investigate ethos, Fairclough (1992) stated “ethos involves not just the discourse, but the whole body” (p. 235). Ethos is when students are communicating they are building a self-image of who they are and what they believe through their learning of materials in the course. For this part of the analysis, data were inspected for phrases, such as “I think” or “I believe” to help to identify students “constructing ‘selves’, or social identities” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 235).

After I looked at the text and searched for the key words, I used the guiding questions Fairclough (1992) supplied as a guide for analysis in order to begin to answer the research questions in regards to how this was represented in my data. I reviewed my analytic memos as well as discussions with my mentors in order to make sense of my analysis. As I examined this data I also used the framework of Community of Inquiry to understand how the elements of social, teaching, and cognitive presence was represented in the data and how this informed answers to my research questions.

Incorporating the previous round of analysis, the next dimension in the framework has the analysis trying to answer questions about discourse practice. For this part of the analysis, I looked at interdiscursivity, intertextual chains, and coherence (Fairclough, 1992). Interdiscursivity refers to “what discourse types are drawn upon in the discourse sample under analysis” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232). Included in this dimension was any textbook or supplemental readings, the syllabus, as well as discussion board discourse. Coherence is explained as “how texts are actually interpreted” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 233). Analysis looked for patterns of resistance to the discussion, or phrases looking for clarification, such as “I agree”, “I disagree”, or “Could you give an example”.

The final dimension of the framework is to explain social practice. This dimension of analysis looked at the previous dimensions and rounds of analysis to “specify: the nature of the social practice of which the discourse practice is a part” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 237). I used the syllabus to help understand the context of how and why the students were posting on the discussion boards. I also asked for demographic information of the university to aid in understanding the social context of the student population. For example, in order to see “language in action” all the dimensions had to explain who seemed to initiate the conversations, how those topics were developed, how elements of CoI were present within the discourse, how power was presented, and what was the social context of the university and the type of student it recruited played a factor in the discourse of the discussion board.

Researcher’s Role

I, the researcher, was an integral part of this research process. This study reflects the exploratory, subjective, relative, and situational (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) nature found in traditional qualitative research. “Discourse is not a representation of some concrete, physical thing that can be understood and analyzed from an external focal point. Rather, discourse is the imaginable and works to construct the reality in which we all inhabit” (Holloway-Libell, 2014, p. 73). It is subjective due to my perception and representation of the data. My role was to logically make connections through analytical analysis. In an attempt to build researcher trustworthiness and validity, I have tried to be as transparent as I could with my analysis process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided four examples of ways that a qualitative researcher can incorporate trustworthiness into this type of research that included “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 327). To establish credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a technique of being immersed in the data for a long period

of time. I have been involved in collecting and analyzing the data for many months. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated transferability can really only be described by only providing “thick description” (p. 316). I have done my best to provide this through sample data (Appendix D), holistic coding (Appendix E), and analytic memos (Appendix F). To demonstrate dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that an “audit trail” (p. 319) is appropriate. Through my description of my analysis process along with the referenced appendices, I believe that I have established sufficient evidence of an audit trail to this research. Finally, the final technique is confirmability which Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest “keeping a reflexive journal” (p. 319) which I have done through my analytic memos. This process should allow the reader to see how my analysis shaped my thinking for determining connections within the data and lead to my relationship with my findings. A discussion of my own positionality with this research follows.

Subjectivity Statement

Subjectivities, or “personal stakes of the researcher” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17) are valuable to the quality of qualitative research. Without proper acknowledgement of subjectivities, the research could be misinterpreted by readers and the researcher may not be expressing their viewpoints with honesty. Peshkin (1988) urges researchers to acknowledge their subjectivities consciously and to “systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of the research” (p. 17). Acknowledging my subjectivity, I recognize my assumptions are part of what I bring to the research as the researcher and that my findings and interpretations represent the data with as much trust as I can provide.

I have always had an interest in distance education. I love technology and I love teaching. There is no greater joy than to see that lost little freshman walk into your class on their first day of college and then walk across the stage getting their degree while growing and

progressing into a successful person into society. When I began my program of study, I wanted to integrate technology into the classroom and lead the development of online classes and programs. Education has always been important to me. I can remember as a child my father telling me “it’s not if you go to college, but when and where you go to college.” I understand now as an adult just how much college has given me in my life. I strive every day to make my classroom the safest, most fun experience while also challenging my students to master concepts that will provide for them in their lives.

While there are so many areas to study in distance education, one area of interest were discussion boards. With the growth, flexibility, and convenience of online classes, the diversity in these classes is great. I started to see what kind of impact this study could have on the field of adult education, education, professional development, and distance education. I also began my doctoral program as a distance student and have an understanding of the distance education environment from the student perspective. I have formed physical friendships from online acquaintances as well as only online friendships with online acquaintances from communication within and outside of discussion boards. As I began to form this theoretical concept of this research, there became a great deal of communication on the subject from my committee members as well as others asking about my research. This drove me even further into pursuing the research. The strongest motivator was the submission of this research to a national organization that did a blind review of the theoretical study. The blind reviews came back and for most researchers this was not a pleasant response, “your research was not chosen.” But the feedback was all positive on the need for the study and the importance of the study. This blind review feedback made up my mind to move forward and turn this theoretical concept into my actual research. The trend in higher education is more online classes, more online degrees, and

more access to higher education. As all of these things grow, this research becomes important to open the communication lines in higher education.

As I have told this story of how this research came about from a theory to a full study, this personal reflection leads you to understand what I know and where I am going. A goal for a researcher should be to collect and present information in as objective a manner as possible, while recognizing that pure objectivity is impossible. I do hope with this research that I can add to the body of literature to open lines of communications and improve the future of distance and adult education.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology that was used in this study. Data collection and analysis procedures were also delineated in relation to verification procedures to be taken to insure trustworthiness. The study's rationale for course selection is also described. Lastly, information about researcher is also provided in order to situate the study within a personal domain for the benefit of the reader.

Chapter 4 - Results

The results of this research are discussed in this chapter. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework about CDA provided the structure for analysis of the discourse that was examined in this research.

Synthesis

Individuals who are involved in distance education generally understand the components of an online course. While there are many elements to an online course, a common element is the use of discussion boards. This research analyzed the contents of discussion boards using critical discourse analysis. Faculty utilized the discussion boards to introduce topics and to have students demonstrate mastery of these topics through their original posts and responses. Through holistic coding, I was able to look at the data to see if students kept to the topics introduced or if the students would ever introduce topics through their own discussions. Fairclough (1992) stated "topics are typically offered by one participant, accepted (or rejected) by another, and then elaborated by the first participant" (p. 155). When analyzing the data and looking into the courses, this pattern looks very different. Topics are offered by the faculty member, accepted in the discussion forum with the original post by the student, accepted in the responses of other students participating in the course, and then an end to that particular discussion topic which signals the end of that week, timeframe, or topic. Then the pattern repeats at the beginning of the next week or the timeframe established by the faculty. This pattern continues until the end of the course. In my analysis of the data, topic introduction is controlled by the faculty member. In the discussion boards, the students did not introduce their own topics. Through the holistic coding, I was able to look at the guiding questions by the faculty and see if the topic of original posts or replies was different than the guiding topics and they were not. To build my own pattern off of

Fairclough's observations it would appear topics are offered by the faculty member, accepted by the student as evidenced by their original post, and then accepted by any other students as evidenced by the replies.

There was an overwhelming amount of sentences that began with "I strongly agree", "Yes, I agree that", or "I agree with the idea". There were very few rejection statements that occurred throughout the data set. These phrases typically contained "I agree and disagree with this", or "I don't agree that", but when these phrases were used it was usually just one sentence. There was never a discussion or developed discussion on the disagreement. I did take this literally comparing with Fairclough's observations, but I also considered the meaning of acceptance or rejection to also include not deviating from the topic. Students could have rejected the topic and introduced their own topic, yet they chose to follow the topic introduced by the faculty member. There lies the control of the topics in the discussion boards with the faculty teaching the course.

Along with topic control is exchange structure. Topics are introduced but Fairclough understood that it also controlled "the sort of things people can say" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 154). Because of the introduction of the topics by the faculty member, the faculty member exercised control over what topics would be discussed in the discussion forum. Fairclough (1992) stated "in initiating an exchange, teachers can give pupils information, ask them questions, set out agendas for the class, or control pupils' behavior. Pupils, on the other hand, are far more constrained in what they can say or do: they mainly answer questions and perform certain tasks in response to requests" (p. 154). In the discussion boards, the student initial posts were in response to the direct questions or statements provided by the faculty member. This was then in direct response to the readings assigned for that given topic. Through the holistic coding, I was

able to generate the topics of each post and relate them back directly to the guiding posts by the faculty member.

When looking into the discussion on topic control and the use of the phrase “agree” another Fairclough element emerged. Student replies to original posts typically included a variation of the phrase “I agree”. Fairclough (1992) also stated that with the “politeness phenomena” (p. 163) “variability of politeness practices across different discourse types” (p. 162) was missing. Interpretation of politeness in the discussion forums were not necessarily in complete agreement with wanting to be like or understood for positive politeness or impeded on by others for negative politeness, but more interpretation of not being confrontational with peers or not using proper netiquette within discussions. I think in discussion forums that students have been “taught” these netiquette rules and are not quite sure how to disagree or give another viewpoint on a topic without possibly being misunderstood or misrepresented without the presence of facial expressions or non-verbal cues. There was an overwhelming set of sentences that included “I certainly agree”, “I agree with your statement”, or “I totally agree with you”. This was a very common beginning to each student reply to an original post. Many times there were phrases used in the replies to original posts that included “great post” or “I like”.

The last element that began to evolve during the analysis was that of ethos. As topics were introduced, discussion was forming from the faculty to the peers, many statements of “I believe” and “I think” began to take a place in the analysis. Students were reading materials, gathering information, and they were beginning to build their knowledge of the topics introduced. Fairclough (1992) described ethos as “the objective is to pull together the diverse features that go towards constructing ‘selves’, or social identities” (p. 235). Other students replying to their own original posts were affirming their building of selves. For many this was

also the affirmation that they had interpreted the readings the same as the rest of the students in the course. One thing that faculty hope discussion boards can do in the learning process is to develop mastery of topics and critical thinking of material. There is also to be an instance where students develop their own ideas with these materials presented, but that is where the discussion boards are lacking. By the faculty controlling the texts and supplemental readings, students are building their mastery of concepts based on what information is provided by the faculty member.

Each course in the data set conformed to these findings in the data. Along with these commonalities were also subtle differences among the courses. Some of these differences were in the physical properties of how the faculty member constructed the discussion forum in the learning management system. There were varying differences in the description of the function and directions on the syllabus for utilizing the discussion forums. There was also variance in the level of participation by the faculty member in the course.

Course 1, was unique from the others in that the faculty member would reply to original posts with a different viewpoint or a question that moved the student into thinking about their answer in a different way. This course was also very overwhelmed with “I agree” or “I believe” statements. Given that the nature of this course was in ethics, it was clearly articulated in the analysis that students were identifying and trying to construct truth with their beliefs and the course materials. I expected to see many of these statements for this course as students were working to grasp where they stood on an individual basis with the topics introduced. What I did not expect was the level of agreement among the students’ viewpoints in the discussion board.

Course 2, also focused a great deal on ethos. This course and Course 1 were taught by the same instructor. There were many similarities between the two courses, but the big difference in this course which was also not found in any other course was the fact the almost

every reply to the student's original post was from the faculty member. The dialog in this course from the other students in the class was almost non-existent. This course was based on the Bible and there was only one disagree statement in the entire dialog. But since students were not really replying to each other, this changed how the exchange structure took place.

In Courses 3 and 4, there were tremendous similarities including being taught by the same instructor. This course appeared to follow the instruction so precisely that it was very predictable in the data. Students did an original post, stayed completely with the faculty's guiding statements, was in complete agreement in posts and replies, and the students replied in the second week to those as stated. This course appeared to follow a sentiment of this is the facts and there was not much discussion other than to confirm they read the material correctly.

Courses 5 and 6, had the most differences from all the rest of the courses in the data set. The topics were introduced by the students working in small groups and not the faculty member. They were still based on readings, but controlled by the students. This entire class was actually controlled by the students. There were very strict guidelines in the syllabus as to how the discussion boards were to function and be used. There were strict policies on using citations and APA style as well as word counts for original posts and replies. The faculty member never posted in the discussion boards. These two courses were also very large data sets by themselves. Because of the structure of this course by the syllabus, there was a different pattern to topic introduction. Students introduced the topics for the week, and students replied to original posts throughout the week. There were many posts that had several replies from different students. Students were trying to understand the material by using their peer's original posts. There were many statements that said "I like how you explained" or "I like the example". This course was also heavy on statements like "I strongly agree", "I agree one hundred percent", and "I

completely agree with your post”. Because there was so much agreement and no intervention from the faculty member, I believe that these statements were so proliferate because the students were relying on each other for affirmation of the interpretations.

Course 7 had similarities to Course 2. This was a course on spirituality and faith where Course 2 was on religion. There was a large difference in the amount of dialog on the discussion board. This was also a course that heavily repeated phrases of “I believe”. The faculty member was also an active participant in the discussion board by posing questions or placing his own beliefs and experiences into the discussion boards. One difference is that most of the time when the faculty asked a question in response to an original post, the author of the original post would return with a response to the question. This was not found in other courses. There was also a good amount of directives in the syllabus about expectation for the discussion boards. This course also contained several discussion board posts where the dialog included phrases of “in my personal experience”. It was interesting that many of the courses had topics or subjects where the students could relate, but this course on faith appeared to be more inviting to share their personal experiences.

A key difference in Course 8 was that the faculty member posed the initial questions and the students’ original posts were all replies to the faculty member. There were not any new threads created from original posts. This course had a week where the instructor did not post a guiding discussion and a student actually began a discussion thread. This was a very personal class with very controversial topics. The politeness in this course was unbelievable. Once again, very few disagree statements and all in agreement with each other. This course was also very different from all the other courses in that the faculty member consciously posted materials that gave contradictory viewpoints on a topic. Even with a difference of viewpoints on a topic, the

discussion boards were incredibly polite and agreeable. This course also included some “personal experience” statements. This course had very personal and controversial statements, yet the students still felt comfortable to share opinions about their personal experiences with the topics.

Summary

The results of this research were discussed in this chapter. This chapter presented a review of the theoretical context of this research and the findings about and across courses. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and answer the research questions of this research. It will also discuss the implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Implications

In this final chapter, I will present the overall conclusions that have been drawn from this research. To begin the chapter, I will give a summary of the study from a historical and theoretical perspective. Following this summary, I will link the findings with the research questions. Finally, I will conclude this chapter with implications for practice and future research.

Summary of the Research

In recent studies published by Allen and Seaman (2013, 2014, 2015), higher education administrators, who provide distance education, state distance education is a large part of their continued strategies for long-term success. It is also clear from these same studies that the majority of students enrolled in distance education courses are at the undergraduate level.

The education of adults has changed and adapted with the changes of education and society. Education of adults in the period (1600-1779) was less attributed to formal education from the few universities, but to the experiences of everyday living. Knowles (1977) chronicled that most education came in the form of apprenticeships in order to pass along critical skills and survive daily workplace challenges. As education transitioned into the next time period mainly through the years of 1860-1920, which included the Civil War and World War I, correspondence education grew in part to the expansion of the railroad. Colleges and universities were being built during this era and working with industries to provide training for employees. This era also saw a rise in the education of women. In the time period including the years 1921-1961, education began to see a wealth of changes. World War II had ended, the people who had survived the depression were looking to brighter circumstances, and there was tremendous growth coming from colleges and universities in the amount of newly formed colleges and

universities and in the growth of delivery of curriculum and educational opportunities. This period saw a huge interest in funding and extensive help from the government to help propel the United States forward. From the 1960's to present, the greatest change in education came from the development of the internet and computers. This has allowed for the transformation of adult education into how we see and use it today. Hansman & Mott (2010) discussed how participation, access, adult development, diversity, social justice and globalization were issues to be addressed. Along with changing the delivery of education, colleges and universities are invested in reaching populations they couldn't provide for in the past, grow enrollment and revenue as well as many other intricacies. But along with those developments and intricacies comes challenges. Some of those challenges become paying for technology, personnel, but also understanding research and trying to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of the whole university or college.

As this growth of technology occurred, researchers began to study the use of new technology for educational purposes. Research studies (Hiltz and Turoff, 1978; Vallee and Johansen 1974; Johanson et al., 1979; Kerr and Hiltz 1982) were conducted on computer-mediated communication and the different aspects of design, interface, operational practices, and support. This propelled other researchers (Harasim, 1989; Mason and Kaye, 1989; Hiltz, 1994; Berge and Collins, 1995; Palloff and Pratt, 2001; Fisher, 2003; Bourne and Moore, 2004) to examine software selection and implementation issues, systems, and strategies for utilization in distance education in higher education. As more and more colleges and universities began offering educational courses in this format, still other researchers (McConnell, 2000; Garrison et al., 2000; Dutton et al., 2002; Swan, 2003; Fjermestad et al., 2005) began to question if distance education was producing results equal to its traditional face-to-face delivery method. As this

delivery method grew in popularity, so did initiatives for research opportunities for those interested in this area. Along with all the above areas of study came the development of theories.

This study was informed by the theoretical framework developed by Garrison et al., (2000) titled Community of Inquiry. It uses social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence as elements that emerged to help facilitate educational learning experiences. Garrison et al. (2000) based their work on Lipman's (1991, 2003) definition of a community of inquiry from analysis of classroom experiences as "students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions" (1991, p. 20). I wanted to understand if these notions were occurring inside discussion boards and what this looked like in a deeper analysis of discussion boards in online courses.

Using Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, I was interested in understanding the following: 1) communication between students in online discussion boards; and 2) the power relationships between students as well as between faculty and students; and finally 3) the various social and historical contexts of these interactions. To examine these intricacies, I used the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis to analyze discussion board data along with syllabi of the undergraduate, online courses. For this analysis, I extracted communication data from the discussion boards of eight online courses that were housed in the university's learning management system. I also collected the syllabi for each course to understand the expectation provided by the faculty member and to help explain the communication patterns observed within the discussion boards. A discussion of specific findings on this research follows.

Discussion of the Findings

Teaching Presence

It comes as no surprise that the faculty member plays a large role in the development of online courses and in particular the discussion boards. The faculty member is the subject matter expert as well as the authoritative figure in the course. In the discussion boards, the faculty member sets the discussions by the textbook selected, assigned readings, as well as the guiding discussion topics to begin each discussion thread. They also have the ability to clearly articulate the expectations in the course through the course syllabus. I found that the expectations for the discussion boards could be found in multiple places, but was not always consistent. These expectations could be found in the syllabus, on the main page of the discussion forums, in the first thread of a discussion forum, and often times in variations of all of these places. The first place was the course syllabus. Within the syllabus, the instructor acknowledged if the discussion boards were a required or optional element. In all the courses for this study it was a required element. This then led the faculty member to assign some sort of value to the discussion boards which was usually a total point value or a percentage of the final grade value. Then the faculty member would describe the expectations for frequency of discussions as well as the principles of good posting, sometimes even with attached rubrics for grading the discussion boards. Next the faculty member could clearly define expectations through the use of the learning management system. They could develop a section on the main page dedicated to the expectations of the discussion boards. Finally, they could reiterate those expectations within the thread of the discussion boards in the learning management system. I found the faculty sometimes would use a variation of these places to define expectations for the discussion boards.

By analyzing this information, I was able to answer part of my research questions pertaining to patterns of communication and power relations. Using Fairclough (1992), several of his interactional control methods helped to answer this question: topic control, turn-taking, and exchange structure. I found from analysis the faculty member introduced the topics, controlled the topics by giving the assigned readings, the students accepted the topics by authoring their own original posts on the topic, exchanged dialogue on the topic, and closed the topic at the end of the timeframe. This pattern was repeated throughout the course. From this finding, I then applied the lens of the Community of Inquiry framework, specifically to the element of teaching presence. This analysis shows that the faculty member does in fact embody the function of course presentation and presenting the expectation of the learning objectives and materials (Garrison et al, 2000). The second part of the teaching presence is that of facilitation, where the “function to support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes” (Garrison et al., 1999, p. 90). My findings support this role of the faculty member and to some extent the students. I believe that the positionality of the members of these courses is also a large factor of teaching presence. The students of the courses are all full-time students in the traditional brick and mortar, face-to-face, daily operations of the university. It is very likely that they have had the faculty in a face-to-face course. This partly explains the findings of the faculty integrating so well into the course as they know the students or on some level are at least familiar with the students. It is also very common that the students and faculty member introduce themselves in the first week of the discussion forums, and the faculty member usually posted a biography on the main page of the course in the learning management system. In two courses, (Course 5 and 6), the premise of facilitation is very much supported in the fact that the faculty member never posted in the discussion forum. He placed

the students in small groups at the beginning of the course and empowered them to create the weekly discussion prompts and facilitate the communication in the discussion forum for the week they are in charge of. In this capacity, he truly played the role of facilitator in the dialog. These two courses were two of the largest data sets in my study. By giving the power to the students, the students were very much in control and responsible for communicating and building the presence of community. They were responsible for deciding and introducing the topics, developing the topics through the communication in the discussion thread, and acknowledging the building of cognitive presence or learning objectives by giving examples or supporting their statements with citations of literature. In the other courses, the faculty member would participate frequently, which I interpreted as weekly, to infrequently, which I interpreted as the professor decided what was appropriate. Some of the methods used were to share their own personal experiences to asking questions that engaged the original author to consider another perspective. This also supports the notion of teaching presence within the discussion boards. Other items that express teaching presence was the contact information of the faculty member, office hours, and response time to inquiries and grading as clarified through the syllabus or main page of the course in the learning management system.

Social Presence

An introduction week to the online discussion forums was often started with the posting of a short biography of the students taking the course. Garrison et al., (2000) defined social presence as “the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community” (p. 89). By faculty members beginning the course with an introduction discussion thread, social presence was demonstrated. Not all courses in this study began this way and I think part of the reasoning for this not happening in a couple of the courses

was due to the positionality as discussed before with these students being traditional face-to-face students taking an online course. There was social presence being demonstrated by the faculty member as well by the biography introductions on the main page of the course on the learning management system. By allowing for the faculty member to introduce themselves to the students as well as student introductions to the students, social presence was being established. There were not a lot of other factors that were represented in the data to show personality of the students. For instance, the learning management system is capable of allowing students the option to change characteristics of typed text such as font selection, bolding, underlining, or even adding emoticons. These changes did not appear in the data. The most personality I could see attributed through text in the discussion board was in a rare occasion a student would use more than one exclamation point. There was a function of the learning management system to integrate student id pictures as profile pictures. The university does try to maintain that option and the students do have the option of uploading a photo of their choice to depict their profile. Faculty also have the same options with text and profile pictures. I observed students would infrequently represent themselves in the discussion board with a profile picture. If the student did choose to represent themselves with a photo it was one taken by the yearbook staff for a standard use photo. In one rare case, a student used their own photo to represent themselves within the discussion board. In all the rest of the cases, the students were only represented by their names. The faculty did usually have a profile picture assigned with their account. While this does allow for social presence, the presence of pictures tied with an online profile could affect the discourse. A profile picture of a student could conceivably cause biases to exist in responses. Since this was not a part of this study, I considered the ability to post profile pictures a good representation of a form of social presence in online discussion boards.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence would appear to most faculty and students to be a key aspect of the educational experience. As Garrison et. al (2000) stated about cognitive presence “the participants in The Community of Inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication” (p. 89). While I agree from my analysis that sustained communication does exist throughout the course, I question the definition of sustained as well as the construction of meaning. I question the intent of the discussion boards, power of the faculty, and depth of the discussion. This is the most interesting and relevant piece of this study and where I believe that the majority of exploration needs to be developed. In my analysis I observed with overwhelming frequency the use of the phrase “I agree” and its variations such as “I completely agree”, “I do agree” and “I couldn’t agree anymore” for example. The next most overwhelming phrase or variation was “I believe” and “I think”. As I reached from insight from Fairclough, I began to piece together the ideas of politeness and ethos (Fairclough, 1992). The overall portrayal of the discussion boards is one of agreeableness even through what most would consider very debatable topics. These controversial topics include: right versus wrong; stories of the Bible; belief in the Bible; wars; terrorism; religions; gay rights; abortion; sex education and several more related to each of the eight courses. The first question I internally asked was “Why is everyone agreeing on such controversial topics?” This should not be what I am seeing. I concluded I believe this is the culture of the student population. First, the population is traditional-aged students, maybe with not many experiences of their own. Second, the majority, if not all, the students were traditional face-to-face students. They will physically see the faculty member and other students in their course around campus or in other courses. Third, I believe there has been conditioning of what is expected as a response on the discussion boards; netiquette. Netiquette is “a common

term for ‘network etiquette’ or the ‘rules of engagement’ for online practitioners” (Mason & Rennie, 2006, p. 84). Grabe and Grabe (2007) discussed the importance of etiquette and suggested guidelines for students such as “monitor your email account, watch grammar and spelling, create a context for your comments, compose the subject line carefully, as yourself if you would say that face-to-face, be careful with sarcasm and humor, remember messages are permanent, listen before you speak, and reply to the proper person” (pp. 189-190). Researchers have also discussed that it is improper to use all capital letters as that represents shouting and also to use emoticons to represent emotion that is stripped away from the lack of physical presence in online communication, but to not over-use them as this comes across as unprofessional (Grabe & Grabe, 2007, Mason & Rennie, 2006).

Next came the notion of ethos. The students used the phrases “I believe” and “I think” frequently. I began to piece together what this might mean in the discussion boards. When looking at the required textbooks, supplemental readings and other requirements of the faculty members, it became clear that the students were making connections to what they believed was truth. Fairclough (1992) described ethos as “the objective is to pull together the diverse features that go towards constructing ‘selves’, or social identities” (p. 235). While I believe that the students were trying to accomplish this, I believe that it was geared toward the beliefs of the faculty, who we considered the subject matter expert. This is where the power of the faculty member really came into play. The faculty controlled the textbook, the supplemental readings as well as the course learning objectives. What I found interesting was there was no divergence of topics and everyone agreed more than should have been expected. In only one course of the eight that I analyzed did the faculty member provide any readings that showed two opposing views on a topic. In this instance, I believe the faculty member set out to develop cognitive

presence. However the opinions of the students were still agreeing, so I suspect that this was based on the demographics and positionality of the student body. It was clearly stated that the students did not have to agree with the reading piece, but it did need to be read and considered. In two courses, the students were expected to respond using cited sources. There were sources provided by the faculty member such as the text and additional readings, but it was stated that students could and should use external sources to supplement their discussions. This could lead to the inclusion of different opinions, but seeing through the holistic coding that new topics were not introduced and through Fairclough analysis that “disagree” phrases were very seldom used, it was not likely that the students looked for outside sources.

The other piece of cognitive presence that I believe was a key finding in this study is that of constant communication. While I would agree that there was consistent communication within the discussion boards, I find the pattern interesting. I discovered that the discussion boards were used to introduce a topic. There was only acceptance, by both writing on that topic, and agreement to the topic, replies that also agree with the topic and then closure to the topic. Are all of these topics and discussions not all a part of the course and the learning objectives? Why are the topics never revisited or the topics all connected together? I feel that part of the constant communication should be built upon for the duration of the course. These topics should be built upon and revisited and ultimately all tied up for cohesive learning of the objectives of the course. The following is a discussion of the relationship of the findings to the research questions.

Research Question 1

What are the nature of the patterns of communication inside the discussion boards?

By looking at the nature of the discourse through the Fairclough (1992) framework and having a theoretical understanding of teaching presence from Garrison et al. (1999), I was able to describe the pattern of communication between students as well as between students and faculty members inside discussion boards. Through the process of analysis beginning with holistic coding followed up with topic control, exchange structure, and interactional control, I was able to describe the pattern of communication in the discussion boards. In the first function of teaching presence by Garrison et al. (1999) teaching presence included “the design of the course regarding presentation and organization of the learning materials and objectives” (p. 90). Faculty members decided upon the required textbook along with supplemental reading materials and established a timeline for breaking up the readings for the duration of the course. The topic control coincided with the readings and the topics of the discussion forum were introduced by the faculty member. In two courses, the topics still coincided with the readings and were introduced in the discussion board, but the topics were decided upon by small groups of students and approved by the faculty member. The pattern emerged in the form of original post by the students, response to the original post by usually another student, but could include responses from the faculty member, and then the discussion on that topic for that time period ended and the next topic was introduced for the next time period with a repeat of this pattern. Teaching presence also was described by a role of facilitation. In some courses, the faculty member provided to the pattern by participating with their thoughts and opinions to the discussion thread, but in two courses the faculty member did not participate in the pattern at all. This role was fulfilled by the students of the course as they decided the topic for the thread and facilitated the discussion by replying to the original posts, expressing opinions as well as providing feedback on the interpretation of the readings. I revealed in this study through analysis of the pattern of

communication that facilitation does indeed exist from either faculty member or students in the course as described by Garrison et al., (1999) who stated facilitation is described as being the function “to support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes” (p. 90). Through the analysis of the courses, this pattern was consistent throughout all courses with just small variations such as; how many replies are required, or the timeframe for a thread which could be weekly to biweekly, but these variations do not change the pattern of the dialog as described above.

Research Question 2

Does the structure of the language that is used by students in online discussion boards create and/or maintain power relations? If so, how and to what extent?

Through the process of analysis beginning with holistic coding followed up with topic control, exchange structure, and interactional control, I was able to examine the power relations within the discussion boards. Most of the power comes from the control of the introduction of topics. Through holistic coding, the topics that were introduced in the discussion thread remained topics for that thread. New topics were only introduced when the time period ended and the discussion boards began a new thread in a new week. While students had opportunities to introduce new topics or diverge from prompted topics, this did not occur in these data through my analysis. I was hypothesizing that students would begin a discussion thread and that students as students discussed the topics new topics would be introduced and those new introductions would take the discussion in the direction of these new topics. I thought that with replies to posts new ideas would be generated and built upon. While initially thinking about my own interactions with discussion boards in online courses this question fit naturally into this research by trying to understand what topics were introduced and by whom, and then trying to understand

why those topics were substantiated on by others in the course in the discussion. This kind of pattern in the discussion threads never occurred within these data and context. Instead I found that this control remained with the topics introduced by the faculty member. Cognitive presence is thought to help foster the construction of meaning and Garrison et al. (1999) added with “constant communication”. I question the thought process behind constant communication. In my analysis, through my interpretation of topic control, interactional control, ethos, and politeness (Fairclough, 1992), I believe that by having a discussion thread in each timeframe the presence of constant communication holds true, but I question the construction of meaning and especially as it relates to power. The faculty member, as the subject matter expert, has the responsibility to pick the required texts and readings and create the learning outcomes for the course. While I believe that meaning was constructed through the use of the discussion board, I believe that the meaning constructed was that of what the faculty member only introduced. I do believe that those are important concepts and need to be introduced and built upon, but I also believe that in education we must also develop critical thinking skills. By not introducing opposing viewpoints in materials, or by creating discussion prompts that has the potential to foster in depth analysis and conversation of the material and learning objectives, cognitive presence appears to not be applied as well as it could be. While analyzing data, several statements of “I believe” were overwhelming in relationship with the topic introduction prompts and I do believe the students were trying to build cognitive presence in relation to understanding the materials presented, but after further analysis into ethos students were just agreeing with the discussion prompts of the faculty member and because no new topics were never introduced the students were all just agreeing with one another as well. Even when an “I disagree” statement appeared in a discussion thread, the point of disagreement was never expanded upon. The

students only responded and built upon the ideas of agreement. These students were taking online courses, but were also face-to-face students, so there is a high probability that students will see their classmates as well as faculty members in other courses as well as other on-campus events. While faculty do possess some level of power in a course, faculty should conceptualize the need and purpose for the discussion boards. If this need and purpose is to build social presence, then the design of the discussion forum should be built for that purpose. If the need and purpose is to promote cognitive presence, then the design of the discussion board should include a way to distribute power to the students in order to foster critical thinking and problem solving skills as well as produce discourse that imitates discussion of topics, supporting evidence, as well as fostering and expanding upon differing viewpoints that are able to be explained through the use of the discussion boards. This will require a level of teaching presence both in facilitation of the discussion boards as well as how the course is structured in the presentation of materials, learning objectives, and physical layout of the discussion boards through the learning management system.

Research Question 3

Are the verbal interactions that are present in online discussion boards reflective of various social and historical factors? If so, how and to what extent?

Social presence is articulated by Garrison et al. (1999) by “the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community” (p. 89). With holistic coding, students were able to discuss attributes about themselves as well as projections for their reasoning for being in the course through a common first week introductions discussion forum topic. In my own experiences, it has been traditional to have an introductory assignment in the first week to prepare a biography of yourself and your interest in the course to

share with the faculty member and the course mates during the first week. Because of the environmental nature of the place for this study, most students and faculty know the majority of students in the course already because they are members of the face-to-face campus community. In deeper analysis, students were able to also project certain characteristics, feelings, beliefs, and values through the analysis of the ethos statements. These statements included phrases such as “I believe”, “I think”, “I do not think”, or “I do not believe”. The learning management system allowed for the use of emoticons as well as students being able to use special characters while typing to make faces or expressions through extra exclamations points. In these data, the use of emoticons never occurred nor did any sort of expressions with special characters. There were very rare instances of extra punctuation or all capital letters. Students are taught very early on that there are proper ways to compose and write and function in online spaces. This usually involves direction from the rules of netiquette. While these rules are important for helping to enhance and effectively communicate with the lack of physical presence and body language, I think students have taken that to mean that one cannot be in disagreement with statements or haven’t been taught how to effectively communicate disagreement in online communication. These data from my analysis support this concept as phrases using “I disagree” or “I do not believe” are rarely expanded upon, but students will expand up “I agree” statements. It was common to see a statement that said “I agree and disagree”, but the following sentences would only expound upon the portion they did agree with in the discussion thread. The faculty members also discuss netiquette expectations in their course syllabi and it is also a built-in feature as part of their course in the physical layout of the learning management system. In light of the analysis, the understanding of the conditions of the university such as demographics of the student body also to help explain some of this nature in the discourse as well. The students are

primarily of the same age group, ethnicity, and close to equal distribution of male and female. Because of the makeup of the student body, it can conceivably be possible to explain the very little variance to topics and discussions from the discussion boards because of the lack of diversity and type of student that is recruited to fit the mission and purpose of the university. This might also be explained from the lack of life experiences due to being traditional-aged college students experiencing and building up those experiences with independence and responsibility solely from themselves and not from authority of a guardian.

Implications and Future Research

This research opened more doors for future research and created more questions than I had answers because of the narrow focus and design of this study. There are some implications for practice from this research. Faculty and instructional designers need to be aware of what the purpose of the discussion boards are when designing an online class. From this analysis, students read the syllabus to understand what needed to be done in order to obtain the points required for this element of the course and did just that. The one most have successfully implemented was the social presence in the course. The faculty address when and how they will be available and participate from the beginning to the end of the course. Students have the options to reveal as much as they want about themselves as well as personalize the experience, even though this research shows they do not take advantage of that as much as what opportunity is provided. I would encourage faculty and instructional designers to think about how to develop cognitive presence more and in a more successful way.

There is a wealth of knowledge that can significantly add to the body of research from additional studies. There were several conscious limitations put on this study, so I believe there is an opportunity for an abundance of research studies. These would include: larger sample size;

larger course sizes; different geographic locations; different student demographics, including truly online students taking a single course from all across the world; similar student demographics; similar geographic location; public vs private vs for-profit institutions; quantitative studies; and conducting this study while courses are engaged so the opportunity to interview students as the course was open. In exploring the results of this research and trying to gain meaning, much discussion was had about the maturity of the undergraduate student. Along with maturity, there is this notion that learning occurs through experience. This discussion boards do not include much dialog on students sharing personal experience with the topics or material. I could see benefit from a study where the analysis examined this concept of maturity and personal experience. Due to the limitations on this study in regards to the methodological approach, I could see benefit from a study that examined the development of cognitive presence. I would also encourage a review of the netiquette rules and look to encourage how to open up discussions with a different view or different opinion.

Conclusion

Institutions are starting, growing, and maintaining distance education. The purpose of this research was to take an extensive examination and grow the understanding of discussion boards. There are more undergraduates taking online course than graduates, but the basis of literature and research has been at the graduate level. The purpose of this research was to explore the creation, development, and building of online discussion boards in online courses at the undergraduate level in order to add to the body of literature that exists.

The conclusion of this study is that there is the development of community that exists in online discussion boards. The elements of teaching, social, and cognitive presence do exist, but to what extent does that happen and how much can we improve on those elements. The CDA

framework that was used in the research does not allow for the identification of issues related to cognitive presence. However, the data that were collected from the online discussion boards and examined in this study allowed for me to conclude that evidence of cognitive presence was lacking. This finding is consistent with results reported in other related research literature. Therefore, there needs to be more investigation into this topic in order to better understand the finding of this research and develop an extensive amount of literature. With this research, it is my hope that invested parties of distance education can improve upon the education of those who have yet to enter the world of higher education.

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Appendix A - IPEDS Snapshot Enrollment Data

2014	American Indian	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian; Other Pacific Islander	White	Unknown	Non Resident Alien	Two- Race/Ethnicity	Total
Undergraduate Full-time under 25	3	4	54	85	3	414	18	19	12	612
<i>Female</i>	1	2	25	42	0	201	10	9	8	298
<i>Male</i>	2	22	29	43	3	213	8	10	4	334
Undergraduate Full-time 25 or over	0	1	4	9	0	41	1	2	2	60
<i>Female</i>	0	0	1	5	0	18	1	1	0	26
<i>Male</i>	0	1	3	4	0	23	0	1	2	34
Total	3	5	58	94	3	455	19	21	14	672

2013	American Indian	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian; Other Pacific Islander	White	Unknown	Non Resident Alien	Two- Race/Ethnicity	Total
Undergraduate Full-time under 25	5	3	42	70	3	395	0	19	10	547
<i>Female</i>	3	2	14	26	2	225	0	6	4	282
<i>Male</i>	2	1	28	44	1	170	0	13	6	265
Undergraduate Full-time 25 or over	1	1	5	12	0	52	0	3	3	77
<i>Female</i>	1	1	2	5	0	40	0	1	2	52
<i>Male</i>	0	0	3	7	0	12	0	2	1	25
Total	6	4	47	82	3	447	0	22	13	624

2012	American Indian	Asian	African American	Hispanic	Native Hawaiian; Other Pacific Islander	White	Unknown	Non Resident Alien	Two- Race/Ethnicity	Total
Undergraduate Full-time under 25	7	3	45	55	4	445	0	20	3	582
<i>Female</i>	6	1	19	24	2	257	0	7	2	318
<i>Male</i>	1	2	26	31	2	188	0	13	1	264
Undergraduate Full-time 25 or over	2	1	3	4	0	41	0	3	1	55
<i>Female</i>	2	1	2	2	0	34	0	2	0	43
<i>Male</i>	0	0	1	2	0	7	0	1	1	12
Total	9	4	48	59	4	486	0	23	4	637

Appendix B - IRB Letter of Approval – Kansas State University



University Research Compliance Office

TO: W. Franklin Spikes
Educational Leadership
Bluemont

Proposal Number: 8367

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair 
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 08/01/2016

RE: Proposal Entitled, "An exploratory study of building a community of inquiry in online discussion boards via critical discourse analysis."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 4, subsection:**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Appendix C - IRB Letter of Approval – Participating University

|

Proposal Number: F2016-1

TO: Annie Hoekman

FROM: John Smith, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Ethical Treatment of Human Subjects

DATE: August 19th, 2016

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "An exploratory study of building community through the use of online discussion boards by utilizing critical discourse analysis framework."

The Institutional Review Board Chair has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval (to be later ratified at the next full IRB meeting).

In giving its approval, the IRB has determined that:

There is no more than minimal risk to the subjects.
 There is greater than minimal risk to the subjects.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to annual review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and, if the subjects are students, to the Executive Director of Student Development.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after a project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for his or her personal records. The identification of particular human subjects in any publication is an invasion of privacy and requires a separately executed informed consent.

* Any reference to the participating university was removed for anonymity.

Appendix D - Data Sample

Forum post (Title Author Date)	Users	Approval	Unread	Replies (My)	Latest Reply	Latest Post or Reply
The recent Supreme Court ruling by [redacted] Tue 6/30/2015 at 1:27 AM	8	-	4	8(0)	Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling by [redacted] Mon 7/6/2015 at 8:31 PM	
tricky topics by [redacted] Mon 5/18/2015 at 12:44 PM	10	-	12	11(0)	Re: tricky topics by [redacted] Mon 7/6/2015 at 8:22 PM	
Research by [redacted] Mon 5/18/2015 at 12:43 PM	9	-	10	9(0)	Re: Research by [redacted] Mon 7/6/2015 at 8:16 PM	
The recent Supreme court ruling by [redacted] Mon 7/6/2015 at 7:08 PM	1	-	1	0(0)	No replies	
Add a Post	Totals:		27	28(0)		

Students

0

Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling

Posted: Tue 6/30/2015 at 11:24 AM (in reply to [redacted])

As a person who frequents Facebook, I've mainly seen positive reactions from my friends and rainbow-fied profile pictures. I've seen very little negative reactions, mostly because my friends are in my age group. Those who were born in the nineties and early 2000s are likely to have positive views of same-sex marriage because we were born into an accepting generation. I can say that my parents weren't too happy about it. They were born in the sixties, a time when being LGBT+ was never a topic for discussion (they're also rather conservative).

Many people say that the right for gays and lesbians to get married shouldn't have been an issue in the first place. The right to marry the person one loves is a basic right in America. Denying a person this right is denying them a right to happiness. Even though gays and lesbians can marry now, there are still numerous roadblocks ahead. Some states mandate that one can be fired for coming out or even evicted. Adoption agencies might still prevent gays and lesbians from adopting because they deem the couple "insufficient parents" because there is the lack of a father or mother figure (or the agency has religious affiliation).

[Reply](#)

[Private Comment](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

00

for Week 1 Discussion

201 words - excluding quoted text

Students

0

Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling

Posted: Tue 6/30/2015 at 1:44 PM (in reply to [redacted])

This is indeed a very interesting topic for discussion. As a heterosexual man I see no way in which gay marriage can possibly affect my life at all. Therefore, why should anyone have a problem with it. Think of it this way, if a homosexual couple have been together for 10 years, and live together for that same amount of time, is it right to deny them marriage...NO its isn't right to do so.

The sanctity of marriage is a commitment to your partner, to stay true and loyal, to love and to cherish, if you are able to commit to these marital obligations then you should be allowed to get married....and it shouldn't matter if you are gay or lesbian....

that's my two cents

[Reply](#)

[Private Comment](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

00

for Week 1 Discussion

125 words - excluding quoted text

Students

0

Re: Re: The recent Supreme Court ruling

Posted: Wed 7/1/2015 at 8:51 PM (in reply to [redacted])

I agree. Homosexuality doesn't violate the sanctity of marriage at all. If a couple loves each other and is committed to each other, then why shouldn't they get married?

[Reply](#)

[Private Comment](#) [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

Appendix E - Holistic Codes from First Round Coding

Introductions

Plato and Humor

Catharsis of emotions

Aristotle

Ethical Relativism

Universal Values

Batman vs Joker

Violence

Egoism

Ethical altruism

Categorical Imperative

Feminist ethics

Death penalty

Primeval Story

Sagas Heroes

Exodus

Retribution Theology

Joshua and Judges

Samuel

The Prophets

The Flood

Socrates and Role/Education of Women

Imperial Policy towards Christians
Humanists Education
Burke and Liberty
Payne and Revolutionary change Europe
Freedoms and Inheritances
African Congo
Berlin Conferences
Cold War
Spanish New World Conquest
Terrorism
Organized Crime versus Terrorist Organizations
6 Propositions Radicalization
Cells, networks and umbrella structures in specific terrorist organizations
Economics and Terrorist Organizations
National Infrastructure
Protection Plan - Accept or minimize Risk
Internal theft by employee
Incident Command System and implementation as well as 5 major duties of Incident Commander
Emergency Response Team to management
Why the church during and after disasters
Preparation of Clergy
Barriers of spiritual care in disasters
Youth and college students

Heal Thyself

Broken is the Beginning

10 Commandments for Spiritual Care in a disaster (Group Project)

Sexuality Research true representation of general population

Supreme Court Ruling Legalizing Homosexual Marriage

Sexual topic discussions in partners

Abortion

STI Risk

Getting married later in life

Oral Sex is Sex

Pharmacies and Contraceptives

Shopping in public for contraceptives

Transgender children

Covenant Marriage

Transgenders allowed to change birth certificates

Media coverage help transgenders

Men vs. Women Work Equality

Sex Education Policy KS

Sterilization

Stereotypical Behavior Children

50 Shades of Grey Porn

Sexual Predators

Conjoined Twins and Marriage

Defining Rape

Privilege

Pornography

Appendix F - Sample Analytic Memos

I started reading Fairclough again and read Exchange Structure and he cited a pieces of works done in classrooms with teachers and pupils. "Question-response-assessment cycle". This really hit home with me as I began to think about the discussion boards.

"What turn-taking rules are in operation? How are topics introduced, developed, and established, and is topic control symmetrical or asymmetrical?" (Fairclough, 1992, p.234)

"In initiating an exchange, teachers can give pupils information, ask them questions, set out agendas for the class, or control pupils' behavior. Pupils, on the other hand, are far more constrained in what they can say or do: they mainly answer questions and perform certain tasks in response to requests". I felt this is exactly what the discussion boards were like!!! The faculty member controlled what was discussed by giving the guiding questions on the discussion board. This then limited what the students responded with on the topic, but I feel in this course the questions were asking the students to self-evaluate on their own belief system in order to construct their posts. I do not feel like the students in the course deviated much from the topics at hand. I feel this course is spent on building "ethos".

Course 4&5 - This course appeared as if most of the time this was a guiding question/statement was offered by the faculty. The student then did an original post based on that guiding premise. The faculty member then responded to the students original post. In just a few instances did another student reply after the faculty member responded to the original post. In almost all cases the only reply was by the faculty member.

In topic control "B offers the topic, A Accepts it, and B goes on (later) to develop it" p. 155. I feel this starts out the way all the discussion board posts go. A student makes their initial post, and then the classmate accepts the post. There is not usually a come back by initial posting student. The discussion ends after a reply. Accepting it is usually on a positive agreement too.

Course 8 - This changes the design a little bit in that B(faculty) starts the thread with a statement/question/material and everyone becomes an "A". This does change the dynamic of the discussion slightly. But when looking at the rest of the courses, most are actually operating this way for the most part

anyways. Maybe this is a good practice? Look at this a little more in depth.

"The interactional control conventions of a genre embody specific claims about social and power relations between participants" Fairclough, 1992, p.152.

So as I look at interactional control and the genre is undergraduate discussion boards, then I can make claims about what the social and power relations are between participants. So I can look at exchange structure and topic control to make some claims about this genre of discussion boards. What do I see in this course? The faculty member starts off the discussion board with a set of questions or statements. The students are then asked to craft a response to the questions/statements by a deadline for the week. They are then also to respond to one individual by that week deadline as well. What I saw was an original post, and a reply by a fellow student. This instructor was involved in the discussions and he usually clarified a question with his expert opinion or his own beliefs/thoughts. There were many times he asked a question to their post to get them to think in a different direction or not what they had just posted about. Once the reply was done, then that was it for that original post.

Should part of analysis be looking at the difference between all the adjectives or what come first. Such as I completely agree vs I agree completely??

Is there a difference between agreeing with one individual in a reply vs saying I agree with others?

Why does everyone always agree with everyone's post? I really thought that maybe this had to do with wanting to learn the materials for the course because it was part of what I needed/wanted to know for my career goals/major, but these are liberal studies courses and it is still that way!!

As I read through this course, I typically saw an original post by the student and then a response by another classmate. The replies are always in agreement. In this specific course, the two non-agreements were with notions coming from supplemental readings/texts. Why does everyone always agree with everyone's post? I am no different. When I took online courses, I too typically began every reply with a "great post" and "I agree" statement. I really thought that maybe this had to do with wanting to learn the materials for the course because it was part of what I needed/wanted to know for my career goals/major, but these are liberal studies courses and it is still that way!!

There was very little disagreement within the posts. There were a few phrases used such as I don't fully agree with that. Typically those statements were not elaborated on. But they would pick out the statements that they did agree with and elaborate on that more. It is like they only can write about what they agree with, but can't expound upon that which they disagree with. Why is that? What are they fearful of? Rejection, being considered "wrong" in the eye of the teacher? But that is interesting as he never posts. Maybe no supporting literature to show another perspective?

Some of the students are in the same classes, does this impact writing style? Seeing the same responses among multiple classes. Although I had many of the same in my graduate courses, but we never met physically, we were familiar with each other.

Ethos

"Ethos can, however, be seen as part of a wider process" p.166. "Which one's whole relationship to the social world is expressed" p.167. "The objective is to pull together the diverse features that go towards constructing 'selves', or social identities" p.235

In all the courses, it is so common to see a statement that begins with "I believe" and "I think". I really had no idea what to do with these statements. There were just so many of them that they had to fit somewhere. These statements were just such a big part of the discussion. I do think that they do tie in with topic introduction/control as well. Many of these statements are a way for students to begin to construct their beliefs and selves.

This course (8) was very human and feeling like in regards to nature of the content. There were many "I believe" and "I think" statements. This is probably the one course where the faculty member did give different perspectives on topics. While it didn't change the dialog much in regards to the topic control process by Fairclough, I think that is because the students were replying to the faculty members post. This could have looked very different if each student was initiating their own original post and having people reply to it. This could be a great study as far as physically setting up discussion boards and introducing materials just as this faculty member did here. I think this is why this ethos section is a lot bigger than other courses in this section. This could also be the nature of the course materials.

Historically, discussion boards used for communication and taking the place of "the classroom". But this shift now after all of this research is to utilize them for the specifics of the course. Maybe as a support forum, small group projects, actual classroom discussion etc. How do we build them now that we have seen the patterns in the discourse?