MDDE 602 RESEARCH METHODS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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ASSIGNMENT 3: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

Research in Distance Education like any other social science research is a systematic process of acquiring, organizing and extending knowledge about the social world. This entails asking of questions, finding answers through pre-determined steps, methodologies, techniques, etc., in order to create knowledge for the improvement of the human society.

Qualitative data analysis is one of the methods commonly used by social science researchers and it involves the documentation of real events, the recording of what people say (words, gestures, and tones), the observation of specific behaviours, studying of written documents, and examination of visual images (Neuman, 2006). Qualitative data may be rough, imprecise and voluminous, but are usually context based.

Qualitative data analysis involves examining, sorting, categorizing, evaluating, comparing, synthesizing and contemplating the coded data as well as reviewing the raw and recorded data. The researcher once fully immersed in the data, usually through a rigorous process is able to recognize what he or she is looking for, in such a way that meaning is often obtained, ideas formed, themes, motifs and generalizations made apparent. A qualitative researcher spins a web of interlocking details from data, while also providing sufficient texture and details that would make the reader feel that they were present, that is, right there at the setting. Qualitative method of data analysis is best understood as a data enhancer and it is by such enhancement of data that it becomes possible to see key aspects of the data even more clearly (Ragin, 1994).

Qualitative data analysis according to Neuman (2006), is used to examine, organize and interpret data in such a way that social theories reflect not only the surface level reality but, also more significantly, the structures, meanings and forces that may lie deep beneath the

surface. This method requires a painstaking effort by the researcher in reading and rereading transcripts, reflecting on what is read and making assessments predicated on evidence, reason and judgement. Cases and contexts are terms used by qualitative researchers for constructing meanings, and showing ways people see, comprehend and recognize things in their natural settings.

Assignment three presents a case study of a group of five individuals, two male students, two female students and the researcher who held three meetings to discuss and share views in the context of the following three central topics in distance education: (a) What are the main concepts in distance education; (b) What is the program and instructional design considerations for distance education; (c) What is the relationship between technology and distance education?

The coding of the transcription, the categorization of the codes, the search for themes, sub-themes and patterns are based on concepts, assessments, observations and comments that are embedded in the data that emerged from the discussions of the three meetings.

This assignment is providing an opportunity to practically demonstrate an understanding of qualitative research method and to perform the necessary steps of qualitative data analysis.

Spradley's six steps of qualitative data analysis will provide the framework and guiding principle for the coding of the data. These are: (i) Reread data notes full details; (ii) Mentally repackage details into organizing ideas; (iii) Construct new ideas from notes on the subjective meanings or from the researcher's organizing ideas; (iv) Look for relationships among ideas and put them into sets on the basis of logical similarity; (v) Organize them into larger groups by comparing and contrasting the sets of ideas; (vi) Reorganize and link the groups together with broader integrating themes (Neuman, 2006, p. 471).

How the Codes were Chosen

> *"Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes are attached to "chunks" of varying sizes – words, phrases, sentences, whole paragraphs." (Miles and Huberman, 1994).*

Researchers using qualitative data analysis method usually would allocate codes to data after a thorough, meticulous process of reading and rereading of the data gathered from the field. The codes that emerge from this process are words or phrases gleaned from data and are based on clues from concepts, theories and philosophy of the field of study. These codes are then attached to words, lines, sentences, paragraphs or sections of text, and multiple codes could also be assigned to the same paragraph or portion of data. Coding of data therefore involves reduction of large amount of data into manageable bits, imposing order, allocating themes, subthemes and creating new themes where possible.

This inductive approach commonly used by researchers for the coding of qualitative data is being adopted here for the transcript under consideration. The codes emerged after much rigour and a careful process of reading and rereading of the transcript, then locating themes and sub themes, and a further step of reviewing and revising some of the initial codes. Through this process phrases such as lifelong learning, face-to-face learning, correspondence study, autonomous learning, communication technology, were brought up. Others include collaborative community, instructional design, instructional materials, computer mediated communication, Asynchronous learning, etc. (see table below). The codes, definitions, flags and examples emerged from information provided by the data, grounded in the data and based on concepts, theories and practices of distance education as a field of study.

Code Table with Label, Definition, Flag, Qualification and Example

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Administration	Managers and the organizational setup to manage a system	Plans and strategies	Administration does not include student support and library services	Well thought out plans and strategies
Adult commitments	These are social-economic obligations of an adult.	Mature adult, family, children, kids, jobs, work	Includes adult socio-economic activities	Here I am a middle age woman with a family.
Asynchronous learning	A computer technology that supports collaborative community and providing for group interactivity	CMCs, on-line, computer conferencing	Excludes serendipitous on-line learning	I don't know about you but I think a lot about my ideas before expressing them in CMC
Autonomous learning	Student is separated from the teacher and learning independently at a different location.	Readings, assignments, CMCs, little activities too	Excludes all form of learning that the student and the instructor are in the same location	This mode of study isn't for everyone. The readings and assignments and stuff we can do on our own. . . ;
Change	Shift in philosophy or transformation of social order	Change, new or how things used to be or paradigm shift	Includes change in paradigm, circumstances, environment, technology, practices,	It seems that everyday we are reading about how things are changing in the education field.
Choice	Ability to select among different options	My white knight, traditional school being out	Available solutions, face-to-face or distance learning	Distance education was my white knight.

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Collaborative Community	Interactivity within a group of distance learners and with instructor providing guidance	Classmates, learners, teachers, Onus	Excludes administrative staff and includes only community of inquiry/learners	We are given the opportunity to learn together and build on each others strengths – knowledge strengths
Collaborative Community Evaluation	Assessment of group cooperation, interaction, and interactivity	Support, fellow classmates online, feel others care	Does not include staff evaluation and all social interactivity	I like the feeling that I am not necessarily alone.
Collaborative Community Success	Social interactions and support among learners is a major outcome of a technology driven DE system	Simple statements, support, feeling that others care.	Excludes social interaction and includes high quality learning interaction	When you are supported and you feel that others care you are more motivated to continue
Communication Technology	Technology for connecting people, delivering Instructional materials	Communication, technology, CMC, Video tapes, audio tapes	Does not include entertainment videos, face book and other kinds of social chat	Connected through our computers we are given the opportunity to learn together and build on each other's strengths. .
Communication Technology Evaluation	Quality assessment of the technology deployed	"in my face", I am comfortable, how easy the tool	Does not evaluate video conferencing, tapes technologies	I don't want any technology to be "in my face". I am very comfortable with the medium
Concepts	Building blocks of a theory	Concepts, ideas, practices	Only includes concepts and ideas in the education field	Like ideas- and things – that form the basis of knowing stuff.
Course Materials	Intentionally designed instructional contents, learning resources produced by design experts	Materials, coursework, assignments, course objectives	Only intentionally designed materials for the program and does not include every source of information	Build on it from there with the help from our materials - objectives to guide, support and supplement learning

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Distance Education System	A structure with other components for delivering education where students are at different locations from the teachers.	Distance learning; programs that use technologies; Distance education	Excludes face-to-face learning, and study by correspondence only.	Now there is distance learning , not just correspondence but programs that use technologies that support learning independently and together.
Empowerment	Personal and professional development and progress.	Advancement, many jobs, where I want to be	Legal means of earning money and financial status	There was no question I had to go back to school to upgrade or retrain
Face-To-Face Learning	Where teachers and learners are in one location (classroom)	"norm", traditional school, classroom , f2f	Excludes primary and secondary schools, only higher institutions are included	When we were younger . . . . was traditional forms of schooling, I mean face to face stuff
Faculty & Staff	Instructors, managers, other support staff that makes the system run efficiently	like people, professor inputs	Teaching and non teaching employees of the organization	It isn't so much dependent on the medium, as much as the person working it.
Financial Challenge	Problems with affordability of distance education	Losing income, paying premium for DE, new computer	Excludes other money issues not relating to education and provision of tools	With me losing my income and having to pay a premium for distance education courses, it was a bit of a financial hardship.
Independent Study	Independent, self study method	Correspondence	Adult self study by printed materials excludes CMCs	And not just correspondence but programs . . . that support independent study

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Instructional Design	Organized, structured contents geared towards intentional learning	Design, ways courses are set up.	Only intentionally designed programs and courses	To do this the courses have to be designed properly. . .
Instructor Interaction	The instructor and all activities geared towards assisting the learner to learn as individuals or as a group.	Study guides, helping, providing clues, professor inputs, little activities too, etc.	Only course assigned tutor or teacher and not every member of faculty	I don't view instructors as add on's to the program.
Learner Centered	A paradigm that gives a lot of freedom and responsibility to the learner in a learner focused approach	Choosing issues, problem at work, solving real and relevant problems	A student of a distance learning program and not just any independent learner	All eyes should be on the student and what is to be learned; it ties into this whole discussion of the focus being on the student but not the entire onus.
Learning Environment	A study place or surrounding for distance education	New surroundings work, home, anywhere, anytime	Does not includes social settings or public places	New surroundings and context; without leaving our jobs and homes.
Lifelong Learning	A need for continuous learning of new things at different times throughout life	Retrain, upgrade skills, continuum, change in life focus	Continuous learning, adult learning for acquiring or upgrading skills	Like an education continuum. Is there such a phrase – educational continuum? Anyway.
Paradigm	A parsimonious explanation providing meaning to a phenomenon	Theories, philosophies , ideas and beliefs strung together	Approaches to learning in the field of education and DE	The "norm" is now challenged by new ideas – or concepts as you call them – and practices.

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Personality Challenge	Problems with character traits that discourage individuals from participating in online discussions	Classmates don't actually like to participate in CMCs,	This excludes problems with physical or mental disability, it is the attitude or character traits of the learner	Although I don't feel this way, there is always the issue that some of our classmates don't actually like to participate in CMC
Scheduling	Planning study times within the contexts of other adult commitments – work and home.	Study when kids are in bed, lunch time, when computer is free, what to do and when.	Self-directed management of time resource	I want to be able to be unrestricted as possible to do things on my own time; It is usually when the kids are in bed.
Scheduling Challenge	Problems with planning and self direction and regulation	Juggling schedules, cannot check CMCs, getting a slot on the computer	Problems associated with time management and excludes social functions	Juggling schedules is a challenge, and I usually get the late shift. Sure, I have a computer at work, but I cannot rely on checking in on our course conferences during my lunch hour.
Self Motivation	The personal encouragement and incentive to continue and not give up	Internal drive, keep going.	Every effort to keep focused on the goal for persistence and success	Oh, and I can't forget you need a heck of a lot of internal drive; when I am feeling too tired . . . I keep reminding my self of where I want to be.
Self Regulation	Self-directedness, self –governing and self-ruling towards the achievement of targets and goals.	Managing things, lives,	Every effort to keep a tab on timing in order to study	Although it sounds really easy to do, managing our lives and schedules take some bit of work.

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Student Evaluation	Student performance assessment	all eyes should be on the student and what is to be learned	Intentionally planned student assessments, assignments, projects grading	All eyes should be on the student and what is to be learned, hone in on my writing skills—or think-writing skills,
Student Persistence	Students determination to continue with learning	Old timer, motivation to continue	Excludes drop outs, stop outs and includes continuity to the finish line	You are more motivated to continue; I am an old timer
Student Personality	The learner's character traits and attitude to managing things well - discussions and communication.	Isn't for everyone, viva la differences	This excludes physical or mental disability, it is the attitude or character traits of the learner	The kind of person that leaves things undone till the last minute, people who do not like to participate in CMCs - "intellectual" contributions or "writing" all the time.
Student Satisfaction	A sense of fulfillment and accomplishment of a program or system.	I am glad, comfortable, fun, useful etc	Only includes pleasure derived from learning activities	I am very comfortable with this medium. So the notion that could be fun and useful at the same time, is true. I am glad AU changed.
Student Success	Students successful conclusion of the program	Student success, learner success, successful ends	Accomplishments in the context of learning activities and the final outcome of the program/system.	Together they create something that helps to promote student success and that is what its all about learner success.
Support Services	Supplementary facilities put in place to support the autonomous learner.	User-friendly stuff	Organizational support duties to help sustain student learning does not include social functions	Well thought out . . user-friendly stuff; easy accessibility to student support services

Code Label	*Definition*	*Flag*	*Qualification*	*Example*
Technology Challenge	Problems with delivery subsystem	Drawbacks, breakdowns	Includes technical problems within the system not all general failures	I admit there are drawbacks to this type of technology.
Unemployed	A state of joblessness, or not working for a pay package.	Its just home, caught in the crunch.	Anyone wishing to work and can not find jobs, and not all "stay at home" moms or dads	So here I am a middle age woman . . .whose job was considered redundant.
Virtual Library	A tool by which the distance learner acquires more information through navigating the internet.	Tools	Does not includes every website on the Internet, only libraries recommended or provided	Like people and tools . . . .and the user-friendly stuff.

Category Definition Table

Category Label	*Definition*
Perspectives	Perception of an idea , an occurrence or view of a transformation
Methods	Philosophies and techniques fundamental to the practice of education
Context	Socio-economic factors that constitute the learning environment and affect the choice and performance of the learner
Strategies	Regular issues of self-directedness that the learner deals with or goes through during the learning period
System	A structured approach to distance education delivery
System Integration	Interactivity within a structure containing different components that are working together towards a common goal for example, Courses, Instructors, community of learners, technology etc for the success of the learner
System inputs	Other factors or subsystems that work together to produce desired system outcomes for example, administration, support services, tools, etc.
System outputs	Expected system outcomes generated by the efficient integration of all the subsystems.
System evaluation	Quality assessment of all components that make up the system, for example, courses, faculty and staff, materials, tools, technology, etc.
New Challenges	Unanticipated factors or problems that may hinder the success of the student or system outcomes.

How the Codes Interrelate with the Category

> *"In qualitative research, ideas and evidence are mutually interdependent. This applies particularly to case study analysis. Cases are not given pre-established empirical units or theoretical categories apart from data". (Neuman, 2006, p. 189).*

Qualitative analysis is a means of interpreting cases, unfolding rich information, presenting underlying narratives and providing insights into the data being considered. Based on distance education themes, concepts and practices, the transcription of the meetings provided the background information that was used for the coding, the categorization of codes and the unfolding narrative that are here presented.

Theory lays the foundation and creates conceptual order in a field of study, it also influences practice by providing ***perspective,*** revealing new realities, reducing intricacies and providing simplicity that is easy to grasp. ***Perspective***s as a category can be viewed in terms of a new era of transformation in the social world, *changes* resulting from current and emerging trends in educational needs and expectations, ideas and *concepts, and a* significant shift in *practice and paradigm* in the field of education due mainly to rapid development in communication technologies. The education as a field of study has always been governed by underlying *theories and philosophies,* characterized by diversity in approaches and defined by the different ***methods*** of learning, such as conventional *face-to-face* learning, *independent study* and the *distance education system.*

Distance education system is still an emerging field of study, grappling with structural and transactional theories, new practices and paradigmatic shifts and challenges. However an integrated system approach with different components interacting to produce desired outcomes may well be the way to go in facilitating an efficient and successful independent study at a distance.

"*We believe a systems view is very helpful to understanding of distance education as a field of study, and adopting a systems approach is the secret of successful practice". (Moore & Kearsley, 2008, p. 8).*

The *distance education system* is a paradigm that is driven by *communication technology;* that is *learner centred* by design; and that which offers flexibility and accessibility to the distance learner. Times are changing and with these changes come the practical realities that people have to face. Individual intending to continue with adult education, retraining, upgrading of skills are at the same time having to juggle other competing *adult commitments*, therefore must choose a ***method*** of study that is suitable and compatible with the challenges of *lifelong learning*. To a large extent this *choice* must be made in the ***context*** of his/her needs, expectations, and the study environment and that is what makes *distance education system* the obvious *choice.*

It is important to note however, that to be successful the *autonomous learner* must take into account time management ***strategies*** that promote self-directedness and skills necessary for effective and efficient study at a distance. Any student who plans to succeed must consider seriously time management disciplines like *self-regulation, self-motivation and scheduling*, which may well depend on the *student's personality,* character traits and his or her ability to conduct study independently at a distance (Moore & Kearsley, 2008).

A system approach requires a full and complete ***system integration*** where *autonomous learning,* supported by properly designed *instructional materials* and the efforts of a vibrant *collaborative community of inquiry* (classmates and instructor) are seamlessly integrated by a *computer mediated conferencing* platform (*asynchronous learning*) offered by the recent unprecedented developments in *communication technology* (Garrison, 2002). To buttress the argument, Moore's transactional theory of distance education also emphasizes the critical role played by effective interaction between teacher-learner, learner-instructional

materials and learner-learner computer mediated communication and interactivity (Saba, 2000) in order to deliver a comprehensive and successful distance education system.

System inputs such as *faculty and staff, administration, virtual library and student support services* (Saba, 2000) are other components needed for an efficient operation of a *distance education system*. With these subsystems firmly and effectively in place a system is expected to produce quality ***system outcomes*** *or outputs* like *student persistence, student success, student satisfaction* and a vibrant *collaborative community of inquiry* (Garrison, 2002). It must be emphasized that in order to guarantee continuity and growth, quality assessment, monitoring and ***system evaluation*** are necessary elements and important design considerations for an integrated system and therefore can not be overlooked (Saba, 2000).

However, no matter how well designed or well operated a system is, at one point or the other it would inadvertently face ***new challenges*** such as *communication technology* implementation and upgrade, *organizational management* and other *subsystem challenges*. Finding solutions to these *challenges* could *change* the future of an emerging *distance education system* in a way that may not be comprehensible at this point in time, in terms of its *theory and practice*.

Code and Category Frequency Table

Category	*Codes*	*Codes Frequency Table*	*Category Frequency Table*
Perspectives			22
	Concepts	2	
	Paradigm	13	
	Change	7	
Methods			22
	Face-to-face learning	8	
	Independent study	1	
	Distance Education system	13	
System			21
	Learner centered	9	
	Communication technology	12	
Context			44
	Choice	1	
	Lifelong learning	14	
	Adult commitments	7	
	Unemployed	3	
	Empowerment	2	
	Learning environment	3	
Strategy			11
	Scheduling	4	
	Self regulation	2	
	Self motivation	2	
	Student personality	3	
System Integration			56
	Instructional design	7	
	Autonomous learning	15	
	Collaborative community	15	
	Asynchronous learning	13	
	Course Materials	1	
	Instructor interaction	5	
System inputs			4
	Faculty & staff	1	
	Virtual library	1	
	Administration	1	
	Support services	1	

Category	*Codes*	*Codes Frequency Table*	*Category Frequency Table*
System outcomes			20
	Collaborative community success	6	
	Student persistence	3	
	Student satisfaction	9	
	Student success	2	
System evaluation			28
	Communication technology evaluation	16	
	Student evaluation	2	
	Instructional design evaluation	5	
	Collaborative community evaluation	2	
	Instructor evaluation	3	
New Challenges			12
	Communication technology challenge	6	
	Financial challenge	2	
	Scheduling challenge	2	
	Personality challenge	2	

Commentary on the Frequency Table

The frequency table generated has forty one codes. The codes are clues based on concepts, theories and philosophy of the field of study. A quick overview shows that the highest occurring code is communication technology evaluation which is probably a reflection of the times - rapid social changes, phenomenal technological advancements and the critical role of communication technology in distance education delivery now and in the future.

Following that is autonomous learning and collaborative community, again "the focus and the onus" issues has showed up in the frequency table as critical issues in distance education delivery. The learner and learner's interactivity being the centre of this kind of educational system, explains where some focus and emphasis should be placed in future development of the theory and practice of distance education.

Lifelong learning is high on the table and proves that this is the emerging trend of a new era of change, context, and choice in education. Then closely followed are paradigm, distance education system and asynchronous learning, again these underscore the changing concepts, philosophy and practice of learning at a distance.

I will also mention the need for student satisfaction based on learner centred approach and instructional design methodology, as issues of important to be continuously tackled if there must be sustained growth and development in the field of distance education.

Lastly, it is important to note that face-to-face learning can not be overlooked, it is still a force to be reckoned with now and in the future. There may be modified variations of this method of education especially by the introduction of computer mediated learning, blending or the hybridization of many more traditional institutions in the years to come. This

conventional method of learning may not go away that quickly even with the growth and extraordinary interest in distance education.

Conclusion

This article consist of an introduction to the general principles of qualitative research methods and methodology, objectives and description of the assignment, and the sequential steps for coding qualitative data.

It also covered the relationship between codes and their categories, an interpretation of the rich data, a presentation of insight into the case study and a construction of an underlying narrative on concepts, theories and practices of distance education as a system.

References

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Journal Notes

June 15, 2009

I spent most of the last weekend trying to complete the reading of chapter 15 (Neuman). Woke up this morning thinking of the third assignment in MDDE 602, I proceeded to take a look at it. I had printed it out the day before. I read through the pages reflectively wondering what was expected of me, thinks to do and learn from this assignment.

Initially I was a bit confused, until I saw the example of the coding from the instructor. This gave me an idea of how to proceed.

June 16, 2009

I read through the case study again this time more sure of what is required. I did some trial coding.

June 17, 2009

To be better prepared to do the assignment, I spent most of the day reading through the first chapter of Distance Education by Michael Moore, to refresh myself on the basic theories of Distance Education and also Randy Garrison's article on The Theoretical Challenges in Distance Education in the 21st Century June 22, 2009

June 18, 2009

I can glean from the non verbal and para-verbal cues that M1, M2 and F1 were not quite prepared for the meeting on the first day despite the evidence that they had been previously briefed as mentioned by the Researcher. How will this affect the quality of their responses? F2 came prepared and it shows from the quality of her contribution that she had given some thought to the topic before the meeting. The Research seems to have focused on F2 acknowledging her preparedness and to reinforce that fact. I guess

"Norm" seems to refer to face-to-face learning and change in education is referring to the concept of distance education. "Its wild" M1 thinks the evolution is unprecedented, a big leap. "Chuckles" non verbal cue, F2 agrees fully. "Laughter" F1 communicates her being unemployment?

"Laughter" F1 has noticed a change of the topic to another theory of distance education. Researcher acknowledges the change by asking a follow up question.

M1 saying "I am not following you here" means I am not getting it, explain the concept further. "Laughter" F1 communicates her being in agreement?

Working through Meeting 1, I could see a pattern emerging, a storyline (narrative) dealing with the definition of distance education, theories and practice. Members were better prepared for the meeting the second day. We see how this will affect the quality of their responses.

I thought the researcher changed the topic too abruptly, or to redirect the discussion. Was the discussion straying off focus? I felt a sense of good moderation though by the researcher.

Its been hectic coding these meetings, going back and forth. I am happy my Laptop battery is showing low and I have to shutdown.

June 22, 2009

I am confused and frustrated. I am not even sure what I am doing anymore. I have had to change things too many times already. Going over this stuff again and again, I think I will leave this thing a bit. No more today, I think I need to do some more reading.

June 24, 2009

I am completely exhausted - mentally, emotionally and physically. I have been on this data the whole day. Going over and over and over . . . . this is not a joke!

The Coded Transcription

Note: Throughout the transcript, the male DE students are identified as M1, M2 and the female DE students as F1, F2. The researcher is R.

Meeting 1: Main concepts in distance education

R: Welcome and thank you all for coming today. You have been asked to participate in these discussion sessions about issues in distance education in order to raise an understanding about the kinds of things you deal with while learning in this educational environment. Did you all get a chance to preview the issues we will address over the next three sessions?

F1: Uh huh.

M2: You mean we were supposed to read those handouts? (snicker)

R: No matter. Let me refresh your memory. Today's topic is about concepts in distance education. Now, when I say "concepts"--that we will be discussing "concepts"--what does that bring to mind?

M1: Hmm. This is tougher than I thought. Give me a minute.

F2: Well, when I think about concepts, I guess, I think about the ideas—and things—that form the basis of knowing stuff.

<Concepts>

R: Can you give us an example?

F2: Well…..like philosophies and theories…those things are ideas and beliefs all strung together to help us make sense of our world.

<Paradigm>

R: Can you give us an example relevant to our area of study?

F2: It seems that everyday we are reading about how things are changing

<Change>

in the educational field what was once accepted as being the 'norm'

<Face-to-face Learning>

is now challenged by new ideas—or concepts as you call them—and practices.

<Paradigm>

Like an evolution of ideas--or something like that. Does that make sense?

M2: Yeah, it does. When we were younger, it seemed that all there was, was traditional forms of schooling—

<Face-to-face learning>

I mean face to face stuff…or that is all we were aware of. Now there is distance learning

<Distance education system><Paradigm>

and not just Correspondence

<Independent study>

but programs that use technologies

<Communication technology>

that support learning independently

<Autonomous learning>

and together.

<Collaborative community>

F1: I guess that is what people mean when they refer to

paradigm shifting.

<Change><Paradigm>

M1: Right. All this information age stuff we hear about everyday has affected

<Change>

the way we approach learning, communicate, live our lives.

Man, when I think about my Dad and his generation, and how things have changed

<Change>

since they went to University and got jobs, it's wild.

You worked your whole life in one career and never thought—or had to think—about doing something else.

<Lifelong learning>

Now, that is almost impossible.

F1: I know what you mean. When my company was downsizing, and I got caught in the crunch,

<Unemployed>

I had to rethink about what I was going to do with my life and career. Refocus, I guess.

<Lifelong learning>

So here I am a middle age woman with a family,

<Adult commitments>

whose job was considered redundant.

<Unemployed>

There was no question that I had to go back to school to upgrade or retrain,

<Lifelong learning>

but with a young family,

<Adult commitments>

traditional schools

<Face-to-face learning>

were out. Distance education

<Distance education system ><Autonomous learning>

was my white knight.

<Choice>

F2: I think you guys have hit on a couple of ‘concepts’ there (chuckles).

<Paradigm><Change><Distance education system><Lifelong learning><Autonomous learning><Collaborative community><Communication technology>

R: Can you explain what you mean?

F2: Well, for one, it seems we are talking about meeting the challenges of a new era

<Paradigm>

new needs,

<Lifelong learning>

new expectations,

<Autonomous learning>

new surroundings

<Learning environment>

and contexts.

<Communication technology>

And it also seems to be about personal and professional advancement,

<Empowerment>

and how we have to prepare educationally for it.

<Lifelong learning>

Distance education

< Distance education system >

is great for that helping us to meet our educational needs

<Lifelong learning>

without leaving our jobs and homes

<Learning environment>

F1: In my case, it's just my home. (laughter)

<Unemployed><Adult commitments><Learning environment><Autonomous learning>

M2: Good points. It makes you think about how learning

<Lifelong learning>

is situated in our lives these days. For our parents it was about learning one thing, having one job. Now

<Change>

it is about learning many things, at different times in your life, to prepare you for, potentially, many jobs.

<Empowerment>

Like an educational continuum. Is that such a phrase—educational continuum? Anyway.

</Life-long learning>

F2: For sure. But it doesn't end there. It isn't only about continuing to learn

<Life long learning>

it is also about how we learn and how we are taught to learn as adults in our distance education program.

< Distance education system ><Paradigm>

F1: Look out—I think this is another paradigm shifting! (laughter)

<Change>

R: That's good. F2, can you clarify what you mean by that?

F2: I will if I can. Lets see……well…it seems that there is a method to the madness the way our course materials are put together

<Paradigm>

along with the kinds of communications technologies

<Communication technology>

used in our distance education program.

<Distance learning>

M1: Method to the madness?

<Paradigm>

F2: Yeah. I mean, umm, those things are put into place for a reason. Like, taking into consideration our past experiences and ages for example.

<Learner centered>

I really don't find too much spoon feeding

<Paradigm>

goin' on in our CMC's,

<Asynchronous learning

we are given credit for our past learning—or knowledge

<Learner centered>

and build on it from there with help from our materials,

<Course Materials>

classmates and professors.

<Collaborative community>

F1: True. I feel that the focus is on me,

<Learner centered>

but not necessarily the entire onus.

<Collaborative community>

M2: I'm not following you here.

F1: Sorry. What I mean to say is, we may be separated from each other,

<Distance education system>

but because we are connected via our computers

<Communication technology>

we are given the opportunity to learn together and build on each other's strengths—knowledge strengths, that is.

<Collaborative community>

I don't know about you, but I think a lot about my ideas before expressing them in CMC.

<Asynchronous learning>

M1: I do too. I just don't want to say something for the sake of it—like getting marks for contributing—I want to express myself meaningfully. That way if it is something that someone else can use, and elaborate on it more, then, hopefully, we all come away with a new perspective.

</Asynchronous learning>

It's like we support each other academically. And mentally, too.

<Collaborative community>

F2: Funny, it's like a paradox. Computer conferencing

<Asynchronous learning>

offers maximum accessibility and independence,

<Autonomous learning>

while allowing us to work together.

<Collaborative community>

R: You mean, independence

<Autonomous learning>

without the feeling of isolation?

<Collaborative learning>

F2: That works. Oh, and we can't forget about the input from our professors.

<Instructor Interaction>

M2: Usually this is true. They tend to be helpful in clarifying and helping us to navigate our coursework.

<Instructor Interaction>

Oh, now, I know what you mean about the onus not being entirely on you.

<Collaborative community>

F1: Ya right—focus but not onus: independence without isolation. What is this, a focus group on clichés? (laughter)

<Paradigm><Learner centered><Autonomous learning<Collaborative community>< Asynchronous learning><Communication technology>

R: It wasn't meant to be—but they sounded good, right? That was a great first session. I want to thank you for raising these ideas and concepts about distance education. See you tomorrow, and thanks for your participation.

Meeting 2: Program and instructional design considerations for distance education

R: Welcome back. Today's issue for discussion is design considerations in DE. Everybody ready?

M1: No confusion here today. This issue is a little more tangible then the one yesterday.

R: One you can sink you teeth into? Speaking of that, I brought doughnuts. Have some.

F2: Thanks (reaching for doughnut). Really, this issue is not unrelated to what we discussed yesterday.

<Concepts>

R: How so?

F2: Ummm…well, we talked about being in separate places

<Distance education system>

…together

<Collaborative community>

and to do this the courses have to be designed properly

<Instructional design>

in order for this to work. Sorry, I didn't mean to start things off so early with another cliché.

M2: No problemo. I can relate to what you are saying. I have always felt that the way courses are set up

<Instructional design>

and technology used in our program

<Communication technology>

were well suited for one another.

<Distance education system>

For instance, the study guide informs us about what we can expect from the course and gives us clues about what things we should consider reading and when. And offers little activities too.

<Instructional design>

The CMC's are asynchronous so we can join in when and where we like.

<Asynchronous learning>

Too, the readings

<Autonomous learning>

are often tied to what we discuss on the CMC's—although not restricted to just those topics.

<Asynchronous learning><Instructor interaction>

I just feel the whole thing

<Distance education system>

is really pretty flexible. Good doughnut.

M1: Is this the whole focus

<Learner centered>

and onus

<Collaborative community>

thing again? (laughter). I tend to agree. Really when you think about it though, most of us are in the same boat

<Collaborative community>

of mature learners,

<Autonomous learning>

with job and family commitments

<Adult commitments>

so these kinds of programs are to be designed

<Instructional design>

with these things in mind.

<Adult Commitments>

I want to be able to be as unrestricted as possible

<Scheduling>

to do things on my own time.

<Autonomous learning>

F1: I hear ya. With young kids at home,

<Adult commitments>

I don't always have the freedom to get to my course work during the day, so it usually is when the kids are in bed.

<Scheduling>

But you know this isn't so bad. I do feel that I can manage this very well that it is under my direction, in a manner of speaking.

<Self-regulation>

F2: Although it all sounds really easy to do, managing our lives

<Self regulation>

and schedules

<Scheduling>

takes some bit of work. This mode of study

<Autonomous learning>

isn't for everyone.

<Student personality>

R: What kinds of examples can you give us, F2?

F2: For instance, if you were the kind of person

<Student personality>

who just left things to the last minute, I don't think you would do very well studying at a distance.

<Autonomous learning>

It requires organization of your time, and deciding what you need to do first, second, etc., etc.

<Scheduling>

Oh, and I can't forget that you need a heck of a lot of internal drive—

<Self motivation>

revisited on a daily basis.

There are times when I am feeling too tired to want to read, or start an assignment, but I keep reminding myself of where I want to be

<Empowerment>

and how I am going to get there.

<Lifelong learning>

And I also remember that since I cannot attend traditional kinds of classes right now,

<Face-to-face learning>

I have to take advantage of the ways open to me.

<Autonomous learning>

This keeps me going.

</Self motivation>

R: Tell us how this relates to what we are discussing today, F2?

F2: Gosh. Well, M1 covered it fairly well already, I guess. But I think our program designers

<Instructional design>

take these things

<Adult commitments>

into consideration…our characteristics as learners,

<Student personality>

I mean how we tend to approach learning

<Paradigm>

and all

<Distance education system>

…as well as the kinds of technology

<Communication technology>

used in our program.

Together they

<Distance education system>

create something that helps to promote student success.

<Student success>

And that's what it

<Distance education system>

is all about, learner success,

<Student success>

you know. Once you've had a taste of doing well, you feel you can do anything.

<Lifelong learning>

Geeze, am I getting off track here?

R: No, at all. Good points.

M2: Although what you've said is true, there are other things worthy of consideration. Like how we as learners connect together,

Collaborative community>

on-line.

<Asynchronous learning>

The reading and assignments and stuff we can all do on our own,

<Autonomous learning>

but it is important for me to have some input from others—students and instructors.

<Collaborative community>

And I get this in our communications on-line. I like to give and get information and help, whenever. If it weren't for this connection through the computer conferences,

</Asynchronous learning>

I would find it hard to stick with it,

<Student persistence>

because reading alone

<Autonomous learning>

all the time can get—well, tedious.

F1: Yes, it's true. I do miss the discussions that take place in a F2F environment, but certainly the type of technology used here, does promote and support this.

<Asynchronous learning>

Sometimes I even feel that these asynchronous discussions are more productive than if we were F2F,

because we can take our time in reading and responding. Or print off helpful responses to keep for later.

And get an equal opportunity to contribute. This you cannot do in a F2F environment.

<Face-to-face learning>

</Asynchronous learning>

And besides, we don't always work alone

<Autonomous learning>

on our assignments, we have had opportunities to work in groups.

<Collaborative community>

I never really thought about it before, but I guess this too is a design consideration.

<Instructional design>

M2: I'll jump in here, because of that reference to assignments.

<Autonomous learning>

I like the fact that we are frequently able to chose our own issues for assignments.

<Learner centered>

We may be given the parameters in which to work, but can feature something that is based in our realities—like a problem from work, or whatever. This way we can get the benefit of solving our own problems which makes learning more relevant and real. And maybe even get to apply these solutions in reality, to boot. </Learner centered>

R: Speaking of support, what about design considerations and the role of the Professor or instructor or tutor?

M1: Were we speaking of support? I'm not sure if you planned to phrase it like that, or if it just came out that way.

R: It's a secret. But what do you think I meant?

M1: Well, you said "speaking of student support"…and that is how I view our instructors, as support systems.

<Instructor Interaction>

But that is not meant in a derogatory way, but rather it ties into this whole discussion of the focus being on the student,

<Learner centered>

but not the entire onus.

<Collaborative community>

I don't view instructors as add on's to the program, but somehow as if they are part of the overall course design.

Are you following me here? For instance, they write the course objectives

<Instructor interaction>

so they understand what we need to do to get to the end point and what may be good ways of getting there. They help to build on what we know. This way we are not left entirely to our own auspices. I don't believe we could get through courses as well as we do now, strictly on our own—at least I couldn't anyway.

We may be learning independent

<Autonomous learning>

off a traditional classroom,

<Face-to-face learning>

but this doesn't mean we shouldn't have traditional kinds of input—like dialogue,

<Asynchronous learning>

direction and those kinds of things.

</Instructor Interaction>

F2: Wow. You said a lot there. I guess design considerations are more important than you think. The whole kit-and-caboodle.

<Distance education system>

What I get out of this is that a well put together learning package

<Instructional design>

is only one part of the equation, you need to have the other things in place to make it fly.

<Distance education system>

R: What, for instance?

F2: Like people

<Faculty & Staff>

and tools.

<Virtual Library>

Well thought out plans and strategies.

<Administration>

User-friendly stuff.

<Support services>

Means to successful ends, you know.

<Student success>

R: Why don't we end on that note? Great discussion, thanks. Until tomorrow, then.

Meeting 3: Technology and distance education

R: Well, this is our last session. Thank you for once again, joining me. Today's topic is technology and DE. I think you will see how it ties into what we have already discussed.

F1: Sure. I know that when I started in this DE program, I was wondering how this computer conferencing technology was going to work out for me.

<Communication technology evaluation>

But, although the learning curve was a little steep in the beginning, I am very comfortable with the medium. So the notion that it could be fun and useful at the same time, is true!

<Student satisfaction>

F2: Well, the present conferencing system that is used is far superior to its predecessor

<Communication technology evaluation >

obviously I'm an old timer in this program.

<Student persistence>

I'm glad AU changed.

<Student satisfaction>

However, the premise remains the same—asynchronous, messaging board, etc., etc.

M2: Ditto. In my opinion, how easy the tool is to use

<Communication technology evaluation>

is as important as what it can do. Who wants to spend half their time on-line wrestling with something that is supposed to make communicating "easier"? It should be like it isn't even there at all.

</Communication technology evaluation>

M1: I took a course at work, and they used video-conferencing, and I found it a bit difficult to get used to.

<Communication technology evaluation>

Seeing the person you were talking to was kinda neat, but there was a bit of a time delay with the speaking--which was a bit annoying.

Anyway, for me I don't feel the need to see the teacher or receive a "lecture".

<Student satisfaction>

F1: Well, as I mentioned before, I do miss the F2F

<Face-to-face learning>

debates that take place in a traditional learning environment. There is an energy present, which is completely lost in computer conferencing.

<Communication technology evaluation>

Sure you can have a really intellectual discussion on-line with your classmates and professor,

<Collaborative community evaluation>

but you don't get the same "vibes" as you do when you are there—live.

M1: I've had both--great and crummy F2F and on-line learning experiences.

<Communication technology evaluation>

It isn't so much dependent on the medium, as much as it is the person working it and the materials used to supplement it.

<Instructional design evaluation>

R: Ah ha! Could this be design considerations—revisited?

M2: Yes, but that was yesterdays topic and yesterday there were doughnuts. (laughter)

Just serious now, I think M1's point is well taken. Courses have to be created properly

<Instructional design evaluation>

so that they work to take advantage of the technologies strengths.

<Communication technology evaluation>

And users strengths too.

<Student evaluation>

The other thing is, I don't want any technology to be "in my face" either. All easiness, please.

</Communication technology evaluation>

F2: Right. The tools are the means,

<Communication technology>

and all eyes should be on the student

<Student evaluation>

and what is to be learned.

<Instructional design evaluation>

The other thing about design considerations and computer conferencing technology

<Communication technology evaluation>

is that not everything that is learned via this method will be designed in and accounted for.

</Instructional design evaluation>

In other words, there can be much learning that is serendipitous.

F1: Other than computer conferencing in this program, the only other technology

<Communication technology evaluation>

I've used for learning purposes in this program--has been videotapes. Not sophisticated, but useful none-the-less. I listened to the tapes as I read the book—it was an enjoyable supplement for me. But then again, I'm the one who doesn't mind the lecture thing.

</Communication technology evaluation><Student satisfaction>

F2: The one really big thing that computer conferencing has done for me,

<Communication technology evaluation>

is enabled me to hone in on my writing skills—or think-writing skills.

<Student satisfaction>

Hmmm, is this connected to critical thinking?

R: You tell me.

M1: Well, of all the things that really work for me using conferencing technology, is the turn around time.

<Communication technology evaluation>

You can post a question to your professor anytime day or night and within 24 hours you have an answer.

<Instructor evaluation>

That is invaluable to me.

<Student satisfaction>

M2: You mean, ‘usually’ within 24 hours. (laughter)

<Communication technology evaluation><Instructor evaluation>

F1: I like the feeling that I am not necessarily alone.

<Collaborative community evaluation>

Separated, together--I think someone coined yesterday. Believe it or not, I have made friends

<Collaborative community success>

with some of my virtual classmates. We can chat about stuff—usually about the course—and it feels like one long coffee break. Nice to know others are in the same boat as you.

</Collaborative community success><Student satisfaction>

M2: Along the same lines,

<Collaborative community success>

is the ability to network. I’ve met and related to classmates who are doing the same kind of thing I do, but in another part of the country. We can compare notes

</Collaborative community success>

and it is cool.

<Student satisfaction>

M1: But I must admit, there are some drawbacks to this kind of technology.

<Communication technology challenge>

I mean when you are wholly reliant on your computer as a means of connecting to your learning world, not to mention just the word processing functions of ones computer—when it breaks down it can leave you high and dry. I know I’ve lived this experience.

Luckily, my instructor understood

<Instructor evaluation>

and I wasn't penalized for not contributing for 10 days. Imagine not attending a lecture for two weeks in a traditional university at a graduate level?

</Communication technology challenge>

Luckily, there was enough reading, etc, to keep me busy during that time,

<Instructional design evaluation>

so I didn't feel like I fell behind.

<Student satisfaction>

M2: Yeah. Do you remember that ice storm that hit the east a few years ago?

<Communication technology challenge>

That wrecked havoc with some of our eastern classmates. No heat, no water, no telephone and no Internet. That dependency is kinda scary when you think of it.

They must have received some pretty flexible assignment deadlines. (chuckle)

</<Communication technology challenge>

F2: Unlike F1, my kids are teenagers. They need the computer for schoolwork and also want to use it for recreation. So, in my house it can't always get to my computer when I need it.

<Scheduling challenge>

Juggling schedules is a challenge, and I usually get the late shift. Sure, I have a computer at work, but I cannot rely on checking in on our course conferences during my lunch hour.

</Scheduling challenge>

F1: Hmmm. When I decided to return to school, it was obvious that we needed

<Financial challenge>

to get a new, more sophisticated computer to handle the demands of this program. And although it was just a matter of time before we replaced old Nellie, with me losing my income and having to pay for a premium for distance education courses, it was a bit of a financial hardship.

</Financial challenge>

Then, when we got our new system, I have to learn

<Communication technology challenge>

how to work all the new doo-dads as well as navigate the conference software. But I think I already mentioned this. Anyway.

</<Communication technology challenge>

M2: Although I don't feel this way, there is always the issue that some of our classmates don't actually like to participate in CMC

<Personality challenge>

and do so just because it is required. Some don't feel comfortable because they feel as though they don't have anything "intellectual" to contribute. Or they think it is too chatty or time consuming. Or dislike "writing" all the time. Oh, well, viva la differences.

Personally, I like the relative anonymity and the "equalizing" effects of CMC. I guess you get out of it what you put in.

</Personality challenge>

R: So I guess you are saying, despite the advantages of this technology, there will always be those who don't care for it.

F2: Sure. I know you've said that some students don't seem to like the CMC's, but I know I've learned a lot from my fellow classmates on-line.

<Collaborative community success>

Even just simple statements can mean a lot--without being conscious of it, you can help a person by just being supportive. When you are supported and you feel that others care,

</Collaborative community Success>

you are more motivated to continue.

<Student Persistence>

That my theory anyway, and I'm sticking to it.

R: It's a pretty good hypothesis. Maybe it's time to wrap it up. I think we've covered some interesting topics and raised some great points. Thanks for participating, ya'll. Good-bye!

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