Advanced Research & Studies Journal

Online Faculty experience education immediacy

David Lloyd[1]
[1] *East Los Angeles College, Monterey Park, USA*

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore best practice strategies in online instruction that effectively reduce perceptions of transactional or felt-psychological distance, and, in turn, promote socially and humanely rich online learning communities in higher education. From this perspective, this study adopted the construct of "instructional immediacy" from educational communications theory, and attempted to uncover applications of the construct in online teaching contexts. To better provide plausible techniques and strategies for online teaching practitioners, "instructional immediacy" was approached through rich narratives of the perspectives and experiences of online teaching practitioners as well as through narratives from students in these courses. Educationally meaningful strategies for enhancing instructional immediacy emerged from an analysis of instructors' and students' narratives. The patterns of strategies were categorized into four dimensions of online instruction: (1) affective interaction, (2) cognitive interaction, (3) technology adoption, and (4) course presentation and organization. This study opens the possibility of cultivating instructional immediacy in a text-based learning community which allows a promise for executing socially connected and engaging online instruction.
Keywords: online education, social presence, instructional immediacy, narrative inquiry.

Introduction

As more higher education institutions move into online learning environments where instructors cannot rely on physical presence as a natural community builder, the topic of how the human element affects Web-based learning environments has increasingly become a center of discussion in the field of education. (e.g., Arbaugh, 2001; Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Baker & Woods, 2004; Boser, 2004; Freitas, Myers, and Avtgis (1998); Gunawardena, 1995; Horton, 2000; Melrose & Bergeron, 2006; University of Illinois, 1999). Online learners often experience transactional distance which refers to a psychological distance as well as a physical separation among teachers and learners (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). This research was initiated to research ways to reduce any transactional or felt-psychological distance in order to create a sense of presence, and build positive learning communities. This study adopted the construct of "instructional immediacy" from educational communications theory where psychological distances between teachers and students were researched in depth, and further attempted to uncover the possibilities of applying the construct of instructional immediacy in online teaching contexts. In fact, in both face-to-face and distance education, the construct of "instructional immediacy" has emerged and is seen as critical to learners' ultimate success (Andersen, 1979; Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Baker & Woods, 2004; Feenberg, 1989; Gorham,

1988; Hackman & Walker, 1990; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987; Sanders & Wiseman, 1990; Shin, 2003; Walther 1992).

While being conscious of pedagogical and cultural differences between traditional and online education settings, there was a need to find ways to improve and promote instructional immediacy in online instructors' competences. To reduce the psychological distance between teaching and learning parties, this study, therefore, was aimed at identifying possible ways of increasing the instructional immediacy in online teaching contexts by exploring four dimensional aspects of online teaching: interaction, course design, technology adoption, and the methods of course presentation.

This study was based on following questions:

- What are empirical strategies that online instructors have learned and implemented in reducing transactional and psychological distance?

- What were the patterns of the strategies for enhancing instructional immediacy competences categorized?

Initially, "teacher immediacy" was defined as "those communication behaviors that enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another" (Mehrabian, 1969a, p. 203). However, instructional immediacy had to be redefined to be aligned with the characteristics of online educations as pedagogical and administrative actions an instructor takes throughout an online course to increase the students' sense of human interaction, instructor presence, caring, and connectedness, directed toward successful online teaching.

Theoretical Framework. This study is based on theory of instructional immediacy (Mehrabian,1967, 1971; Andersen, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, & McCrosky, 1987) and social presence theory (Short, Williams, & Christies, 1976).

Teacher Immediacy and Social Presence. The concept of instructional immediacy has become associated with social presence theory as well as the concept of instructional intimacy. Social presence is the degree to which a person feels "socially present" in a mediated situation or the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" in mediated communication (Short, Williams, & Christies, 1976). Short et al. suggests that the social presence of the communications medium contributes to the level of intimacy that depends on factors such as physical distance, eye contact, and smiling.

Immediacy behavior has been defined and developed by Mehrabian (1969) to refer to behaviors that reduce the distance between people. The distance reduction can be accomplished by decreasing the actual physical proximity or by reducing psychological distance (Mehrabian, 1971). Instructors can convey immediacy or non-immediacy nonverbally (physical proximity, formality of dress, and facial expression) as well as verbally. Nonverbal immediacy behavioral cues include eye contact, gesture, relaxed body position, directing body position toward students, smiling, vocal expressiveness, movement, and proximity (Andersen, 1979).

Particularly significant verbal immediacy cues are the use of humor; praise of student work, actions, or comments; and frequency of initiating and/or willingness to become engaged in conversation before, after, or outside of class. These nonverbal cues are largely removed in online instruction. If immediacy enhances social presence which is a significant predictor of successful teaching, there is need to make a socially- rich environment so online instruction can be perceived as high in social presence, and, in turn, are generally judged (on Semantic Differential Scales) by users as warm, personal, sensitive, and sociable (Short et al., 1976).

Method. We adopted narrative inquiry as a research method. Since this study is based on empirical and reflective perspectives of online instructors, narrative inquiry method, a way of understanding experiences through stories lived and told (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), is the best fit to understand and expand instructors' professional experiences and empirical knowledge. Narrative inquiry offers the

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

possibility of educative experiences (Dewey, 1938) as individuals expand meanings of their experiences in their particular situations where reality takes over the decision making process.

Participants. The participants of this study were drawn from online instructors and students at Public University, a comprehensive university located in Texas. Public University offered the largest and longest-running distance education program in Texas. Due to the use of narrative inquiry within this study, the participants were selected based on their willingness to participate. We recruited online instructor participants diverse in content area and gender. Pseudonyms are used here to provide participant anonymity.

This study used multiple data sources which included researcher journal, field notes, and research interviews combined with conversations and observations. Interview and document data were then analyzed using a common process of data analysis. Interview transcripts and other data sources were analyzed through a process of coding and the use of analytical memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from which the key themes within the data were identified, developed, and refined.

Results. Four dimensional aspects on online instructional immediacy competencies emerged from narratives of online instructors and their students. These four dimensions were intertwined in instructors' teaching repertoire while they pursued increased instructional immediacy. To find a simple way to present these interwoven dimensional themes embedded in practice, four integral quadrants for instructional immediacy were employed (see Figure 1). Figure 1, which was inspired by a four quadrant figure from Wilber (2000), indicates that effective teaching practices which enhance instructional immediacy not only come from interaction and communication but also from integral use of other elements of Web-based instruction such as technology adoption and course presentation/organization.

In the threaded stories of the participants, we found two different kinds of interaction in online communication: (1) affective and (2) cognitive. Affective interaction refers to the interaction that is executed for, and results from, personal attention and caring responses. Cognitive interaction refers to the interaction that is conducted for, and results in, the achievement of the content of the subject matter. Affective (social) interaction opens the door for building and maintaining the relationships between students and the instructor; it can affect the level of student achievement thereby creating a strong and engaging learning community. However, cognitive interaction also contributes to the building of relationships with students. As long as students can feel the instructors are out there listening to them, students perceive the presence of the instructor and feel higher satisfaction with the instructor's attitudes. When students receive prompt, detailed feedback and comments, they consider instructors' actions as caring for them as learners.

Learning and teaching in a Web-based environment is extremely static on the computer screen. As a result, simple feedback from the instructor appeals to students' perceptions of teaching presence: the instructor is out there listening to students. Although it is difficult to express nonverbal and verbal immediacy cues in a Web-based classroom, the research revealed here suggested that online students appreciate any form of instructor action presented during course activities, because online students expect less interaction. They anticipate the instructor will be less present than in face-to-face settings. It was also important to see that immediacy behaviors can be derived not only from affective interactions but also cognitive interactions. Another phenomenon found in this study was that the immediacy approaches that instructors chose were dependent upon the size and content of the classes. With bigger size courses, instructors opted for collective activities rather than individual activities due to the limitation of time.

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

I. Affective Interaction Individual-Interior	II. Cognitive Interaction Individual-Interior
III. Technology Adoption Collective-Exterior	IV. Course Presentation/Organization Collective-Exterior

Figure 1. Integral Quadrants for Instructional Immediacy (Adapted and modified from Wilber, 2000)

Affective Interaction.*Personal attention.* The English professor, Dr. Parker, found a key drive of affective online interaction in personal attention and acts of caring (Noddings, 1984). He found that the students were "right there" with him when he approached students with personal attention. His interaction with students began with taking an active interest in students' concerns, understanding their situations, and sensing students' emotion.

DR. PARKER: A woman talked about her baby being home sick for the day and …..So I'll just say something like, "Well I hope your baby gets better and take advantage of the time you are at home," and things like that.

Dr. Parker expressed his sympathy, comforting students, adding caring, warm comments, and offering advice in his interaction with students. To build his personalized interaction, he started by collecting students' personal information from the beginning of the semester, through asking students to write self-introductions, then by revisiting self-introductions as students approached him with their personal issues. Dr. Parker understood that he could not rely on cues from his physical presence as he was accustomed to in face-to-face classrooms. Therefore, he needed to seek out alternative "ways to make personal connections with students in his class." Dr. Parker's personal attention created a real sense of a virtual instructor for students, allowing students to claim that "he is real (Jennifer)" when teaching online.

Facilitating various communication channels. Dr. Williams found communicating on the telephone with students to be extremely effective. He believed that sometimes communication through written text was not enough to express complex and sensitive issues. He informed his students during their orientation session that they could call him if they needed to, thus providing a more accessible way to contact him. He mentioned that the telephone conversations provided answers and a certain atmosphere that email was not able to offer. He further stated that students who were in desperate need of assistance should feel free to call him. His phone conversations with students mostly related to difficulties in understanding the material and inherent anxieties related to failing the course. In addition to the email communication channel, he would like to open more communication channels in online instruction.

Cognitive Interaction.*Promptly responding to students' needs.* Dr. Parker learned how it was critical to let students know how prompt instructors' response would be. His goal was a turn-around time of 12 hours so that he could reduce the level of anxiety students would have when not getting immediate responses:

I try to get back to them within twelve hours….I make a religious effort to do that but sometimes, let's say ….. I try to respond twice a day.

Clearly, Dr. Parker understood that prompt feedback was a way that he could show his concerns for his students. Because he exchanged emails as his primary mode of interaction with students, he sought to narrow the time it took for him to respond to them.

Facilitating chat sessions. One of Dr. Williams' methods of initiating conversation with students was synchronous virtual meetings. Every night at 9 p.m., he logged on to the online chat room and waited

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

for his students to enter, ask questions, and talk to him. He wanted to make sure that if students out there in e-space needed help, they could approach him without delay. And his students knew he would be there for them. If they needed help, they would know where to go find him. Dr. Williams believed that the chat session offered multi-layered conversations as compared to email, which allowed for only two-way conversation. Multi-voice conversations allow students to survey the opinions of others on the same subject. He also felt that successful interactions in these synchronous meetings could be an indication of better classes. He has found the same methods were viewed differently with different groups of students. That is the nature of the interaction which relies on both sets of interactors—learners and instructor—not merely the instructor's ability to promote students' participation.

There were always regulars who took advantage of the chat session, as well as those who never used the resources offered by the instructor. Dr. Williams was often alone, with no one showing up to chat toward the end of the semester. Nevertheless, he retained the chat session space because he wanted his students to get the most from his online class. Dr. Williams used the chat session to impress on his students the habit of attendance; he also monitored students to see if they were keeping up with the learning events. He believed that these kinds of ongoing class activities possibly created a sense of urgency about completing assignments, which is largely absent in online contexts due to the removal of the physical presence of instructors and peers from their sight.

When we asked one of Dr. Williams' students about the chat sessions, we found some extremely interesting phenomena. Our impression of Dr. Williams's synchronous meetings was that they were not a success story because of low participation rates; in effect, we thought that students did not find value in them. Interviews with his students, surprisingly, revealed that our hypothesis was incorrect. For instance, though one of his students (i.e., Maggie) attended the synchronous sessions just one time during the semester, she claimed that the synchronous chat sessions were informative. She noted, however, that the chat session time did not align with her own schedule due to her family-related responsibilities and time needed for her children. Nonetheless, she logged on later when everyone else had left, and checked on what others were talking about—perhaps they had similar issues and concerns. Asked about the value of the chat session, she suggested its continuance. Maggie, as we understood it, had experienced vicarious immediacy or feelings of closeness by witnessing interactions between one's teacher and other students (LaRose, Gregg, & Eastin, 1999) in chat rooms.

In Maggie's report, we found two different kinds of participation: (1) visible participation, and (2) invisible participation. Students who missed the chat session participated in the synchronous discussion activity by logging on after the session closed and reading the transcript of the sessions. Dr. Williams, however, was considering making participation in an online chat session part of the students' grade in his next course since he believed that this live support could contribute to students' learning and completion rate. Given Maggie's situation (and perhaps many others with similar busy work and family schedules), he might want to, instead, make chat sessions a mandatory class activity with required written reflections on the synchronous discussion.

Being proactive in the contact. Proactive where communication was concerned, Dr. Williams surveyed individual students' patterns of responding to the class activities, and initiated contact with his students when he located key issues around students' performances. His online teaching experience revealed that online students were reticent in soliciting help. At the same time, he found it difficult to connect with students' needs without making students think he perceived a student as a poor academic performer.

The sensitive situation deterred Dr. Williams from attempting repeated contacts. It was interesting to observe that as students are laboring away, instructors might be hesitant to approach students with problems because of the touchy situation. However, Dr. Williams ensured that students knew he would be available whenever they needed him through emails and orientations. One of his students acknowledged his efforts at initiating contacts with his students. She observed that he kept track of students' work and guided off-task students in the right direction. It was significant to see an online student crediting her instructor's actions, even when the instructor was helping other students.

Technology Adoption.*Learning students' learning styles:* As a professor of accounting, Dr. Raji felt inherent limitations in learning through textual forms in terms of understanding the content, and,

consequently, employed technology to provide better teaching presence with more sensory stimulation. Dr. Raji learned the importance of human elements in online teaching from workshops and conferences, and agreed on the effectiveness of humanized online classes. She attempted to enhance technology with the human elements by inserting her voice into her presentation slides. She wanted students to understand better through supplemental materials and to hear the "feeling" of her instruction. Students without discipline did not use the technology-integrated instructional resources created for students' own benefits. She felt disappointed when she observed that some students never listened to her voice lecture in which she had invested a great deal of her time, energy, and other resources in order to promote a better understanding of materials.

It seemed that these online students followed the principle of economy in learning: online students who were task-oriented sought to achieve the best grades with the least effort. Maggie, one of Dr. Williams' students, found the PowerPoint slides with embedded voice helpful since she was an auditory learner. However, sometimes she could not listen to the audio because it was a time-consuming process to do so. "It is like being in a class, listening to the lecture. It is time-consuming," she claimed. She continued that, "I do not know what other graduate students' lives (are) like. There are so many things to do, so many things waiting for me."

Course Presentation/Organization. *Visual Channel of Personalization: "Virtual Physical Objects."* Online courses are composed largely of written text formats, which provide scant social-emotional cues in making acquaintances between teachers and learners or between learners and other learners. As an effort to reveal who he was really, Dr. Parker provided an extensive number of visual and communication channels for his students: for example, those channels that included his homepage, welcoming message page, personal pictures, and an introduction letter which disclosed personal and professional information about himself. Such documents and resources offered a self-image of Dr. Parker to his students which scaffolded a more open and socio-emotionally rich environment (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). More specifically, Dr. Parker posted a picture of himself mountain climbing in his course welcoming page, taken when he taught the "Semester at Sea" course, to show students that he was an active man, not a bookworm in a university office surrounded by the bookshelves. His picture played a role in creating his "electronic self-image and personality" of being adventurous and active. To be more personalized, Dr. Parker added a personal message below the picture.

Written Channel of Personalization: "I," "You," and "Narrative." It is common that an online presentation style should be a literary style rather than a dialogic one. Dr. Parker, however, explained that online classes should have features of the conventional classroom, where the instructors presented their instruction in a conversational way. Consequently, he adopted a conversational style in his writings for class Web sites, using "I," "you," and "narrative."

Disciplining students. To succeed within Web-based instruction, online instructors have had to find ways to work with students who are used to traditional ways of learning. Dr. Parker discovered that one of the mistakes students repeatedly made was that they miss reading notices posted in multiple places throughout the Web site because they do not have face-to-face peers reminding them about class procedures or professors repeating verbal instructions during the ensuing live class session.

In response to these concerns, Dr. Parker encouraged his students to be more alert than they were in a traditional classroom. In addition, he walked students through the requirements in a face-to-face orientation of the course, while his weekly messages repeatedly detailed what was expected. This was a key factor in establishing the accepted routines and procedures of the class; a step toward the structured discipline for students who might have gotten lost in this complex, new environment. He confessed that occasionally he purposefully tried not to repeat himself; instead, he asked students to remind him of the coming tasks and requirements and ask questions if anything was ambiguous.

Such a teaching style opened a more informal, mistake-allowed atmosphere. Dr. Parker's weekly message section became an announcement board wherein students gradually established their online learning habits and expectations as well as their overall pace of learning. One of Dr. Parker's students,

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

Brittney, mentioned that her teacher always attended to his students' activities, sending emails to remind them of their missed tasks. "If you don't turn in your weekly journal, then he'll email you. Whereas in other online classes, they don't care whether you log in or not." It was clear that Britney appreciated and felt an affinity for Dr. Parker's caring attitude toward students.

Creating momentum in communication. We learn how to behave in situated contexts and a given culture. When the momentum of interaction is established, a better opportunity is given to improve the relationship between instructors and students. Continuous interaction played a role building the momentum of communication. For instance, Dr. Parker developed momentum in communication by supporting a discussion board and journal writing. The discussion board and journal writing developed students' habits to execute the learning events while they were participating in such events on a regular basis. This can be seen as the gradual internalization of processes initially shared between participants of the learning activity (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993). Keeping journal entries on a weekly basis and responding to the discussion topics on discussion board—these activities functioned to immerse students in a routine of communication. In effect, he believed that ongoing communication played a key role in both students' academic performance and rapport between students and teachers in online classrooms.

Dr. Williams noticed that nontraditional students who had not been exposed to online environments or had not taken traditional courses for a while lacked the sense of rigor and intensity necessary for successful online learning. Students enrolled in face-to-face classes had had more opportunities to feel pressured to finish their work by hearing the instructor repeat reminders aloud and by observing their peers discuss and prepare assignments. Talking to peers about the assignment and their work process also provided a sense of urgency to traditional students in regular classes. This was the pressure arising from their learning communities. According to Dr. Williams, online students lacked the support from instructors' physical messages and the pressure from learning communities. Dr. Williams used the chat session to impress on his students a sense of urgency about completing assignments.

Table 1
Four Online Instructional Immediacy Dimensions and Instructional Competencies

Dimensions	Competencies
Affective Interaction	I. *Personal attention:* Taking active interest in students' concerns; understanding their situations; sensing students' emotions; expressing sympathy; comforting students; adding caring, providing warm comments; offering advice; and using self-introductions.
	Facilitating various communication channels: Informing students in their orientation session of the availability of communication through telephone; helping with the difficulty of understanding the material; and using the telephone to comfort student anxiety about failing the course.
Cognitive interaction	II. *Promptly responding to students' needs:* Keeping track of students' work; guiding off-task students in the right direction; reminding students of their missed tasks; and regulating turn-around time between 12-48 hours.
	Facilitating chat sessions: Initiating conversations with students in synchronous virtual meetings; being aware of those students who are only able to participate in synchronous meetings by reading transcripts.

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

	Initiating the contact: Being proactive in communication with students, and ensuring the availability of instructors through emails and orientations.
III. Technology Adoption	*Learning students' learning styles:* Creating effective technology-enhanced instruction by walking students through the requirements; detailing what was expected depending on students' learning styles; and using condensed, time-effective presentation slides with voice-over instruction to provide the feeling of instruction.
IV. Course Presentation/ Organization	*Visual Channel of Personalization: "Virtual Physical Objects":* Providing social-emotional cues by using a number of visual channels such as a homepage and a welcoming message page containing event-oriented pictures which present the instructor's self-image and attitudes, and attached messages which explain the content of pictures.
	Written Channel of Personalization: "I," "You," and "Narrative": Presenting online instruction in a dialogic style.
	Disciplining students: Walking students through the requirements; detailing what was expected as well as possible problems they would face; and creating routines to get students familiar with new ways of learning.
	Creating momentum in communication: Creating continuous, regular-basis opportunities for interaction such as journal writing, weekly discussion, open-ended, problem solving discussion boards, and asynchronous discussion meetings.

Table 1 summarizes the findings of the study in four online instructional immediacy dimensions, and details instructional competencies presented in instructors' personal practical knowledge.

Table 2

Online Instructional Verbal Immediacy Competencies

Instructional Dimensions	Categories	Verbal Immediacy Example
Affective interaction	Personal attention	1. For student whose baby was sick and was not able to come to classes. "Well I hope your baby gets better and take advantage of the time you are at home." 2. For students who got fired from their jobs "…you got more time to devote to the class. There are possibilities for new jobs for you." 3. For students who considered dropping out of classes because of job relocation. "Wait and see what the situation would be offshore, and we'll see whether you have to drop out. It is expensive to drop out, you know."
	Facilitating various communication channels	"You could call me if you need of any assistance in the difficulty of understanding the material and anxiety about failing the course." "Feel free to email about any issues with this class."

Cognitive interaction	Promptly responding to students' needs.	"Please ask me whatever it is that you need to know right away."
	Facilitating chat sessions.	"I set up the evening virtual office hours in the chat room, and we will get started next week."
	Being proactive in the contact.	"I did not see your second assignment. I would like to know if you are in some kind of trouble in the course. If so, please call me or email me for advice or help."
Course presentation	Visual channel of personalization: "Virtual Physical Objects."	"Hi! That is me on the right, Dr. Parker, your professor for this class. I am not actually waving to you but to some other students who reached the summit of the Avacha volcano ahead of me (description of a picture posted)."
	Written channel of personalization: "I," "You," and "Narrative."	"Each week I will post a weekly message to update the syllabus, go into greater detail on the activities for the week, or comment on other matters dealing with the class. Normally I try to post the weekly message on the weekend, but sometimes I may not get it up until Monday."
	Disciplining students	"Please reply back to me if you receive this email so that I know that all of my students are on board."
		"You must sign on regularly and you must turn in your work on schedule."
		"First, I think online classes require students to be a little more alert than classroom classes. In a classroom class if you absentmindedly miss something, the person sitting next to you may remind you, or the professor may repeat it the next class or near the end of the class. In an online class that may not happen."

Table 2 and the following tables state the verbal and non-verbal immediacy competencies emerged in findings. Verbal and non-verbal immediacy competencies were found in three instructional dimensions: (1) affective, (2) cognitive, and (3) course presentation. Verbal immediacy in affective domain is close to the instructional immediacy behaviors in traditional settings which present approachability, signal availability for communication, communicating interpersonal warmth and closeness. However, in online settings, students felt cared for when the content of communication was not related to the social, affective domain. The prompt manner of responses and methods of providing help of academic difficulty were perceived as positive caring behaviors. Therefore, instructional verbal immediacy competencies were also found in cognitive interaction. The effective online instructors believed that since teaching online is partly mimicking face-to-face classroom, a variety of channels of personalization creates a semblance of the atmosphere of face-to-face classroom. Students appreciated the reminders and alerts presented in the course Web site to prevent common problems of learning online such as procrastination.

Non-verbal immediacy behaviors in traditional settings were presented with physical proximity, high eye contact, and smiling, which conveyed greater intimacy, attraction, and trust. Due to the removal of physical appearance, all these non-verbal behaviors are not options in online instruction. However, methods of non-verbal immediacy competencies in online instruction were more versatile. Online instructors found ways to build immediacy in four dimensions such as facilitating the letter of

introduction, virtual office hours, photos of instructors, personal homepage, telephone, and weekly discussion activities. Online instructional non-verbal immediacy competencies are summarized in Table 3.

Discussion. As is clear from this particular study, online teacher immediacy behaviors, as displayed socially, culturally, and pedagogically, are different from those witnessed in conventional classrooms due to the nature of instruction delivered through this medium since it lacks physical contact while also typically lacking a real-time presence. Even though the verbal and nonverbal immediacy competences need to be created in a different ways in online settings compared to face-to-face settings, the results of this study offer the possibilities of creating online instructional behaviors.

Through the presentation and analysis of the online practitioners' threaded stories, this study also illustrates that instructional immediacy competencies in online instruction could and should be created in all four dimensional aspects of online teaching. In addition, the methods of creating online instructor immediacy should be adapted to the characteristics of the prevailing Web-based culture, online students, content area, and students' learning styles. This study shows various approaches used by online instructors to enhance the sense of instructional immediacy. Such practices used by the instructors in this study demonstrate that online instructional immediacy, in a virtual world, is possible.

Web-based environments, where the instruction is delivered electronically, are new to both the learning and teaching parties. As a result, Web-based environments call for human adjustment on the part of both teachers and students. All three participants had to find alternative ways to connect with students' needs and interests by facilitating continuing synchronous and asynchronous interactions, moderating online journals, and initiating contacts, thereby discovering and employing possible ways to be present in their teaching procedures. Their pedagogical, social, and administrative approaches were still in the experimental stage. However, their methods of understanding online students are being adjusted gradually.

Table 3
Online Instructional Non-Verbal Immediacy Competencies

Instructional Dimensions	Categories	Non-verbal Immediacy Example
Affective interaction	Personal attention	Assigning a letter of introduction to know students better.
	Facilitating various communication channels	Phoning students, and using both external mail, and WebCT mail.
Cognitive interaction	Promptly responding to students' needs.	Establishing turn-around time for replying to emails, and providing frequent feedback.
	Facilitating chat sessions.	Opening evening virtual office hours.
	Being proactive in the contact.	Keeping track of students' works, identifying off-track students, and emailing and phoning students who are off-task.
Technology adoption	Learning students' learning styles.	Using sensory stimulating technology based on students' learning styles.
Course presentation and organization	Visual Channel of Personalization: "Virtual Physical Objects."	Posting a picture of the instructor. Developing personal homepage

Disciplining students	Facilitating weekly message, and emailing students about the missed tasks.
Creating momentum in communication.	Keeping weekly journal entries, offering evening virtual office hours, using instant messenger, and incorporating problem-solving discussion board.

The understanding of online students' learning styles and their main goals of taking online courses should be considered within the process of planning. The use of high technology is a time-consuming process and creates myth that technology-enhanced instruction will work. However, not every guideline for technology integration Dr. Raji learned in faculty trainings was functional for her instruction. Most guidelines, in fact, were created from the perspective of the senders of instruction (i.e., the instructors), not by receivers of education (i.e., the students). The guidelines, focusing on the teaching parties,-failed to understand the negative or positive responses of students to certain instructional efforts. She made the point that online instruction would be better understood when both sides of learning spectrum were analyzed.

As the online environment calls for *more* presence from the instructors, it is easy to fall into the illusion that expensive technology could solve all the pedagogical dilemmas caused by the removal of physical presence of instructors, and lead to the creation of humanly-rich environments. However, for online students who are mostly task-oriented, not up-to-date on technology, or lack the time to attend class on campus, the use of time-consuming technology is not appealing, no matter what the grand intentions or thoughtful efforts of their instructors. Rather, well-organized mechanisms in classes make students keep up with the course modules and force them to learn; in effect, they successfully help prevent student procrastination in their tasks. This sort of systematically developed instructional mechanism brought to students' an appreciation for the work of instructors as well as a feeling of closeness to their instructors. A sense of instructional immediacy, as participants perceived, was developed through caring and guiding interactions with students throughout the course in forms of affective interaction as well as cognitive interaction. This sense of instructional immediacy was also made salient through well-structured course organization, presentation and effective use of technology.

Conclusion. American higher education has long struggled with the "right" model for facilitating an educationally connection between faculty and students. To explore the possibility of human connection (Palloff & Pratt, 1999), and of emotional involvement and feelings of personal relations between the teaching and learning parties (Holmberg, 1989) in online education environments, the construct of "instructional immediacy" was explored in the study. The results are intended to provide online educators with instructive models for teaching as well as guidelines for humanizing and enhancing instructional immediacy in a Web-based environment. Such findings, in turn, can be used to help bridge the gap between the guidelines for online teaching and the enactment of online teaching by providing detailed narration of online teaching processes. It is our hope that such immediacy can be cultivated in the process of teaching online as well as in the course design, course presentation, use of technology, and other course interactions in such socially-, culturally-, and pedagogically-altered learning environments.

To address the concerns related to dehumanization and impersonalization of online education, the findings of this study offer possibilities to understand and address issues that need to be considered in building instructional immediacy in online education. Information from the three online practitioner participants offer pathways that suggest, but do not dictate, better ways to proceed with online education. Now is the time to consider how we, as online educators, can learn from the knowledge derived from other online teaching experiences and how we can address the issues with which those online teachers struggled, not only at the individual level, but also at the institutional level.

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

References

Anderssen, J. F. (1979). Teacher immediacy as a predictor of teaching effectiveness. In D. Nimmo (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 3* (pp. 543-559). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

Abraugh, J. B. (2001, December). How instructor immediacy behaviors affect student satisfaction and learning in web-based courses. *Business Quarterly*, *64,* 42-54.

Baker, J., & Woods, R. H. (2004). Immediacy, cohesiveness, and the online classroom. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, *15*(2), 133-151.

Boser, U. (2004). *Working on what works best. US News*. Retrieved April 14, 2004, from http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/elearning/articles/03good.htm.

Britzman, P. D. (2003). *Practice makes practice.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Brodkey, L. (1987). *Academic writing as social practice*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Brooks, H. (1967, February). Dilemmas of engineering education. *IEEE Spectrum*, 89-91.

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Massachusetts, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Chang-Wells, G. M., & Wells, G. (1993). Dynamics of discourse: Literacy and the construction of knowledge. In E. A. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Eds.), *Contexts for learning: Sociocultural dynamics in children's development* (pp. 58-90). New York: Oxford University Press.

Clandinin, D. J. (1986). *Classroom practice: Teacher images in action*. London: The Falmer Press.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1988). *Teachers as a curriculum planners: Narratives of experience.* New York, NY: Teachers College.

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1990). Research on teaching and teacher research: The issues that divide. *Educational Researcher*, *19*(10), 2-11.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*, New York: The Macmillan Company.

Eisner, E. (1991). *The enlightened eye: Qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice.* New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Elbaz, F. (1988). *Teacher thinking: A study of practical knowledge*, New York: Nichols Publishing Company.

Freitas, A. F., Myers, S. A., & Avtgis, T. A. (1998). Student perceptions of instructor immediacy in conventional and distributed classrooms. *Communication Education, 47*, 366-372.

Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and learning: Monitoring process and product. *Communication Education*, *39*, 354-368.

Gunawardena, C. N. (1995). Social presence theory and implications for interactive, collaborative learning in computer conferences. *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications, 1*(2/3), 147-166.

Hackman, M. Z., & Walker, K. B. (1990). Instructional communication in the televised classroom: the effects of system design and teacher immediacy on students' learning and satisfaction. *Communication Education*, *39*(3), 196-209.

Holmberg, B. (1989). *Theory and practice in distance education.* London: Routledge.

Holmberg, B. (1985). The feasibility of a theory of teaching for distance education and a proposed theory. *ZIFF Papiere*, *60*. ERIC, ED 290013.

Horton, W. (2000). *Designing Web-based training*. New York, NY: Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kearny, P., Plax, T., & Wendt-Wasco, N. (1985). Teacher immediacy for affective learning in divergent college classes. *Communication Quarterly, 3*(1), 61-74.

Keegan, D. (1986). *The foundation of distance education*, London: Croom Helm.

Kubala, T. (1998). Addressing student needs: Teaching on the Internet. *T. H. E. Journal, 25*(8), 71-74.

LaRose, R., Gregg, J., & Eastin, M. (1998). Audio telecourses for the Web: An experiment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *4*. Retrieved December 1, 1999, from http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue2/larose.html.

Lee, K. M. (2004). Presence, explicated. *International Communication Association*, *14*(1), 27-50.

Lynton, E. (1984). *Universities in crisis*. Unpublished memorandum. Boston, MA.

Advanced Research & Studies Journal

McCreary, E. (1990). Three behavioral models for computer-mediated communication In L. M. Harasim (Ed.), *Online education: Perspective on a new environment.* (pp.117-130). New York: Praeger.

Melrose, S., & Bergeron, K. (2006). Online graduate study of health care learners' perceptions of instructional immediacy, *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 7(1). Retrieved October 2, 2006, from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/255/477.

Mehrabian, A. (1967a). Attitudes inferred from nonimmediacy of verbal communication. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior*, *6*, 294 – 295.

Mehrabian, A. (1967b). Orientation behaviors and nonverbal attitude in communicators. *Journal of Communication, 17*, 324-332.

Mehrabian, A. (1969). Attitudes inferred from non-immediacy of verbal communication. Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 6, 294-296.

Mehrabian, A. (1971). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis. An expanded sourcebook.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Moore, M., & Kearsley, G. (1996). *Distance education: A system view.* Belmont, WA: Wadsworth Pub Co.

Moore, M. G., Thompson, M. M., & Dirr, P. (1991). *Research in distance education* (The Second American Symposium). University Park, PA: American Center for the Study of Distance Education, Pennsylvania State University.

Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Oakeshott, M. (1962). *Rationalism in politics and other essays.* London: Methuen

O'Donnell, J. J. (1998). *Avatars of the word: From papyrus to cyberspace.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (1999). *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K.(2003). *The virtual student: A profile and guide to working with online learners,* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Polkinghorne, D. F. (1988). *Narrative psychology*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Richmond, V., Gorham, J., & McCroskey, J. (1987). The relationship between selected immediacy behaviors and cognitive learning. In M. McLaughlin (Ed.), *Communication Yearbook 10* (pp. 574-590). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Books.

Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Schon, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. London: Jossey-Bass.

Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Wiener, M., & Mehrabian, A. (1968). *Language within language: Immediacy, a channel in verbal communication.* New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

Wilber, K. (2000). *Integral psychology*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publication, Inc.