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CONSTRUCTING EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM OF ONLINE COURSES:
A MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTATION BY PRACTITIONERS

by

KELVIN THOMPSON
B.M.E. The Florida State University, 1991
M.A. University of Central Florida, 1999

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Research, Technology and Leadership
in the College of Education
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Major Professor: Charles D. Dziuban

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ABSTRACT

Online courses are complex, human-driven contexts for formal learning. Little has been said about the environment emerging from the interaction of instructor(s), learners, and other resources in such courses. Theories that focus on instructional settings and methods that are designed to accommodate inquiry into complex phenomena are essential to the systematic study of online courses. Such a line of research is necessary as the basis for a common language with which we can begin to speak holistically about online courses.

In this dissertation, I attempt to generate better questions about the nature of online instructional environments. By combining prior works related to educational criticism and qualitative research case study with original innovations, I develop a model for studying the instructional experiences of online courses. I then apply this approach in the study of one specific online course at the University of Central Florida (UCF).

To my much adored daughter, Kylee Elizabeth, born during the writing of this dissertation,
and to her mother, the love of my life.

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First, and foremost, I acknowledge the extreme supportiveness of my wife, Wendy, and her commitment to the completion of this often arduous and daunting task despite the hours it took away from our shared companionship. She is invaluable as my life partner and friend.

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- Dr. Chuck Dziuban, acclaimed online learning researcher and dissertation advisor/mentor, who agreed to embark on an odd journey he characterized as “Felix and Oscar write a dissertation”
- Dr. Steve Sorg, online course pioneer, colleague, and mentor who has helped me understand much about teaching/learning (online and otherwise) over the past seven years
- Dr. Judy Lee, who has been enthusiastic about this work and knows personally the trials and delights of teaching an entire online program
- Dr. Jeff Kaplan, who has always had an encouraging word throughout this process
- Dr. Beth Young, who was adventurous enough to open one of her online courses to criticism

Third, along with the faculty who teach online at UCF, there is an exceptional team of talented and hard-working individuals within the division of Information Technologies and Resources, overseen by Dr. Joel Hartman, to whom I am personally and professionally indebted. This team contributes daily to the international reputation and on-going success of the University of Central Florida’s online learning initiative. It includes:

- My immediate colleagues at Course Development & Web Services, led by Barbara Truman
- The Center for Distributed Learning, led by Steve Sorg
- The Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness, led by Chuck Dziuban and Patsy Moskal

I appreciate all of these individuals and their personal support of me and this work.

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Fifth, I recognize Dr. Jennifer Deets who fanned into flame my interest in qualitative inquiry over three semesters of coursework. She quite literally taught me all I know about qualitative research.

Sixth, there are a few individuals who made serendipitous (and perhaps unwitting) contributions to this dissertation. Dr. Dave Boote referred me to an article that contained a reference to the work of Christopher Alexander. This work captured my imagination. In a conference presentation, Dr. Andy Gibbons mentioned the work of Stewart Brand which resurfaced from my stack of books at just the right time. Dr. Kay Allen and Dr. Larry Holt each supervised early papers that eventually led to the writing of this dissertation.

I am mindful of how much of the following work is dependent upon the support I have received from all of these individuals. Any benefit derived from it must be credited accordingly. Any errors or oversights are mine alone.

Finally, thanks are due to the One who satisfies the desires of every living thing.

EPIGRAPHS

Look, says the Teacher, this is what I have discovered: adding one thing to another to discover
the scheme of things...

- Solomon (Ecclesiastes 7:27)

...the resulting document is like a recipe for improvisational cooks.

- Corinne Glesne

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READING THIS DISSERTATION

I am prefacing this dissertation with a note on this work's form and function. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) have commented on the need for templates different from traditional quantitatively oriented research reports and point out that appropriate structures may vary further depending upon the specific genre of qualitative research one is undertaking. Most of these approaches emphasize the importance of explaining the rationale underlying qualitative methodologies, articulating a broader conceptual context than is typically addressed in most scientific studies. Additionally, Wolcott (2001) recommends using a first person voice when publishing qualitative research in order to emphasize the importance and influence of the author's roles as observer and interpreter. I am following this convention.

This dissertation is divided into two main sections. The first articulates a rationale for studying online courses (and, by extension, any instructional context) while the second summarizes and applies this rationale to the study of one particular online course. The first section is divided into five chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: The Case for Connoisseurship, Chapter 3: On Criticizing Online Courses, Chapter 4: Conducting Case Studies of Online Courses, and Chapter 5: The Lenses We Wear Determine What We See. The second section contains the following three chapters: Chapter 6: Presenting the Online Course Criticism Model, Chapter 7: Applying the Model, and Chapter 8: The Road Forward from Here. The features associated traditionally with discrete chapters in quantitative dissertations (i.e., problem, review of literature, methodology, findings, and conclusion) are contained in this dissertation as

well, but they are embedded within the structure explained above. Throughout this work, metaphors from building construction will be a recurring theme. One reason for this is to emphasize the constructed nature of understandings from research studies in general. Another aim is to underscore the relatively recent emergence of online courses and studies of them (i.e., “building in progress”). Finally, several theoretical constructs used in this work are drawn from or make use of building construction metaphors.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Human beings may learn at any time and at any place, whether intentional or incidental (Hodgins, 2000). In recent years, discussions center on the affordances of technology to facilitate intentional learning, especially for adults (Ryder and Wilson, 1996). Included in the dialogue is the importance of tailoring instruction to the unique attributes of learners. In fact, a cursory examination of almost any conference program in higher education reveals many sessions on topics such as evaluation of online courses, incorporation of technology in the classroom, learning styles, and motivation (e.g., Florida Community College at Jacksonville, 2002). It is common knowledge that there has been a rapid proliferation of online courses at the university level during the past decade. While online faculty have begun publishing papers detailing the nature of their online courses, there has been a dearth of corresponding publication providing systematic inquiry into the composition of such courses. Little is being said about the environment emerging from the interaction of instructor(s), learners, and other resources in instructional settings. This dissertation attempts to generate better questions about the nature of instructional environments and about online university courses in particular. I plan to outline a rationale for studying the instructional experiences of online courses and to apply this approach in the study of one specific online course at the University of Central Florida (UCF).

Articulating an approach to studying online courses is fraught with challenges. This difficulty is exacerbated, however, by the fact that “online course” means different things in different contexts. The label is routinely applied to situations as

varied as a traffic school course taken to avoid increased insurance premiums, a skill improvement tutorial available to U.S. Army tank drivers while deployed abroad, a certification course offered by a professional association to real estate agents, and an English course taken to complete a university's degree program. While it is my hope that the approach articulated here may be applicable to other contexts as well, my focus is on higher education. Even with this distinction, however, there is not a sufficiently robust theoretical framework in the field of education to make the study of online courses merely a special case of any set of general rules. Therefore, I find it necessary to develop a context upon which this new approach may be built.

Novak and Gowin (1984) and Kuhn (1996) observed that, as an academic discipline, the field of education is at an early stage of development. While theories have been borrowed from other disciplines (e.g., psychology), education has developed few theories of its own. In particular, Bruner (1966) and Ausubel (1968) argue that it is important to understand the nature of learning that takes place in instructional settings. This perceived need leads to the development of at least one learning theory with a conscious orientation to instruction (Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian, 1978), at least one theory of education (Novak, 1977), and at least two theories of instruction (Gagne, 1970; Englemann and Carnine, 1991).

Interestingly, each of these writers remarked on the importance of recognizing the distinction between aspects of learning that are internal to the learner and those associated with his or her environment. First, Bruner (1966) recognizes that the interaction between instructor and learner is “never indifferent in its effect upon learning” (p. 42). In particular, he is sensitive to the perception of “authority” (p. 42) in this

instructor-learner relationship. Second, Gagne (1970) refers to the “external conditions of learning” (p.302) and includes a number of communication functions between the instructor or instructional materials and the learner. Reflecting his behaviorist orientation, Gagne refers to these communications as “stimuli” (p. 302). Third, Novak (1977) emphasizes the importance of educational psychology as a basis for considering how instructional settings may be optimized for student learning. Fourth, while writing from a cognitivist perspective, like Bruner, Ausubel et al (1978) delineated the following “situational variables in learning: practice, arrangement of instructional materials, group and social factors, and characteristics of the teacher” (p. 30). In fact, they advocate a view of learning in which instructional materials and the instructor (in the role of “planner and tutor,” p. 356) interact with the learner(s) in order to bring about learning. Fifth, Englemann and Carnine (1991), outline a theory based totally on the communications that occur between teacher and students. The “stimulus-locus analysis” they propose allows instructors to create logically “faultless communication” with students (p. 15). These authors claim that, “a theory of instruction begins with the assumption that the environment is the primary variable in accounting for what the learner learns” (Englemann and Carnine, 1991, p. 3).

Recently, other authors (Reigeluth, 1983; Wilson, 1996b; Reigeluth, 1999) formulated theories that relate to the construction of instructional materials or “learning environments” (Wilson, 1996b, p. 5). However, it can be argued that these latter writers have developed specialized approaches to the design of individual instructional events rather than articulating broad, inclusive concepts of instruction.

Among these instructional theorists, there appears to be shared interest in the dynamics of the instructional experience external to the learner. Interestingly, however, none of these writers specifically addressed the complex construct of the instructional or learning environment. Nevertheless, others have made some attempt to discuss these environments without reference to instructional theory.

In the literature, the phrase “learning environment” is utilized in two distinctly different ways. The first body of work (e.g., Moos, 1979; Rowe, 1981; Loughlin and Suina, 1982; Stueck, 1991) addresses issues related to facilities construction, classroom seating arrangement, and other primarily physical concepts. Meanwhile, the second group (e.g., Wilson, 1996a; Herrington and Oliver, 2000; Jonassen and Land, 2000) concerns itself with technology-generated “microworlds” (Wilson, 1996a, p. 9) in which learners interact with artificial characters or with one another. Neither of these usages directly relate to the context of online courses as I have used the term here. However, both learning environment concepts transfer partially. The online course context is somewhat analogous to the physical space of a classroom setting – the “place” where the course “happens.” This emulates the microworlds in which the interactions of learners are paramount. Unlike the microworld emphasis on building technological representations that can interact (as in a video game), in online courses learners interact with each other, with various instructional resources, with one or more teachers, and with the ideas embodied in the subject matter just as they might in a physical classroom. It is quite directly the mode of these interactions that make the difference. Learners are separated (and perhaps overcome their separation) from other learners, teachers, and instructional materials by time/space in online courses.

From reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that the perspectives represented so far are based on quantitative methods despite the implied recognition that educational settings are complex, not easily reducible to discrete variables, and artifactual in nature (Novak and Gowin, 1984). Perhaps, because of this orientation the interactions that occur between learner(s), instructor(s), and other resources have received little examination, because to do so a more qualitative mindset is appropriate. (Certainly, this concept is not without interested parties. Molenda (cited in Reigeluth, 1999), for instance, attempted to represent the dynamics of these interactions schematically. However, his particular approach has received little further attention (Personal communication from M. Molenda, February 8, 2002.))

Despite the dichotomy between answers to the question, what is a learning environment? in the above cited writings, Schwab (1973) provides a foundation for a more holistic conceptualization by introducing his construct of the four “commonplaces” (p. 509): learners, teacher, subject matter, and milieu. The first three constructs are readily understood, but Schwab’s use of the concept of “milieu” warrants further elaboration. Schwab explains that milieus are multiple and arranged concentrically. That is, these milieus may be the immediate surroundings of the classroom, the broader school context, or the greater community or societal setting. Certainly the concept “learning environment,” in both of the formulations described above, fits within Schwab’s milieu formulation, and by so doing it is also anchored to a theoretical “home” within the field of education. Thus, Schwab’s commonplaces construct provides a foundation for framing questions related to instructional contexts in general and online courses specifically. (This construct will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.) That is, the instructional

experience/learning environment and the concerns of instructional theory are tied together in one construct. Interestingly, while the instructional and learning theorists mentioned above have been associated with quantitative methods, Schwab, as a curriculum theorist, aligns himself with a tradition that has, historically, been more disposed to qualitative methods of inquiry (Short, 1991).

To be of greatest value, the rationale and associated methodology for studying online courses that I am building upon Schwab's (1973) commonplaces foundation must be flexible enough to recognize the varied complexities to which online courses are prone while being structurally robust enough to weather the forces directed against it. That is, while qualitative methodologies are touted as being more effective than quantitative methodologies in dealing with complex phenomena, it is important to articulate how the specific methodology fits into a particular research tradition within the qualitative family rather than being the result of a personal whim. Also, for utility outside of the education discipline, this approach must not be limited to viewpoints valued within education nor reject perspectives valued outside of education.

In the remaining chapters of this first section, I will integrate my emerging model into a specific research tradition by introducing Eisner's (1985, 1991) educational connoisseurship and criticism within the context of the research case study while also asserting my own connoisseurship of online courses (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I will articulate the value of and the challenge of having such a model by addressing short term and long term goals for my work. Chapter 4 details specific methodological issues beyond the basic educational criticism approach introduced in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, I will compile three existing theoretical frameworks with one new framework as the basis

for the interpretive perspectives to be used in my model for educational criticism of online courses. In the chapters of the second section of this dissertation, I will summarize my model, apply it to the study of one specific UCF online course, and discuss implications for further work in this area.

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE FOR CONNOISSEURSHIP

Introduction

In this chapter I will attempt to make a case for connoisseurship in three ways. First, I will introduce Eisner's (1985, 1991) approach to educational connoisseurship/criticism as a distinct sub-class of qualitative research case studies. Second, I will argue for the importance of including evidence of one's connoisseurship in educational criticisms. Third, I will present documentation of my own connoisseurship of online courses at the University of Central Florida (UCF) as a basis for the educational criticism of one online course later in this dissertation and for development of a model for constructing educational criticisms of online courses in general.

Educational Connoisseurship/Criticism

To accomplish the goals of this study, I find it useful to employ Eisner's (1985, 1991) approaches of educational connoisseurship and educational criticism. Using an arts metaphor, Eisner articulates the value of having individuals with highly developed perceptive abilities in a particular domain (connoisseurs) make public their observations through criticism. While Eisner does not necessarily use the term "criticism" to denote a negative viewpoint, he does suggest that it is crucial to make "fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities" in contexts where "character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances [are] distributed and variable"

(Eisner, 1991, p. 63). The nexus of interactions among instructors, students, and instructional resources in university-level online courses is certainly such a context.

Eisner (1991) outlines basic criteria for what he labels connoisseurship using the analogy of wine tasting. First, one needs both access to wine and the ability to taste it. Second, one needs to have a certain perceptivity, “a qualitative intelligence in the domain in which it operates” (p. 64). Third, one must be able to recognize how her experiences are examples of a larger set of qualities (e.g., not just tasting a wine as “fruity” or “dry” but as representative of Sauternes or Chardonnays). This latter criterion, in Eisner’s view, is related to what he terms “antecedent knowledge” (pp. 64-65). That is, knowing the story of what has gone before informs our judgment about what we perceive (just as knowing that a particular wine is aged in stainless steel barrels informs our perception of a particular characteristic in its taste).

While Eisner’s (1985, 1991) view of connoisseurship serves to delineate those with a more refined perceptive ability in a particular domain from those without such ability, it is his construct of criticism that gives purpose to the connoisseur and assistance to the lay person. Criticism is a published account of the connoisseur’s observations about a particular phenomenon for the purpose of assisting others in recognizing the qualities that the connoisseur’s more honed domain-specific sensibilities allow him to perceive. Functionally (and perhaps structurally), criticism includes description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics (or naturalistic generalization). That is, the particular phenomenon being studied is described as completely as possible, and interpretations of the observation are given (both acts dependent upon the connoisseur’s perceptive abilities). An appraisal of the educational value of the phenomenon is

presented, and themes from the critic's work are offered as the basis for any naturalistic generalizations the reader may choose to make to contexts other than the one featured in the criticism. Eisner leaves to each critic to decide how to structure her criticism. That is, he purposely does not provide a recipe for others to follow, since as he says, "in qualitative matters cookbooks ensure nothing" (Eisner, 1991, p. 169). His reticence to prescribe is based upon Eisner's conviction that criticism is dependent upon the uniqueness of the critic and his personal style, that qualitative research is prone to unexpected incidents, and that qualitative research cannot be fully anticipated ahead of time. In short, "there are no routines to prescribe, no rules to direct one's steps, no algorithms to calculate" (Eisner, 1991, p. 170). Although I will attempt to honor the spirit of Eisner's wishes, it is my intent in this dissertation to formulate a model that practitioners can follow in order to create educational criticism of online courses based on their own connoisseurship. (The model is summarized in Chapter 6.)

Previous Educational Criticism Studies

Previous dissertations espousing educational criticism have examined phenomena such as an elementary school language arts program (Knowlton, 1984), a "building construction" environment for elementary children (Stueck, 1991), home schools (Taylor, 1993), and the community surrounding a Catholic school (Crowley, 1996). While no dissertations directly related to online courses were available that explicitly identified themselves as educational criticisms, the four listed here each provide insights into the construction of educational criticism. Although each dissertation cites a version of Eisner's (1985, 1991) educational connoisseurship/criticism approach, they vary in how

they manifest this approach particularly with regard to documentation of the writer's connoisseurship. I will comment briefly on each dissertation, noting to what degree each writer uses Eisner's elements as structural components of her criticism and highlighting to what extent she explicitly documents connoisseurship. It is my contention that without guidance (such as that afforded by my model), critics vary widely in how/whether they document their connoisseurship. These observations are not intended to disparage the authors of these works, however.

Stueck (1991) references Eisner's (1991) approach as the basis for an educational criticism that is one chapter of his dissertation. He also documents nearly twenty years of experience related to the subject of the criticism throughout most of the remainder of the dissertation. However, he does not clearly exploit Eisner's criticism elements (i.e., description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematic), nor does he link his experience with connoisseurship.

Crowley (1996) is similar in that she references Eisner (1991) but does not *structure* her criticism around his four criticism elements. She does, however, provide description, interpretation, and deal with themes throughout her rich narrative, but without her Eisner citation early in the work, readers would have no way of knowing that this is an educational criticism. The following quote is the only additional connection she makes to Eisner's approach.

Eisner...constructs the idea of "educational criticism" as the public act of portrayal, heightened vision, and understanding based on a private sense of connoisseurship or knowing what is good about a realm in which one is familiar and proficient (p. 59).

She then goes on for approximately one page to describe her “many years of immersion in and study of both theory and practice” as a basis for knowing “what is good about educational settings” (pp. 59-60). She mentions keeping record of her ethnographic field notes separate from her educational connoisseurship notebook. Therefore, she would note observations separately from her notations as an “expert” in educational settings.

Knowlton (1984), using an earlier version of Eisner’s criticism elements (i.e., description, interpretation, and appraisal, Eisner, 1975, cited in Knowlton, 1984), is extremely clear in aligning the structure of her educational criticisms with Eisner’s elements although she chooses to use alternative labels for the elements in her section headings. Her emphasis is on educational criticism. She does not address educational connoisseurship, nor does she explicitly document her expertise as a connoisseur.

Although she authored the earliest dissertation reviewed, Knowlton makes the following comment about dissertations preceding hers that is obviously still relevant:

Previous studies in the use of educational criticism contained these limitations:

Lack of clear guidance for selection of phenomena to be criticized, unclear designation of the role of the observer, vague basis for analysis of descriptive information, [and] paucity of application of educational criticism to meet the practical needs of educational decision makers (Knowlton, 1984, pp. 110-111).

By contrast, Taylor (1993), one of Eisner’s doctoral students, structures her criticisms of Christian home schooling environments around Eisner’s elements and labels the elements accordingly. Her documentation of connoisseurship is most prominent in the two pages she uses to ally herself with the experiences of her study’s participants.

I am a Christian, and I am a wife, and I am a mother of five small children whom my husband and I care for at home. More recently, together with my husband, I have come to desire home schooling for my own children. For these reasons I share a common world view with the home schoolers I am studying. We adhere to a Christian philosophy of education, and thus the foundation of our view of education is Biblical authority (p. 21).

However, Taylor also gives a persuasive impression throughout her dissertation that she is conversant with the nuances of her study topic through her use of insider code words.

The parents in the three families I have studied all describe themselves as born again Christians; followers of Jesus Christ who have committed themselves to a saving faith in Him. The emphasis is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A Deacon at Hillside explained that these families, as members of Hillside, believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. They believe in the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth and that Jesus died for the sins of mankind, was buried, rose again on the third day and is seated at the right hand of God interceding for the saints (p. 10).

Although she puts these insider terms in the mouths of her study participants, Taylor uses the turns of phrase with a practiced ear that is reflective of her own Christian sub-culture connoisseurship.

Of the educational criticism dissertations reviewed, only Knowlton (1984) communicates an intention to create an educational criticism model for others to follow (much as this current dissertation is intended to do). To this end, her work is distinguished by her use of a two-dimensional matrix that guides her model. Four

classifications of general classroom phenomena are listed on the horizontal axis of the matrix while on the vertical axis are listed specific characteristics of the program implementation being investigated. Excerpts from Knowlton's field notes are pasted into the appropriate intersecting cells. Both sets of characteristics were chosen prior to collecting her observational data. Her focus on program evaluation and her assumption of a face-to-face modality in her methodology limit the *direct* applicability of her model to this current study, but the emphases on consistent structure and clarity of process within her model for program evaluation are characteristics I will attempt to ensure within my model for educational criticism of online courses.

Case Studies and Educational Criticism

Eisner (1985, 1991) situates his educational connoisseurship/criticism construct as a special case in the tradition of qualitative research. Although he is careful not to restrict the aspirations of would be connoisseurs/critics as he provides guidance in working with his constructs, Eisner's own descriptions of methodology most closely align with the qualitative research case study. In particular, his emphasis on evaluation, use of multiple data sources, uniqueness of the given "case," richness of description, and naturalistic generalization from emergent themes is consistent with features of the research case study paradigm (Creswell, 1998). While Eisner's approach is the special case, serving to meet a need within the field of education for criticism born of connoisseurship within the field's sub-domains, methodological guidance can be found by also consulting examples from the broader research case study literature.

Previous Research Case Studies of Online Courses

Previous dissertations have used a research case study approach to examine online courses in recent years. However, they have varied in focus, in how theoretical constructs have guided the inquiry, and in what data sources were used. Also the research case studies varied in whether the course(s) was/were studied while in progress or after the fact and whether visual artifacts from the course(s) were included. One should not expect these case study examples to ascribe to a standard methodology or theoretical base. By reviewing them here, it is my intention merely to identify methodological examples for incorporation in my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses.

Vonderwell (2002) focuses on the experiences of the instructor and of students in an online Technology in Education course for undergraduate students. She was guided in her inquiry by a construct that prescribes conditions for active learning (i.e., Rich Environments for Active Learning). Her data sources include student journals, email transcripts, discussion postings, course web pages, student surveys, and a researcher/instructor journal. The data were collected during the course, and Vonderwell had the unique perspective of being both the first-time course instructor and the researcher. A copy of the course syllabus is included.

Eggers (1999) selected six online courses for study that were recognized by the Paul Allen Virtual Education Foundation in its Outstanding Online Course Award for 1998. (One course was the winner, and the other five received honorable mention.) Eggers focused on instructional practices that facilitated active learning and social construction of knowledge in online courses, and she was guided by the *Learner-centered Psychological Principles of the American Psychological Association*. Data sources

included surveys, email transcripts, course web pages, and instructor interviews. The courses were studied after the fact, and Eggers presents a summary of each using a consistent structure for ease of comparison between courses: course design (including instructional design, course supports, interactions, assessment and evaluation, and technological aspects), instructor/developer information, unexpected discoveries (of the instructor), challenges and satisfactions (of the instructor), and reflections and advice (of the instructor). A few visual samples of materials in one course are provided. Although this is not an educational criticism study, Eggers does cite Eisner (1991) extensively and provides approximately two pages on her personal background as a student in online courses.

Mannan's (2003) focus appears to be a concern over whether online courses cause us to "lose some of the things we already have [while] deliver[ing] a shallow learning experience" (p. 20). She does not identify any particular theoretical construct as a guide to her inquiry into an online nutrition course and technical writing course. Her data sources include course web pages, transcripts of chat session focus groups, surveys, student time logs, email journals, in-person interviews, and student demographic data. The study was conducted while the two courses were in progress. One screen capture of web page materials from each course is included in the study. Mannan does not cite Eisner's (1985, 1991) work or refer to educational connoisseurship, but she does document her experiences vis-à-vis online courses that include serving as the "technical and student support person" (p. 108) for one of the two courses studied and the fact that she has administrative access to the course management system which houses the two courses.

The UCF Context

Hartman (2002) has described the institutional context of the University of Central Florida's online learning initiative. It is this foundation that provides the background both for my development as a connoisseur in the area of online learning and for the online course that will be studied later in this dissertation. As he points out, UCF's online initiative began with one online course offered in the summer of 1996 that was then selected as a model for the courses that followed. In fact, Hartman notes that UCF's initiative is distinguished by its development of a series of "models of practice" (p. 46) that are each based in theory and result in the organization's development. These models include "an instructional model for online learning, a faculty development model, a course development model, a learner support model, and an assessment model" (p. 47). By contrast, Hartman contends that many other institutions do not articulate such models, do not have scalable development processes in place, do not conduct on-going evaluation, and do not "seek... institutional transformation" (p. 48). In particular, Hartman characterizes the UCF online instructional model as being based on social constructivist learning theory, being communication-centric vs. content-centric in design, having a high level of interactivity, being asynchronous vs. synchronous in access and communication time, and being instructor led. He points out that implementation of this instructional model is, to a fairly high degree, accomplished by UCF's reliance on instructional designers and a highly systematized faculty development process. However, individual courses are unique since individual faculty members still make instructional decisions that vary in the degree to which they conform to the model.

Previous Studies of UCF Online Courses

Several other UCF dissertations have focused on aspects of the online learning initiative at the University of Central Florida. While none of these studies present findings that generalize to the entire UCF online course initiative, I mention them here for two reasons. First, no one has articulated a methodology grounded in instructional theory that can be consistently applied to UCF online courses as a means of identifying patterns or distinctives. Second, each of these dissertations reveals something about how one might choose to approach the study of online courses. I will comment briefly on each dissertation. My comments will be restricted, however, to factors relevant to the goals of this current dissertation. That is, I hope to assemble a mosaic picture of UCF's online initiative as construed by previous researchers while at the same time pointing out the need for a more holistic methodology that draws upon the nuanced perceptions of the connoisseur within the tradition of instructional theory. I am examining these dissertations from a perspective other than their intended purpose, so no slight is intended to these authors as I make observations relevant to the subject of this current dissertation. I will note study focus, methodology, the degree to which online course materials are examined, whether the study was conducted during or after the course(s), and whether any broad constructs from instructional theory ground the study.

One of these studies (Floyd, 2000) compared one online and one face-to-face section of the same UCF graduate course in educational measurement and evaluation (taught by two different instructors) primarily using student survey data. This study was concerned with student perceptions and was conducted during the run of the course. Although only survey data were analyzed and shared in the dissertation, student and

faculty interviews and three observations (of both the online and face-to-face environments) were conducted as well in order to provide more depth to the data (such as comments like,

The instructor expressed a strong preference to teach in the online format.

Observations indicated that students enrolled in the online class were in fact communicating with each other a great deal more than the students enrolled in the traditional format class (p. 113).

No specifics are offered as to the methodology of the interviews or the observations.

Two studies (Lee, 2002 and Pan, 2003) use a few UCF online courses as the context for survey research on particular learner traits. Both studies were conducted during the run of their convenience sample courses. Lee administered his surveys at three times during the term to students in four courses and collected no additional data. Pan administered one survey to students in two courses; however, he also briefly describes what he considers to be the environment of the courses:

Both courses used WebCT tools/features: grade, quizzes, chat room, forum discussion, and content modules. The content modules mainly recommended outside reading of texts. Class notes were available in WebCT, but in different formats. In the psychology course, notes were given in the forum discussion; in the other, notes were downloadable as Microsoft PowerPoint files. WebCT mail and calendar were used in the psychology course, however, not in the engineering course. The syllabus of the engineering course was posted on the WebCT course page, while a hard copy of the syllabus was distributed in the psychology course (p. 60).

He offers no specifics as to the methodology of his observations, but he was also less concerned with WebCT or online courses than he was with applying his study's construct (i.e., the Technology Acceptance Model) to a convenient information system (Personal communication from C. Pan, January 29, 2005).

Another a survey-based study (Buckley, 2003) examines how a set of teaching/learning principles were realized in two UCF online courses within the same completely online graduate program in educational media. This study was concerned with student learning experiences and was conducted during the run of the courses. Buckley privileges the instructional systems design process and assumes that the courses were all designed in compliance with the particular instructional design process he summarizes. The teaching/learning principle construct used was based on the popular Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987) that is presented as a compilation of findings from research on the undergraduate experience at colleges and universities.

Finally, Schepise (2002) used surveys and a review of web page materials in six UCF online courses as the basis for exploring possible relationships between web usability and content structure principles and student satisfaction. The study was conducted during the run of the courses. Of all the UCF dissertations reviewed, Schepise's is the only one to incorporate a rigorous appraisal of the actual online course materials into her methodology. Her methodology involved checklists for content structure and web usability which she compiled from various sources, and she stated that it took her approximately four days to review each course using the checklists. She

describes the six courses in approximately two paragraphs each. In addition she makes some general comments about the courses.

In observing the selected online courses the researcher noted that all of the instructors of the six participating courses had a student-centered methodology.

The courses all had a similar look and general layout since all of the courses were contained with[in] the WebCT shell (p. 67).

She cites in her discussion that UCF

requires all professors who desire to put their courses online to complete a course development program which prepares the faculty to use the template established by the university as the “model” for all courses. Consequently, all courses basically “look-a-like” [sic] and follow the same design principles (p. 75).

Although this comment suggests that Schepise has an awareness of UCF’s course development process, some of her conclusions reflect a less refined perception. She equates WebCT (the course management system software used in UCF online courses) with the “sameness” she observes in the courses she examined. She does not address the uniqueness of each course and of each offering of the course (with the unique time-based interactions between and among instructor and students afforded by each offering), the intentions of the instructor who developed the course, and the role of the instructional designer who assisted in development.

The Necessity of Antecedent Knowledge

As a graduate student taking online courses at UCF, Pedone (2003) found that

A common web platform, WebCT, had been adopted by my university, making all online courses have similar logistical functions. I did not fully appreciate this fact until I completed online courses from different instructors. The same basic course structure from class to class helped me feel as if I were returning to a familiar “place.” It was much like a student might feel taking a class from a new instructor in a familiar room or building. The content of the class may be different, but the surroundings are very comfortable and familiar (p. 57).

From her student perspective Pedone attributes the positive familiarity she experienced to the course management system software, WebCT, rather than to the structural, graphical, and procedural conventions which had been institutionalized “behind the scenes” and away from her view. Using Eisner’s (1991) term, she lacked the antecedent knowledge necessary to recognize that while some institutions’ implementations of WebCT (or other course management systems) are without institutionalized conventions (resulting in remarkably *dissimilar* logistical functions), UCF has intentionally taken steps to ensure that the kind of familiarity Pedone experienced is cultivated through the availability of graphical templates, structural components, and procedural protocols that are adopted by faculty through the intervention of instructional designers.

UCF Online Course Components

Truman-Davis, Futch, Thompson, and Yonekura (2000) delineate the conventional online course components at UCF. First, each online course has a publicly accessible course web site which serves as the syllabus for the course despite the fact that “the exact number and titles of standard public pages and buttons varies according to a

faculty member's preference" (p. 49). Second, each online course is provided with a "password-protected database" (p. 50) which "promot[es] community in online courses" (p. 50) by displaying student's biographical information, photographs, and current email addresses. Third, each online course has a password-protected area provided by the WebCT course management system which contains course content and provides a place for students and faculty to have instructional interactions which have been designed collaboratively by the faculty member and an instructional designer.

UCF Instructional Designers

Truman-Davis, Futch, Thompson, and Yonekura (2000) also explain that UCF instructional designers are tasked with "conceptualiz[ing] the faculty member's vision for the course" (p. 47) and with "incorporating appropriate instructional strategies and media as the course is developed" (p. 47). This occurs through a liaison role that the instructional designer serves between faculty member and teams of programmers, graphic artists, and multimedia developers. In their study of the relationship between instructional designer and faculty member, Pan, Deets, Phillips, and Cornell (2003) assert that the instructional designer's primary role is to design and develop online courses in concert with the faculty member who will be teaching the course, but predominantly the instructional designer is concerned with doing whatever it takes to support the faculty member in the teaching/learning process. They characterize the relationship as being one of teammates or partners, analogous to that of a pitcher and catcher in baseball. In a follow-up study of UCF instructional designers, Pan, Thompson, and Deets (2003) recognize the expertise of the instructional designers in working collaboratively with

faculty to design and develop instructional materials and the conscientious assertiveness which marks their relationship with faculty members.

The instructional designers are the experts in Web-based instruction... [and] are considered a solution source for faculty obstacles and issues... but if they perceive that development principles prescribed are violated, they tend not to go with the flow (p. 7).

My Qualifications as a Connoisseur

I worked closely with UCF online faculty as an instructional designer for three years from 1998 to 2001. During this time I met individually with faculty members, gave feedback and advice on instructional methods and materials, coordinated the development of online materials, and provided direct technical support to faculty during the run of their courses. From 2001 through 2003, I continued to assist the UCF instructional designers in working with faculty as the primary facilitator of the faculty development courses offered to those preparing to teach online at UCF for the first time. In both of these roles, I interacted closely with faculty from disciplines throughout all of UCF's colleges and campuses, recognizing their subject matter expertise and assisting them with translating their instructional goals into active online courses within the context of UCF's institutional model of online learning. I have worked with approximately 400 faculty preparing to teach fully online and mixed mode (reduced seat time) courses at UCF. I have also consulted with staff and faculty from numerous other institutions seeking to explore or emulate some aspect of UCF's approach to online learning and have led initiatives to incorporate a UCF-like approach to online learning at

two other institutions. In addition to my work with UCF faculty, I have also experienced both teaching online and learning online at UCF. I have served as a facilitator/instructor of thirteen offerings of IDL6543, UCF's mixed mode course for faculty preparing to teach online (<http://reach.ucf.edu/~idl6543>), and seven sections of ADL5000, UCF's fully online course for instructors "inheriting" an existing online course developed by someone else (<http://reach.ucf.edu/~adl5000>). As a graduate student at UCF I have taken two fully online courses, six mixed mode courses (i.e., at least one-third reduction in class meeting time through online content and interactions), and numerous web-enhanced courses from 1998 to 2003. To add depth to this documentation of my connoisseurship, I will share two contrasting anecdotes drawn from my experiences as an instructional designer at UCF.

On Designing an Online Course

One of the first faculty members with whom I worked at UCF has recounted the story of meeting with me as her instructional designer for the first time with a disk full of PowerPoint presentations from the face-to-face version of her course in hand. She reports that I told her to hold on to her PowerPoints because that's not the way that we were going to build her online course. As it turns out she was from a discipline in which the faculty pride themselves on the detailed structure they bring to their courses. Lengthy syllabi filled with learning objectives, robust presentation of content supported by media (such as PowerPoint), thorough testing, and high academic standards are the hallmarks of their programs. However, this faculty member proved to be very open to suggestions

about how her online course could be prepared for a high degree of interaction between students, instructor, and course content.

Despite the fact that assignments were designed to require postings to the asynchronous discussion board, she wanted to maintain the same approach to grading “student participation” that she used in her face-to-face courses. That is, she would award a small percentage of points at the end of the term based upon her perception of how fully each student participated. After her first time teaching the new online course, though, she acknowledged that her students had no incentive to make substantive discussion postings, nor did they have any instructor feedback on their contributions to the discussions other than her personal replies to them (which caused her to personally reply to every single student posting the first time she taught the course). She felt a need for “participation” scoring that was based on the qualitative differences of students’ actual contributions to the course’s discussions (e.g., a vague student posting is different than a posting that more thoughtfully addresses the assignment). As a result, we conceptualized a simple three-level discussion scoring rubric based on criteria that she felt were important. Discussions would be scored weekly and would count for a larger percentage of the overall course grade than in the past. To preserve her ability to subjectively reward those students that she “felt” had worked hard or needed assistance, we built in a few “flex points” (i.e., 1% of the total course grade) that she could award at the end of the course. After her second time teaching the course, we made a few other adjustments, but then the course (and instructor) was relatively stabilized. She has become a prolific online instructor whose courses have a high degree of substantive student-to-student interaction along with high interaction with the instructor and the course content.

On Differing from the “Right” Point of View

I remember a former UCF faculty member who has since retired. He taught an early online course that consisted of both a web site and a WebCT account that most of our team of instructional designers thought was passé. Rather than the “professional” graphical look that had become the norm at UCF (and which we encouraged and supported), his materials had a distinctly “hand-crafted” feel to them. He made use of background images in his web pages (which we all thought were in poor taste). He created or “borrowed” animated ornamental graphics that blinked, flashed, and spun on screen, and he made use of text sizes, colors, and styles which were “non-standard” to say the least. To top it all off, we all thought that his materials were fairly difficult for students to navigate. They didn’t seem very intuitive to us as instructional designers (compared to the course materials that followed the guidelines *we* had suggested to the faculty). So by *our* standards (of aesthetics and instructional design at least), this course was “inferior” to the majority of other UCF online courses.

Interestingly, this same faculty member prided himself on stimulating students’ critical thinking. It was his intent to use many of the kitsch graphical elements as jumping off points for communication on certain themes. He also contended that the course’s navigational structure (or lack thereof) fostered student independence and stimulated the critical thinking which he valued so much. From his vantage point these were more important goals than for the course materials to “look good” or to be *conventional*.

Whose perspective was right and whose was wrong? Is that even a fair question to ask? Might it not depend on one’s point of view?

Summary

In this chapter I introduced Eisner's (1985, 1991) model of educational connoisseurship and criticism and the qualitative research case study as the theoretical and methodological "home" of the approach to studying online courses that I am building. Additionally, through examples from previous dissertations using an educational criticism orientation, I pointed out the importance of documenting one's own connoisseurship when constructing educational criticism. I also gave evidence of my connoisseurship of UCF online courses by sharing details on my ability to access, perceive, and generalize perceptions about online courses and my ability to apply my antecedent knowledge about UCF's online initiative.

In an oft cited quote, author Anais Nin reportedly once said, "We do not see things as they are; we see them as we are." Certainly this is true when engaged in criticism of online courses. What one discovers/concludes will undoubtedly be influenced heavily by what one is looking for. For some, such a dynamic will seem undoubtedly too *inexact* to be useful. However, Eisner (1991) comments that it is unrealistic to think that when educational situations are

punctuated with virtues and vices, with features that are focused and diffused, with clarity and ambiguity, it is possible to write an educational criticism that itself is without uncertainty. Precision can be concocted, but that doesn't make it useful (p. 111).

Since the area of online learning is still so new, in the absence of educational criticisms of online courses born of the kind of connoisseurship Eisner espouses, some will make conclusions about *all* online courses based on hearsay or experiences related to a few

courses (e.g., online courses are easier than face-to-face courses) while others will adopt the values of the most prominent voices in their sphere (e.g., this course received special recognition from [insert person or organization here]) regardless of any agenda lying behind the voices (such as the corporate goals of a company like WebCT vis-à-vis its annual “Exemplary Course Project” <http://www.webct.com/exemplary>)).

For this reason, it is important to bring as many nuanced viewpoints to the data of the online course as possible. This is particularly true of the interpretation section of the educational criticism in which McCutcheon (1978) advocates employing a variety of counterpoised “interpretive perspectives” (p. 189) through which the same observational data can receive differing interpretational treatments. (This will be expanded upon in Chapter 5: The Lenses We Wear Determine What We See.) When adopting such a balanced approach, there is a greater likelihood of recognizing the various strengths and weaknesses manifested in any particular online course rather than classifying it as merely “good” or “bad” (or “exemplary”). In the longer term, such an approach, when used with a larger number of diverse courses, will facilitate the formation of a pattern language with which we can begin to speak intelligently about the instructional contexts of online courses.

CHAPTER 3: ON CRITICIZING ONLINE COURSES

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss two sets of issues related to educational criticism of online courses. First, I will articulate goals for such studies that are related to the shorter term. Second, I will offer a vision of what might be done over the longer term with a larger collection of such studies.

Shorter Term Goals

In constructing a model for conducting educational criticism of online courses, it is not my goal to identify “bad” practices among online university faculty. This is counter-productive. The writing of educational criticism related to online courses, at least in the context of higher education, is dependent upon faculty being willing to share their courses and being open to “criticism” (in the Eisnerian sense discussed in the previous chapter rather than in a pejorative sense). In non-academic contexts, there may be a comparable concern with course designers as with faculty in academia. Using educational criticism as a means to cast individual courses or faculty/course designers in a negative light will undoubtedly result in very few educational criticisms being written of online courses. This viewpoint is consistent with Rorty’s (1987, cited in Belland, 1991) discussion of philosophy critics in which he contrasts second and third-rate critics who fixate on negativity with first-rate critics who

think [their] way so thoroughly into the hopes and fears of the philosopher [they are] criticizing that [they are] able to shrug off, on that philosopher's behalf, the strictures of such lesser critics. First-rate critics delight in the originality of those they criticize, and they *criticize them only when they are at their best* [italics added] (pp. 34-35).

It is my hope that establishing a model for conducting educational criticism of online courses will benefit those who are involved with any aspect of online learning, whether as an instructor, an administrator, an instructional designer, or even as a student by surfacing relevant commonalities between online courses despite differences in their context (and in their critics). Belland, Duncan, and Deckman (1991) have suggested six contributions that educational criticism can make to our understanding of educational technology. Their six statements are consistent with my own shorter term goals for educational criticisms of online courses and are applicable to a single educational criticism or to far more than one. I will use these six contribution statements as prompts for a more detailed articulation of my goals. I have modified the statements by replacing Belland, Duncan, and Deckman's generic terms with "online course(s)" where appropriate.

Relationship Among the Constituent Parts and the Whole

"Criticism could help explain [online courses] in terms of the relationship among the constituent parts and the whole" (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.156). The whole in this case is the "online course." However, as noted in Chapter 1, "online course" is used as a label for instructional settings in diverse contexts with, arguably, quite

different configurations of parts. It would help to have a consistent set of labels for the parts so that we might better understand the variety of configurations in which they are arranged. Returning to the foundational construct of Schwab's (1973) commonplaces introduced in Chapter 1, we find four elements that are "vital factor[s] in educational thought and practice" (pp. 508-509). The four commonplaces are teachers, learners, milieus, and subject matter. Educational criticism of online courses should focus on explaining the whole (the online course) in terms of the parts (the commonplaces). Regarding teachers, one might ask, "is there a teacher?" "how many teachers are there?" "what are the roles of the teacher(s)?" Similarly, about learners we might ask, "how many learners are there?" "do the learners interact with each other (if there is more than one)?" "what are the roles of the learner(s)?" About the immediate milieu, the imminent instructional environment, we might look for additional sub-parts and ask, "what instructional materials are there?" "how do they facilitate communications?" "how do they convey course content?" "what affordances do they provide for structuring time and tasks?" "how do they enable learners to function as (re-)creators of knowledge and products?" Concerning a broader milieu, one might be concerned about the organizational/institutional context and ask, "what is the purpose of this course?" "of what larger curriculum structure is the course a part?" "with what discipline is this course associated?" Finally we might ask how all these various parts interact with each other in the context of an online course.

I have saved subject matter for last because it has special characteristics. First, although a course would not have its primary function without its subject matter, there is the possibility of subject matter and subject matter expertise overshadowing the other

commonplaces. This was a concern of Schwab's (1973) when he wrote about the role of the commonplaces in curriculum making, and it is a concern in the study and criticism of online courses. It is difficult for some people to consider a course apart from its subject matter. Rather than speaking in generic terms about learner(s), teacher(s), and milieu(s), they only consider how these "lesser" commonplaces serve the needs of the subject matter. For instance, I have witnessed a few faculty who, when asked to speak about the teaching/learning process in their courses, lapsed instead into a mini-discourse on their subject matter as if they were unable to speak in more general terms about teaching and learning. Second, some more general aspects of subject matter can be touched upon in the other commonplaces. In the questions above, a concern with how course content is conveyed and how the discipline area (in the form of a program of study or an academic department) provides a context for the course is a reflection of a concern for more general aspects of the milieu commonplace. Third, although I assert my connoisseurship in matters pertaining to the teaching/learning process and logistical issues involved with online courses, I do not pretend to be a connoisseur of all disciplines in which online courses are taught. Since educational criticism is based on one's connoisseurship, it would be inappropriate to critique what one does not sufficiently understand. The exception to this would be, of course, if one were a connoisseur in both the subject matter and in online courses or if an educational criticism were written by co-authors representing these two complementary areas. Therefore, in this model for educational criticism of online courses I will not include subject matter other than when it is touched on in the other commonplaces, but these three commonplaces (learners, teachers, and

milieus) do provide an initial classification of parts which can help explain the whole of the online course.

Quality of the Relationship Between Content and Form

“Criticism could help explain [online courses] in terms of the quality of the relationship between [their] content and [their] form” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.156). Along with the above discussion of wholes and parts, Schwab’s (1973) commonplaces also lend themselves to a consideration of content and form in online courses with subject matter representing the content and the remaining commonplaces of teachers, learners, and milieus representing the form. It is possible that certain subject matters are more likely to employ certain forms (that is, certain configurations of teachers, learners, and milieus) than others. However, until a systematic inquiry into these relationships is undertaken this will remain unknown. In Chapter 5 I will present three existing constructs and one new formulation in an effort to provide tools with which critics can more systematically interpret what they observe in online courses. Here I’ll briefly state how these constructs can be connected with the three “form” commonplaces so that the use of these tools in concert can be viewed as an extension of Schwab’s work and, therefore, understood as a way of referring to the form of online courses. Two of the constructs, the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston and Ashworth, 1990) and the Community of Inquiry model (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000), both relate to the roles of and relationships between teachers and learners in instructional contexts. The other two constructs, “five facets of a learning environment” (Perkins, 1991, p.18) and modular reusability of instructional materials, pertain to the milieu of the course’s

immediate instructional environment. All four of these constructs will be explicated in Chapter 5.

Interpretations, Judgments, and Consequences

“Criticism may reveal the grounds upon which interpretations and judgments of an [online course] may rest as well as the consequences the [online course] may entail in human experience” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.158). McCutcheon’s (1978) call for a variety of “interpretive perspectives” (p. 190) as a sub-structure of Eisner’s (1985, 1991) interpretation element in educational criticism is echoed in Belland, Duncan, and Deckman’s contention that

“[i]n order to arrive at some defensible interpretations and judgments, the critic must explore in some detail the grounds which led him/her to those interpretations and judgments” (p. 158).

I propose in my emerging model for educational criticism of online courses that a consistent set of “lenses,” arising from a foundation built on instructional theory, should be used by critics when studying online courses. While this doesn’t relieve the critic from explaining how his interpretations emerged from the intersection of these lenses and his unique vantage point as a connoisseur with particular experiences, it does ensure that the interpretations of different critics have a similar frame of reference (i.e., Schwab’s, 1973, commonplaces) based on one theoretical tradition (i.e., instructional theory as discussed in Chapter 1) allowing them to be assembled together to form patterns with design implications. (See the “Longer Term Goals” section later in this chapter.) I do not suggest that these lenses are the *only* ones that critics may use, but I do propose that *at least* these

lenses should be used for the reasons given here. Additionally, the lenses associated with the commonplaces of teachers and learners, in particular, encourage a focus on the “human experience” called for above by Belland, Duncan, and Deckman.

Unifying Themes and Designs

“Criticism may provide insight into the unifying theme(s) and design(s) which help to hold [online courses] together in all [their] richness and complexity” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.157). At the very least, online courses consist of diverse instructional materials (e.g., text, static graphics, animations, video, audio, interactive media, links to web sites, and more) and varied interactions between teacher(s) and learner(s) (e.g., discussion postings, synchronous chats, email messages, assignments/feedback, tests/feedback, and more). Further, each offering of an online course at a distinct point in time with a certain complement of learner(s) and teacher(s) results in a configuration of these component elements as unique and colorful as the patterns displayed with every spin of a kaleidoscope’s wheel. It is the critic’s role to highlight these designs and to draw attention to themes that emerge from his careful study of them. However, as Belland et al suggest, “design” implies both arrangement of component elements and underlying purpose or intent. While a connoisseur/critic may be successful, based only on her experience and observations, in applying Eisner’s (1985, 1991) basic approach by describing the arrangement of elements within (and including) the “whole” of an online course, providing counterpoised interpretational perspectives on the arrangement, evaluating the educational value of the arrangement, and articulating themes arising from the arrangement, she can only infer the designer’s intent unless she is

able to obtain information directly from the designer. It may be that the connoisseur/critic's inference of intent is reasonable and defensible, but it must still be regarded as an inference without this confirmation. Knowlton (1984), in her educational criticism model for program evaluation, suggests that the program-implementing classroom teachers be given a copy of the criticism and an opportunity to comment, and a summary of this exchange is to be included with the criticism. This practical strategy will be applied in my educational criticism model for online courses as a way of including the confirmed intent of the course designer/faculty member in the criticism, but it is also useful as a safeguard against the pejorative "criticism" of the third and second-rate variety decried by Rorty (1987, cited in Belland, 1991) and discussed earlier in this chapter. Such a strategy is also consistent with Creswell and Miller's (2000) call for member checking in that the faculty member "confirm[s] the credibility of the information and narrative account" which then allows the critic to "incorporate [the faculty member's] comments into the final narrative" (p. 127). In the event that the original course designer is no longer available for comment but the critic has been granted legitimate access to the online course by the course's "owner" (perhaps a department chair or dean in the university setting), the critic's well-reasoned and defensible inference of intent must suffice. Belland, Duncan, and Deckman observe that,

"The competent critic is capable of illuminating not only the nature of the purposes and the meanings intrinsic to our educational technological endeavors but also the means by which they were achieved. The insight of the connoisseur is indispensable here" (p. 157).

Such a nuanced reading of online courses is necessary if educational criticism that unveils them in all their richness and complexity is to result.

Intimate Experience from Connoisseurship

“Criticism may reveal the nature of the intimate experience a well-informed, sensitive, and reflective individual has with an [online course]” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.157). This is consistent with Eisner’s (1985, 1991) view of connoisseurship as a private experience of appreciation and criticism as a public act of disclosing the insights gained privately. In this sense, criticism is educational to lay persons in that their “perception[s] [are] increased and understanding[s] deepened” due to the “illuminat[ion], interpret[ation], and apprais[al] [of] the qualities” shared by the critic (Eisner, 1991, p. 86). This is a worthy goal in and of itself, revealing depth and subtlety where none were perceived before. However, because of the unique perspective of individual critics, it is important for lay persons to have the opportunity to encounter more than one perspective on online courses in general and even multiple perspectives on the same online course. As Eisner says, “one of the major functions of criticism is to provide the content through which readers of different critics can compare and contrast competing interpretations of the same work and thus deepen their understanding of its multiple layers” (Eisner, 1991, p. 105). In this sense, the benefits extend beyond the lay person to other connoisseur/critics since one critic’s perceptions are sharpened by exposure to another critic’s insights and “the qualities described in any critical account are not necessarily either all that could have been described or those that other critics might have described” (Eisner, 1991, p. 86). That being said, this variability of perception

and selectivity in writing of criticism should not diminish the value attributed to educational criticism since

“[a]lthough critics may differ significantly in their theoretical beliefs, idiosyncratic nature of their understandings and their capacity for insight, good criticism is thoroughly and robustly constrained by the nature of the products and/or processes within human aesthetic and educational experience which nevertheless are embedded in a community of meanings and values.” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p. 158)

That is, given a perceptive connoisseur/critic and tools for focusing the critic’s observations through certain interpretive perspectives, it is unlikely that one will observe an apple and interpret an orange.

Synthesis of Research

“Criticism may serve to synthesize the knowledge derived from disparate research processes into more comprehensive theory” (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p.158). While one of my arguments for constructing a model for conducting educational criticism of online courses is that the relative newness and complexity of online courses have limited the number of robust research studies of their characteristic elements, it is my hope that where relevant findings from research studies do exist (from whatever research tradition) that connoisseur/critics will bring such findings to bear in their criticisms. For instance, findings from studies of learner-trait characteristics in online courses such as Lee’s (2002) study of student self-efficacy (e.g., initial course content self-efficacy was a significant predictor of performance in online courses) or Pan’s

(2003) study of the Technology Acceptance Model (e.g., perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness were determinants of students' attitude toward WebCT, which, in turn, determined the frequency of their WebCT use) could be included in an educational criticism of an online course if relevant. Similarly, findings from studies of particular media/technologies (e.g., web-conferencing in Foley and Schuck, 1998; and streaming audio in LaRose, Gregg, and Eastin, 1998) might be relevant if the online course being studied includes these media. It is a duty of the connoisseur/critic to be familiar with such studies.

Rarely are the results of these different kinds of inquiry brought together into some more comprehensive view.... Criticism might help in bringing the results of such inquiries together while adding rich, aesthetic dimensions of understanding (Belland, Duncan, and Deckman, 1991, p. 159).

Although there are numerous journals devoted specifically to different facets of online learning, there are literatures related to online courses that are distributed across multiple disciplines. One of the reasons for this is the pressure exerted on university online faculty to publish studies related to online learning in journals within their own disciplines.

Access to reviews of literature and annotated bibliographies that pull from sources in a variety of disciplines are essential. (See Thompson, 1999, for an example of an annotated bibliography of diverse works related to online learning.)

Longer Term Goals

Writers in the intersecting fields of architecture, regional planning/design, and zoning have found it useful to articulate a variety of typologies for describing sets of

traits characteristic of particular geographic regions, societal functions, and personal activities and for guidance in developing new structures (e.g., McHarg, 1965; Alexander, 1979; Brower, 1996; Duany, 2002; and Walters and Brown, 2004). As a longer term goal of the implementation of my model for conducting educational criticism of online courses in various organizations by many connoisseur/critics, it is my hope that collections of such criticisms can lead to similar typologies related to online learning in the higher education context and, perhaps, to more comprehensive typologies that can encompass online learning in contexts other than higher education and even learning in modalities other than online courses. Toward this end, I will review four of the typologies from these fields listed above as a means of casting a vision for others to pursue as they conduct educational criticism of online courses.

First, through a series of works, Alexander and his colleagues (Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein, Jacobson, Fiksdahl-King, and Angel, 1977; Alexander, 1979; Alexander, Neis, Anninou, and King, 1987) have established in the fields of architecture and urban design a vocabulary for talking about macro- and micro-spaces involved in constructing buildings/communities. They were able to do this because of their years of experience with a wide variety of architectural projects. Alexander and his colleagues describe their work as follows:

During the 1970s a group of us succeeded in isolating a large number of so-called “patterns,” which specify some of the spatial relations necessary to wholeness in the city. The patterns we defined ranged from the largest urban scale to the smallest scale of building construction” (Alexander et al, 1987, p. 4).

Although they do not describe the process whereby these patterns were isolated and identified, Alexander and his team explain that the result of their work was that

Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice (Alexander et al, 1977, p. x).

Using a standard format, Alexander et al (1977) describe 253 numbered patterns and identify specific patterns that are useful to combine together (e.g., 41: work community, 147: communal eating, and 61: small public squares, p. 226). Alexander and his colleagues referred to the inter-linked set of patterns as a “pattern language,” and this work has come to serve as an example to follow for those desiring to articulate pattern languages in their own fields (e.g., software development, Gamma, Helm, and Vlissides, 1994 and, interestingly, a visual design dissertation, Chan, 2003 that derived an entire web/visual design pattern language from one online course in art criticism). The work of Alexander and his collaborators is focused on ideals, not practical implementation, however. As they say,

In fact, the success of the theory, and of the experiment, depends on the fact that we intentionally ignored present rules of urban planning, zoning, urban administration, financing, and economics... The process we have outlined is incompatible with present-day city planning, zoning, urban real state, urban economics, and urban law (Alexander et al, 1987, p. 240).

Second, the transect, a methodological construct from the biological sciences in which one draws an imaginary line through a geographic region and collects specimens or takes

measurements at standard intervals along the line, has emerged as a prominent urban design typology. Duany (2002) traces the progression of the transect through the twentieth century from its appropriation by geographer Patrick Geddes (1915, cited in Duany, 2002) through its use by environmentalist Ian McHarg (1965) through its subliminal incorporation into the work of architect Christopher Alexander (1977) to its re-emergence in Duany's own work in his New Urbanist school of urban design. Geddes identified different geographical areas within a valley (i.e., highlands, foothills, and shores) as living areas for different social groups (hunters, farmers, and tradesmen, respectively). Using the example of highway placement, McHarg mapped both the areas of greatest social cost arising from highway construction and the areas of greatest inherent social value (e.g., real estate value, natural resources, beauty, etc.). Each map used shadings of color to indicate the range of these qualities (e.g., the higher the cost or value, the darker the color). He then overlaid transparencies of the two maps in order to "observe the maximum concurrence of either high or low social values and [to] seek that corridor which transects the areas of least social value in all categories" (McHarg, 1965, p. 34). Although Alexander et al did not identify themselves with the transect construct, Duany nevertheless infers a transect from the alignment of four of Alexander et al's patterns: number 2 ("the distribution of towns," Alexander et al, 1977, p. 17), number 13 ("subculture boundary," Alexander et al, 1977, p. 76), number 29 ("density rings," Alexander et al, 1977, p. 156), and number 36 ("degrees of publicness," Alexander et al, 1977, p. 193). Brower (2002) recognizes Duany as the major modern proponent of the transect construct and observes that "Duany's use of the transect differs from [past uses] in an important way: while historians and geographers use the transect to describe the way things *are*, he uses it to describe the way things *ought to be*" (p. 314, emphasis in

original). Talen (2002) lists the six progressively urban sectors or zones of Duany's transect as "rural preserve, rural reserve, sub-urban, general urban, urban center, and urban core" (p. 297).

Third, concerned with the need for a typology that "serves the public interest... [and that serves as] an instrument of public policy, Brower (2002, p. 314) extends the transect construct to form a typology of his own focused on the qualities of good neighborhoods. It is his contention that "the physical attributes of the setting... [and] the social relationship between neighbors" (Brower, 1996, p. 161) are both crucial. Based on a review of thirty-six previous neighborhood satisfaction surveys from which a set of characteristics were derived and ninety-eight interviews utilizing these characteristics with residents of eight Baltimore neighborhoods, Brower (1996) sets forth a classification of four neighborhood types that "all cities... must offer" (p. 161). The four neighborhood types (which are believed to appeal differentially to people with different preferences) are center neighborhoods, small town neighborhoods, residential partnership neighborhoods, and retreat neighborhoods. Brower asserts that this typology holds great promise for city planners and should be tested in cities throughout the United States.

Fourth, Walters and Brown (2004) in an approach that they term "planning by design" (p.1) consider a broad range of strategies for implementing the goals of the New Urbanism associated with Andres Duany. Rather than setting forth a particular typology, they lay a broad theoretical foundation, share individual case studies from their architectural practice (one case each for region, city, town, neighborhood, and block) in which they discuss how various theoretical constructs were applied, and provide a number of tools for practical implementation in the appendices which includes Smart

Growth (used synonymously with New Urbanism) Principles containing 17 imperatively stated principles with sub-headings such as “General Policies,” “Planning Strategies,” and “Urban Design Concepts” (p. 235). Walters and Brown do make use of typologies, which they define as

consistent patterns for buildings and urban spaces that are derived from historical examples and which can be used and reused in different contemporary conditions (p. 82)

However, the multiple typologies they embrace are woven throughout their case studies rather than serving as an overarching unifying device. They summarize their purpose, in contrast to urban planning, when they depict their approach to urban design as a tool that

makes real places to live, to work, to shop, to worship, and to fall in love; urban planning makes only abstract models of cities (p. 229).

In the four typologies from urban design and related fields reviewed above, there are both similarities and contrasts that emerge from comparison. While all of the typologies are concerned to some extent with both *description* of what is and *design* of what is to be, the typologies vary in how they balance these two goals. They also vary in how they balance complexity with simplicity of their constructs, in balancing implementation with idealism, in the type of language employed (i.e., more functional vs. more stylized) and in the level of granularity they address (e.g., region, town, building, etc.). In the matrix below (Table 1), I chart these qualities for each of the typologies reviewed. (I have included two distinct versions of the transect typology for a total of five typology examples.)

Table 1. Comparison of Urban Design Typologies By Selected Qualities

Typology	Goal	Constructs	Usage	Language	Granularity
McHarg's Transect (McHarg, 1965)	Description	Simple	Idealism	Stylized	Larger scale (Region/City)
A Pattern Language (Alexander et al, 1977)	Design	Complex	Idealism	Stylized	Mixed Range (Building element- Region)
Duany's Transect (Talon, 2002)	Design	Simple	Idealism/ Implementation	Functional	Mixed Range (Rural preserve- Urban core)
Good Neighborhoods (Brower, 1996)	Description/ Design	Simple	Idealism	Functional	Neighborhood
Planning By Design (Walters and Brown, 2004)	Design	Complex	Implementation	Functional	Mixed Range (Block- Region)

While a variety of typologies are in use (and are continuing to be built upon) in the field of urban design for describing qualities and, increasingly, for designing new buildings, neighborhoods, cities, etc., online courses have no such typologies at present. As discussed in Chapter 1 and reiterated earlier in this chapter, “online course” (and related terms such as “e-learning course” and “distributed learning course”) means different things in different contexts, and even when there is consensus on the broad meaning of the term, we understand that there are widely differing manifestations (e.g., an online university course that is based in large part on asynchronous discussion postings vs. another that primarily employs synchronous chat sessions). Certainly some dichotomous labels have emerged in higher education that we can employ to talk about particular kinds of online courses (e.g., asynchronous/synchronous, instructor-led/instructorless, content-centric/discussion-centric, etc.). However, these labels are far from standardized, no typology gives them meaning in relation to one another, and there is much about online courses that remains “unlabeled.” To compound the problem, even if a pattern language for individual online courses were to emerge (at the “building” level, to use an analogy from the urban design works above), there remains the need to articulate how a particular online course configuration fits into a consideration of other related factors such as discipline, curriculum, and institution to name a but a few (perhaps somewhat akin to the neighborhoods, towns, and cities of urban design). In fact, the larger the scope, the greater the challenge of articulating an adequate typology. (For instance, in urban design there is always a physical presence to map that serves as the integrating context, whether it is a town, city, or region. Where McHarg (1965) could overlay maps to highlight a physical area with little value and low cost, there is no “map”

of cyberspace that allows one to depict the various higher educational institutions offering online courses nor the various other organizations that offer their own online courses.) It is my hope that one day, when the literature is replete with rich educational criticisms of online courses, that these may facilitate the formation of some sort of typology or pattern language which can be used by practitioners and scholars to talk descriptively and prescriptively about online courses. To that end, this current dissertation is focused on articulating a model for conducting educational criticisms of online courses so that a large number of connoisseur/critics can write and share criticisms that make public the richness and complexity of online courses.

Summary

In this chapter, I have put forth goals for individual criticisms of online courses arising from implementation of my emerging model. The delineation of these goals included a revisiting of Schwab's (1973) commonplaces as a foundational element and an introduction to four constructs that serve as McCutcheon-esque (1978) interpretive perspectives. (These will be explicated in Chapter 5.) I have also articulated a vision for a large, diverse collection of such criticisms as the basis for a typology or pattern language to emerge which can be used to *describe* what exists and to *design* instructional environments with certain desired traits. In the next chapter I will discuss the importance of ensuring sufficient methodological rigor in the case studies of online courses that serve as a basis for educational criticisms.

CHAPTER 4: ON CONDUCTING CASE STUDIES OF ONLINE COURSES

Introduction

The underlying methodology of educational criticism is that of the qualitative research case study (as discussed in Chapter 2). In this chapter, I will address issues related to conducting research case studies of online courses that result in the writing of educational criticism. First, I will address theoretical issues involved in the conceptualization of educational criticism as a form of qualitative research. In particular, based upon these theoretical concerns, I will recommend incorporation of certain practices in educational criticisms of online courses that should render them more acceptable to those concerned with lack of rigor in past criticisms. Second, I will discuss a number of methodological issues unique to the specific activity of online course case study.

Questioning Educational Criticism-As-Research

Although he puts forth educational criticism as a form of qualitative research, Eisner (1985) has “resisted” (p. 342) any standardization of format for educational criticisms in favor of an “openness... to different forms of reporting” (p. 342) and a respect for “the refined vision and skilled writing” (p. 340) produced by “each critic[’s]...style” (p. 340). Unfortunately, this has led to such variety in writing educational criticism that detractors have questioned whether it is appropriate to consider

educational criticism as a mode of qualitative research or not. For instance, Rist (1987) argues that if educational criticism is to be accepted as research then “the quality of the work should be judged in accepted ways” (p. 451) including the adoption of “certain analytic and methodological guides” (p. 450) and “evidence of... reliability [and] validity of the data” (p. 448). This view is consistent with other perspectives on what constitutes acceptability in conducting qualitative research in general and case studies in particular.

Research, Qualitative Research, and Case Study Research

Let us consider the themes connecting the concentrically arranged concepts of general research, qualitative research, and qualitative case study research. Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (1998) assert that, in the broadest sense,

[a] research report gives the history of a study, including what the researcher wanted to find out, why that seemed worth discovering, how the information was gathered, and what he or she thought it all meant (p. 23).

More specifically, Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15).

In addition, Creswell (1998) observes that

case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (p. 61).

This is consistent with Stake's (2000) statement that

...researchers use the methods for casework... to learn enough about their cases to encapsulate complex meanings into finite reports – and thus to describe the cases in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusions (which may differ from those of the researchers) (p. 439).

Stake (2000) also summarizes four essential components to case study observed by Yin (1992, cited in Stake, 2000):

bring[ing] expert knowledge to bear upon the phenomena studied, ...round[ing] up all the relevant data, ...examin[ing] rival interpretations, and...ponder[ing] and prob[ing] the degree to which the findings have implication elsewhere (Stake, 2000, p. 449).

Running throughout the above statements about general research, qualitative research, and qualitative case study research is a concern with how raw data (whether from observations, archived materials, interviews, or other sources) are collected, analyzed, interpreted and how they give rise to the “complex, holistic picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61) that the researcher presents.

Evidence from Published Educational Criticisms

I examined 25 non-dissertation educational criticisms for evidence of the rich writing envisioned by Eisner (1985) and the kind of rigor in methodology for which Rist (1987) argued (as expanded upon above). Since I am concerned with developing a model for practitioners to use in constructing individual “article-length” educational criticisms

of online courses rather than in promoting their writing of dissertations, I limited myself to non-dissertation examples in the literature. (Also, it is unlikely that dissertation-length educational criticisms are lacking in rigor.)

Thirteen (Apple and King, 1978; Davidman, 1978; Greer, 1978; Grumet, 1978; Jenkins, 1978; McCutcheon, 1978; McKinney, 1978; Milner, 1978; Pinar, 1978; Popkewitz, 1978; Rosario, 1978; Shaw, 1978; and Vallance, 1978) of the criticisms reviewed were contained in a reader of “curriculum criticisms” (a sub-genre of educational criticism) edited by Willis (1978) and endorsed in a foreword by Elliot Eisner. Another five (Barone, 1985; Catford, 1985; Cohen, 1985; Marshall, 1985; and Porro, 1985) were included as examples in the second edition of Eisner’s (1985) *Educational Imagination*. The remaining seven (Alexander, 1983; Barone, 1987; Konzal, 1997; Templeton, 1997; Dean and Mountford, 1998; McAllister, 2000; Schweber, 2003) were published individually in various journals and align themselves with Eisner’s educational criticism approach.

Of the 25 educational criticisms reviewed, eight contained no information about how data were collected. The remaining criticisms typically made brief mention of particular types of data collection (e.g., observation and interview) with little elaboration. Very few provided details on data collection and rationale used in analysis. (It is debatable how much detail is “enough,” and for the purposes of this discussion it matters little which of the specific criticisms I would place in this category. I would encourage the interested reader to review the criticisms and judge for himself.) I found no mention of concepts such as reliability or validity (or qualitative analogs to them) in the criticisms I examined.

The 25 criticisms ranged in length from 7-50 pages (with a mean length of 21.68 pages). The subjects of the criticisms varied somewhat, but almost all were concerned with some sort of face-to-face learning environment (usually a classroom). Four focused on non-face-to-face environments or materials (i.e., books, a telecourse, and the *intended* curriculum for programs of study). The scope of time considered in each criticism varied also from a low of one two-hour class session to a high of three school-years. Six of the criticisms did not specify a timeframe. There did not appear to be a relationship between length of criticism and scope of time studied. Most of the lengthier criticisms did include an array of quotations and other excerpted data. However, some of the longer criticisms deviated from the study of a case to make extensive ancillary comments (usually on the process of criticism or on curriculum theory). This is consistent with Barone's (1982, 1987) observations that as much or more has been written *about* conducting educational criticism than has been written in the form of actual criticism of particular cases. (As a case in point, this current dissertation is overwhelmingly *about* conducting educational criticism. As a defense, I assert only that the focus of this work is on constructing a model that will make it more likely for practitioners to write and share educational criticisms of online courses.)

There was considerable variety in writing style and format in the criticisms examined (with the most diverse being a criticism presented as a piece of reader's theatre), but almost all excelled at capturing the verisimilitude of the context studied and in conveying a sense of "being there." Most of the criticisms were replete with quotations from participant observations (or other data sources). One criticism made extensive use of photographs (17 photos in 21 pages) to convey the classroom environment. Another

included a sketch of a cartoon that appeared on a classroom chalkboard. Interestingly, in most cases the criticisms that provided a more detailed methodology were not as evocative in their descriptions and general writing style. (Konzal (1997) is the exception in that she provides a richly written educational criticism along with a detailed methodology.)

Reliability and Validity

Eisner (1985, 1991) suggests that in educational criticism, analogs to reliability and validity, the hallmarks of rigor in quantitative methods, are found in referential adequacy, structural corroboration, and consensual validation. In brief, these concepts, when used adroitly by an educational critic, are to be sufficient in addressing concerns about rigor in educational criticism. However, these concepts are not self-evident. Most readers will need the terms defined and will need assistance in identifying the concepts when they are embodied in a criticism. Although I agree with Eisner that criticisms exhibiting referential adequacy, structural corroboration, and consensual validation are likely to be superior works, I fear that depending upon readers' abilities *alone* to recognize these features and, therefore, judge such works as "rigorous" is not a sufficient response to calls like Rist's (1987) for rigor in educational criticism.

At the risk of doing short shrift to Eisner's (1985, 1991) use of these three concepts, I will summarize them briefly here before suggesting some additional answers to the call for documented rigor in educational criticism. *Referential adequacy* refers to the ability of a reader of educational criticism to find the qualities identified by the critic in the actual phenomenon that is the subject of the criticism (i.e., the case). The reader

looks to the whole of the phenomenon (such as the actual online course) for evidence of the parts identified in the criticism. If the actual online course (or other phenomenon) is not available, the reader might consult his memories of similar courses to see if the critic's statements "ring true." If a reader does not have prior experience with an online course (which is wholly possible given their newness relative to other educational settings), she is encouraged to seek out similar settings for herself. When data from various sources fit together, supporting each other, to form a whole picture, they *structurally corroborate* the picture that is formed (i.e., the conclusions presented in the criticism). Emphasis is placed on identifying typical qualities; the rule rather than the exception. To do this effectively, "it is especially important not only to use multiple types of data, but also to consider disconfirming evidence and contradictory interpretations or appraisals" (Eisner, 1991, p. 111). *Consensual validation* refers to a mutual agreement that a judgment is accurate. In one sense, this agreement may depend upon how successfully the judgment has been structurally corroborated or how referentially adequate it is. In this sense, it is an umbrella concept, a meta-validity in educational criticism. However, as Eisner (1991) points out, one might also seek consensual validation through multiple educational criticisms of the same case, in which case the concept more closely resembles reliability. Although Eisner observes that it is unlikely more than one critic will routinely write a criticism of the same setting (such as the same online course), if this were to occur, it is also unlikely that the critics would agree completely, causing us, perhaps to want to "dismiss the critics as incompetent and find new ones who can independently agree," but "in criticism, differences between judges are no necessary index of unreliability (Eisner, 1991, p. 113). This conclusion about

reliability's ultimate lack of relevance in educational criticism is echoed by Janesick (2000) when she states that

qualitative researchers do not claim that there is only one way of interpreting an event. There is no one "correct" interpretation (p. 393).

She goes on to add that

the value of the case study is its uniqueness; consequently, reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here (p. 394).

Having summarized Eisner's (1985, 1991) answer to questions of reliability and validity in educational criticism, I will suggest that procedures for documenting validity exist in the qualitative research literature and should be incorporated in educational criticisms as they are in other case study research. Further, while I agree that reliability may be a moot point in case study research, I suggest that it should be identified as such in educational criticisms. I'll turn now to expand upon these alternative forms of validity documentation.

The counterpart to "validity" used often in qualitative studies is credibility. For instance, Janesick (2000) comments that

[v]alidity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation and whether or not the explanation fits the description. In other words, is the explanation credible? (p. 393),

while Creswell and Miller (2000) observe that

[t]here is a general consensus...that qualitative inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are credible (p. 124).

Creswell and Miller further summarize a series of “validity procedures” (p. 124) arranged by different paradigmatic assumption and by “the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (p. 125). I will present each of these procedures here as options for educational critics to employ in documenting the credibility (or “validity”) of their criticisms.

Creswell and Miller (2000) explain that three different worldviews influence a researcher’s choice of validity procedures. These schools of thought are postpositivist/systematic, constructivist/interpretive, and critical. The postpositivist paradigm most closely resembles quantitative research methodology, embraces systematic processes, and “look[s] for quantitative equivalence of [validity in qualitative research] (p. 125). The constructivist paradigm views reality as subject to interpretation depending on one’s unique context. Various synonyms are exchanged for validity (e.g., trustworthiness, fairness, authenticity, and credibility) when working within this worldview. The critical paradigm questions assumptions about validity that may be based in socio-economic, gender-related, or other forces that reinforce the status quo.

Additionally, validity procedures vary from those that emphasize credibility as seen from the point of view of the researcher, to the perspective of study participants, to the viewpoint of external readers. All three points of view are represented in each of the three worldviews described. That is, there are procedures that emphasize credibility from each of the researcher, participant, and outsider perspectives within the postpositivist paradigm (and within the constructivist and critical paradigms as well). In the case of each procedure, documentation in the final research report is assumed.

Within the postpositivist paradigm, triangulation represents the researcher viewpoint, member checking emphasizes study participants' perspectives, and the audit trail is offered to outside readers. *Triangulation* is a method used by researchers to validate their conclusions through the integration of data from multiple sources (the *result* of triangulation is, arguably, a structurally corroborated conclusion to use Eisner's term). *Member checking* seeks validation from case study participants (such as the instructor of an online course). Researcher interpretations are shared with participants, and they have the opportunity to disagree with or confirm these interpretations. The same process may be used with the final research report. The establishment of an *audit trail* in qualitative studies allows an external reviewer to retrace the steps of the researcher from data collection, through initial interpretations, to final conclusions. The audit trail can be documented in the study, or the external auditor may be named in the study as evidence of the audit trail's existence and the resulting credibility from an outsider's perspective.

Similarly, within the constructivist paradigm, the three procedures that represent the viewpoints of researchers, participants, and outsiders, respectively, are disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, and thick, rich description. When researchers look for *disconfirming evidence*, they provide evidence of possible alternative interpretations, validating the complexity of the interpretive process and enhancing the credibility of their own conclusions. *Prolonged engagement in the field* allows researchers to build trust with study participants and to test initial interpretations against new data which researchers continue to collect. The result is increased credibility from the study participant perspective. *Thick, rich description* appeals to a study's readers for judgment of credibility by providing them with a described context so authentic that it is

as if they were transported there. (This is an inherent feature of Eisnerian educational criticism.)

Finally, within the critical paradigm, the three procedures are researcher reflexivity, collaboration, and peer debriefing. *Researcher reflexivity* is a technique for researchers to critically evaluate their own beliefs and values that impinge on their study. These biases are disclosed by the researcher in the research report as he attempts to suspend them throughout the duration of the study. *Collaboration* with study participants may take the form of co-authorship of the study or at least involvement in key decisions as an equal. This process raises the study's credibility in the eyes of participants. *Peer debriefing* is similar to the process followed when incorporating an external reviewer in a study to review the audit trail. However, peer debriefing is less systematic and more emergent in that the emphasis is on an on-going dialogue between the researcher and the peer reviewer.

For the sake of balance in the pursuit of rigor, I recommend including at least the three credibility viewpoints contained within a particular paradigm. This provides a type of meta-triangulation across multiple viewpoints for building credibility. Which paradigm a particular researcher/critic chooses is a matter of personal conviction. However, it is possible that a critic might choose additional procedures for reasons other than paradigmatic conviction. For instance, in Chapter 3 I suggested the practice of having the course designer/faculty member incorporate her comments on the criticism in the final version. This is a form of member checking. If a critic's worldview is constructivist or critical, then the member checking would be an additional validity procedure beyond the three from within her paradigm of choice. (Of course, the critic could elect not to label

the faculty member's responses as a validity procedure.) Obviously, incorporation of validity procedures in educational criticisms as documentation of rigor must be balanced with other concerns such as the time constraints of practitioner/critics and their personal writing styles.

Recommended Practices

How then shall we reconcile the need for clearer documentation of methodology and validity procedures with the need for writing (and other forms of representation) that evokes the particular case being studied? The validity procedures discussed above are not incommensurate with Eisner's (1985, 1991) emphasis on consensual validation, referential adequacy, and structural corroboration within a well-written narrative structure. (In fact, I would argue that critics who pursue these concepts that Eisner emphasizes are probably already performing some of the validity procedures without acknowledging them as such.) The documentation of these validity procedures simply makes *evident* the efforts of the researcher/critic to make the criticism credible. To that end, my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses will call for critics to identify briefly how data are collected and analyzed along with a statement about the three validity procedures followed in the study. My model will also call for critics to identify both the scope of time represented in the course being studied as well as some indication of the length of time that the critic spent with the archived course materials.

This issue of time "in the field" is of some concern since an entire semester's materials could be perused in a half hour or studied for a month. Stake (2000) emphasizes the importance of time in study, when he comments that

Qualitative case study is characterized by researchers spending extended time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on (p. 445).

Eisner (1985) concurs with this assessment:

One of the reasons why it is important for someone functioning as an educational critic to have an extended contact with an educational situation is to be able to recognize events or characteristics that are atypical. One needs sufficient time in a situation to know which qualities characterize it and which do not (p. 245).

The assumption in each of these statements seems to be that the case's scope of time is the same as the time invested by the researcher in studying the phenomenon (at least the initial fieldwork time). When a case is represented entirely by archived materials (such as an online course), the distinction between a case's scope of time (e.g., a three-month academic term) and initial archival "fieldwork" is more easily made, but for this reason it *should* be made. I will comment further on such methodological issues below.

The above recommendations should not be read to suggest that these documentation requirements should detract from the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an Eisnerian educational criticism. They need not be unduly burdensome; merely *present*, in the context of writing styles that evoke the verisimilitude of the course being studied, through the support of various data excerpts (such as quotations and images) from the course. With such documentation of rigor present, there should be no outstanding concerns over recognizing educational criticism as a genre of research in the tradition of the qualitative research case study. Having addressed concerns over acceptance of educational criticism as a research genre and questions about

documentation of rigor, we turn now to a consideration of more tactical methodological issues in the study of online courses.

Methodological Issues

In constructing this model for conducting educational criticism of online courses, it is important to ask what is involved in making a research case study of an online course. Before this question is answered, others of a pensive nature must first be asked. What *is* an online course? Is it a solitary cyber edifice visited by learners who leave behind little trace of their presence? (Is this distinguishable from a book and its readers?) Are there at least records of entry and departure, of questions asked and answered correctly? Or is it a communal experience in an online “place” that is not a place? Is there evidence of the group’s presence? Are the interactions of this community ephemeral, like the smoke of a campfire or the words spoken around its edge?

These are some of the questions that I have asked myself as I’ve considered the question of how one might go about inquiring into the nature of an instructor-led, discussion-oriented online course in a university setting. But another question I’ve asked is, what does it mean to study? That is, how should one inquire? Perhaps, ideally one might *participate* in the online course and make an ethnographic study of the sociological experience or at least observe the course as it unfolds (as the case has been with the educational criticism studies of other course contexts discussed in Chapter 2). Certainly, this seems the richest vein for potential “thick description.” Alternatively, interviews might be conducted with students and instructor, or questionnaires might be administered to them (as with most of the online course studies reviewed in Chapter 2). However, what

if the course is over? What if the time is not right to participate in the course or if one's presence cannot be reasonably unobtrusive? What if the experience of that particular course is no longer vivid in the memories of the students or instructor? How might the remnants of the online course be examined in order to reveal the nature of the instructional environment and the experiences of those involved in the course? There are numerous methodological possibilities to explore when undertaking such an after-the-fact study of an online course. Although Eggers' (1999) dissertation (reviewed in Chapter 2) is instructive, I've found it helpful to consult fields in which it is common to study *remnants* of phenomena for additional guidance in determining what form the methodology for educational criticism of online courses should take.

Other Disciplines

There is a tradition of inquiry that examines the ends of individuals' ephemeral experiences from what they leave behind. The figure of the coroner or the crime scene investigator engaged in forensic investigation of a dead body and its surroundings is familiar to anyone who watches television or motion pictures in the early twenty-first century. Photos are taken. Descriptions are written. Observations are verbalized and recorded as the cadaver is cut open to reveal what ended a life. (Nordby, 2000)

The inductive nature of this kind of "fieldwork" that is brought into a lab provides some insights into how the remains of an online course might be studied. But in a study of an online course, I am interested in the lived experience, not in what put an end to it. Perhaps the examination of a *corpus* of another sort can provide some more guidance.

Sociohistorians routinely engage in the study of the body of work left behind from the life of an individual and gathered in archives in order to understand something of how the life was lived. Written correspondence, publications, and mementos are examined. Forces influencing which items are extant and which have “eroded” are considered. What *isn't* present is taken into account along with what *is*. A detailed story of a life usually results. (Hill, 1993)

The careful examination of artifacts in order to determine something about a person through his written work and documented relationships is helpful, but rather than focusing on the life of one person, I am interested in understanding the relationships between all the people involved in an online course. There is another tradition that provides experience with studying the artifacts left behind by groups of people in order to understand something about how they lived.

The romantic view of the archaeologist/adventurer has been prevalent in American popular culture since the early twentieth century. The work of those actually engaged in this line of inquiry, however, is probably less romantic than it is painstaking. Probable locations of sites are identified. One site from among a number of possible sites is selected. From within the site, artifacts are excavated and examined. If possible, both a relative chronology of artifacts and an absolute chronology are established. Past theories of cultural characteristics are compared against what is actually found. Interpretations of the evidence are made and then challenged (to check if possible alternative interpretations are viable). (Barker, 1977; Hodder, 1999; Ball, 2002)

The comparison of excavated artifacts with established theories is applicable to a study of the remains of an online course. Thankfully, though, the uncovering of online course artifacts will not result in the destruction of the site or artifacts.

Following is a discussion of some of the issues involved in undertaking a study of an online course using some of the lessons learned from forensics, archival studies, and archaeology. The issues are arranged as answers to the following questions: Which course do I study? What constitutes being “in” the course? What is the scale of analysis? What methods of data collection/analysis should be used in the study?

Which Course Do I Study?

As with archival study and archaeology (and unlike forensics), the choice of which online course to study is up to the one conducting the inquiry. There should be some rationale for this choice, however. Is the course prominent in some way (e.g., award received by course or instructor as with Eggers (1999); first online course in a program or institution)? Is there reason to believe that this course is indicative of some phenomenon of interest (e.g., high student success; high student satisfaction)?

As with some forensic investigations, archival studies, and archaeology, there is a concern with receiving *permission* to access an online course. It will be impossible (not to mention unethical) to obtain access to the online course, study it, and report findings unless the instructor of the course and, possibly, the institution consents (in addition to the required Institutional Review Board approval for research involving human subjects). This is reminiscent of obtaining family approval before conducting an autopsy, having to

receive written permission to reproduce works from a private collection in an archive, or government approval for excavating in protected lands.

What Constitutes Being “In” the Course?

Knowing what elements should be considered a part of an online course and what elements should not be is not a simple matter. Most online courses in higher education make use of some sort of course management system (CMS) software (e.g., Blackboard or WebCT). One benefit provided by a CMS is that the entire “account” for a course (containing course content, student/instructor discussions, quizzes, chat room logs, grades, etc.) may be “archived” in one compressed file (like a block of freeze dried coffee) for later retrieval by the instructor. Given this, it may seem straightforward to conclude that any items *inside* the course management system are a part of the online course while anything else is not. There are several problems with this conclusion, however. First, within some courses, there are additional instructor-maintained resources *external* to the course management system that are, nevertheless, components of the management protocol of the course (i.e., as mentioned in Chapter 2, at UCF, for instance, publicly accessible course web sites and password-protected database listings of student/instructor names, email addresses, and photos are provided for all online courses). Second, for various reasons, it may be necessary to link to instructor-created resources that are stored in some web space *other* than the course management system (e.g., a multimedia element that “won’t run” in Blackboard or a frequently updated document that an instructor uses in multiple courses). If these elements are considered “a part of the course” by instructor and students, they should be included in the study. Third, there may

be links from within the course management system to resources maintained by entities other than the instructor. Usually, these are content-related resources that record no “traces” of the students’ presence. While they may be viewed in order to understand the nature of a particular assignment, it may not be permissible to make copies of these resources or include images of them in the research report without the written permission of the copyright owners.

Of course, any resources outside of the course management system (especially those outside of the direct control of the instructor) may be modified or may “erode” at any time (a degradation problem encountered in the traditions of forensics, archival studies, and archaeology as well). There are a number of approaches that may be helpful (in different degrees) in combating the erosion problem once one has obtained permission to reproduce a web resource. Printing of web resources is a possibility. (Some browsers even stamp the printed page with the URL and the date/time.) However, care should be exercised to ensure that the web resource doesn’t contain elements that will be lost by printing (i.e., motion, sound, color, etc.). Saving a local copy of the resource to one’s local computer may be possible (or it may not), but, depending on the software at one’s disposal, the resource may have to be saved one page at a time (or one image at a time). This can be tedious to say the least. Some web browsers facilitate the process by offering the option to save all elements associated with a web site at one time.

What Is the Scale?

Hodder (1999) discusses the impact that methods and the “size” of one’s view have on inquiry in archaeology.

The objects could not be seen as archaeological until they had been thought about and constructed in a certain way. A similar point can be made today. Objects only exist within traditions of inquiry....[A]t a site where there is wet sieving and then sorting of heavy residues down to 1 mm, a wide range of small artifacts will exist which will not occur at all in the universe of a site which does not sieve, or which sieves selectively; or which sieves down to a different mesh size (pp. 15-16).

This perspective is important in considering how one might study an online course vis-à-vis time frames, object size, and phenomena under investigation. For instance, if I limit myself to a numerical summary of the number of discussion postings made by students in the term the course was offered, I can, perhaps, claim to know something about the level of student/instructor interaction in that course. However, it would be more informative if I view these postings by day. Perhaps I see that more postings are made on Saturdays than any other day in the week. If I look at the postings by hour, perhaps I may determine that a certain portion of students make postings consistently between the hours of 12:00am-2:00am. Therefore, I will have a new line of investigation for pursuing questions that would not have appeared if I chose a time frame that was broader. Also, will I examine how students visited each page of content available in the course management system (through the “tracking” records maintained by the system), or will I be more concerned with visits to Module 1 versus Module 10 (collections of content instead of discrete pages)? Similarly, if I limit myself to examining the *amount* of interaction as determined by discussion postings I will not be able to speak to the *quality* of the interactions or the social dynamics experienced by participants. There are a number of choices to be made regarding the scale of the inquiry.

While some of these decisions may be made once the inquiry is underway, initial decisions could prevent or enable awareness of specific records or artifacts.

What Methods of Data Collection/Analysis Should Be Used?

Fieldnotes

To enable the “observation” of an on-screen environment, while at the same time taking notes, one might follow the example of the coroners who audio record their examinations. In this way, various elements in the course management system can be explored in context while speaking aloud one’s observations. As with any observation project, the details of the environment should be the first object of focus (because details tend to become “invisible” with repeated viewings). Subsequent observations can proceed in an ever-narrowing fashion, shifting to examine aspects of interest. These recordings can either be transcribed verbatim or can serve as the basis for summary notes/expanded notes. (See Appendices B-D for excerpted examples of fieldnotes of several types.)

Read Content Pages and Discussion Postings

While it might be helpful to verbalize one’s observations while initially exploring the course management system (and other online components), taking written notes later while reading the course content in greater detail may be a valuable strategy. Student/instructor discussion postings and instructor feedback on quizzes/assignments submitted should also be read. While the course instructor may grant permission to read

course email contained in the course management system, care should perhaps be taken to not read the private messages of students (or at a minimum to ensure their anonymity).

Course Management System Records

Course management systems typically record a number of different types of student actions (e.g., last time the course was accessed by a student, number of discussion postings, a history of content pages visited). Some of these records are viewable already as numerical summaries (e.g., number of postings) while others are not (e.g., history of pages visited). These various records can be collected and summarized as necessary. For example, initially, it might be helpful to know that the mean number of student discussion postings is 103 for the semester, but if this is higher or lower than expected, then the underlying reasons can be investigated. (See Appendix D for an excerpted example of fieldnotes based on CMS records.)

Timeline

A timeline can be assembled which presents a summary of student/instructor activity in the course. It may be efficient to focus on larger blocks of time (a week) first and later to focus on smaller sections of time where more detail is needed. Perhaps there are no discussion postings during the first week of the course, but in the third week there are 90 postings. It would be helpful to know more about the 90 postings. For instance, which days and which hours were the postings made? Many elements in the course management system are time-stamped facilitating the construction of an absolute timeline. However, it may become apparent that there are other events (perhaps the

“disappearance” of a web resource external to the course management system) for which it is possible to establish only an approximate time relative to some other known item.

While this is similar to the use of absolute and relative chronologies used in archaeology and forensic investigation, the time-stamping of the course management system affords a great deal more specificity. However, it may be necessary to convert the format of the timestamp to facilitate chronological sorting. (See Appendix E for an excerpted timeline with timestamps converted to yyyyymmddhhmm format, i.e., four digits for year and two digits each for month, day, hour, and minute.)

Themes

The various forms of collected data can be summarized (perhaps even numerically where appropriate), and any commonalities can be identified. While the lessons of quantitative content analysis (e.g., Budd, Thorp, and Donohew, 1967; Berelson, 1971; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990; Riffe, Lacy, Fico, 1998) may be helpful here, such as the calculation of frequencies of certain words/phrases occurring, these approaches can fit within a broader qualitative data analysis strategy (LeCompte, 2000). Established theories or findings from previous studies may be helpful as resources for identifying themes (or the absence of themes). This is also where McCutcheon's (1978) interpretive perspectives become lenses through which the data and emergent themes can be viewed differentially. The result is a naturalistic generalization built from themes Eisner (1991) calls for in educational criticism. In this the connoisseur/critic can facilitate the generalization(s) by calling to the reader's attention certain latent themes, but ultimately it is the reader who has to judge for himself whether the particular case

serving as the subject of the criticism has lessons that generalize to their own contexts. As Eisner observes,

Research studies, even in related areas in the same field, create their own interpretive universe. Connections have to be built by readers, who must also make generalizations by analogy and extrapolation, not by a watertight logic applied to a common language. Problems in the social sciences are more complex than putting the pieces of a puzzle together to create a single, unified picture. Given the diversity of methods, concepts, and theories, it's more a matter of seeing what works, what appears right for particular settings, and creating different perspectives from which the situation can be construed (Eisner, 1991, p. 211).

As with the three lines of inquiry discussed above (i.e., forensics, archival studies, and archaeology), qualitative research case study of instructor-led, discussion-oriented online courses in higher education presented in the form of educational criticism will benefit from the inductive collection and analysis of data from multiple sources leading to a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being investigated. This is a relatively new line of inquiry, but it can benefit from the lessons learned outside the field of education.

Summary

In this chapter, I have addressed theoretical concerns with situating educational criticism as a research genre, dealing in particular with concerns over lack of rigor. I have also explored methodological issues arising from studying what remains of online

courses after they have concluded. (These issues will be addressed in the summary of my model in Chapter 6.) In the next chapter, I will expound upon the four interpretive perspectives introduced in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 5: THE LENSES WE WEAR DETERMINE WHAT WE SEE

Introduction

At the end of Chapter 2, I introduced the concept of interpretive perspective, and in Chapter 3 I touched on the value of interpretive perspectives relative to my shorter term goals for educational criticism of online courses. In this chapter I will elaborate on the interpretive perspectives (or “lenses”) introduced earlier. First I will discuss the purpose of interpretive perspectives in educational criticism, and then I will detail the lenses incorporated in my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses. Three of these lenses are existing constructs while I assembled the last lens specifically for this model from two unrelated components. For each lens I will provide a summary of the construct and discuss its use as an interpretive perspective in constructing educational criticism of online courses.

The Purpose of Interpretive Perspectives

Educational critics as interpreters of phenomena in educational settings (such as online courses) bring with them highly personalized sets of assumptions and values as well as expectations shaped by external forces such as “theories...or knowledge of contemporary events or those out of history” (McCutcheon, 1982, p. 171). LeCompte (2000) refers to this dichotomy, respectively, as the difference between one’s “tacit theories” and “formative theories” (p. 147). As noted in Chapter 3, it is important to

recognize the role of one's personalized assumptions (or tacit theories) in interpretation, and, as observed in Chapter 4, particularly if one is employing the validity procedure of researcher reflexivity within the critical paradigm, she is expected to disclose such assumptions. As LeCompte (2000) notes,

People tend to record as data what makes sense to and intrigues them. Selectivity cannot be eliminated, but it is important to be aware of how it affects data collection, and hence, the usefulness and credibility of research results (p. 146).

In addition to concerning themselves with the tacit/formative theory distinction, critics draw interpretations *from* a phenomenon ("internal interpretation," McCutcheon, 1981, p. 6) and critics interpret by comparing a phenomenon *to* formative theories ("external interpretation," McCutcheon, 1981, p. 6). Previously, the construct of internal interpretation was addressed in the Chapter 4's discussion of the importance of multiple data sources structurally corroborating a critic's interpretation. "Interpretive perspectives," the focus of this chapter, will refer to lenses used *as* formative theories for the purpose *of* external interpretation.

Interpretive Perspectives in Published Criticisms

In Chapter 4, I discussed my examination of 25 article-length educational criticisms (Apple and King, 1978; Davidman, 1978; Greer, 1978; Grumet, 1978; Jenkins, 1978; McCutcheon, 1978; McKinney, 1978; Milner, 1978; Pinar, 1978; Popkewitz, 1978; Rosario, 1978; Shaw, 1978; Vallance, 1978; Alexander, 1983; Barone, 1985; Catford, 1985; Cohen, 1985; Marshall, 1985; Porro, 1985; Barone, 1987; Konzal, 1997; Templeton, 1997; Dean and Mountford, 1998; McAllister, 2000; and Schweber, 2003) as

related to methodological rigor. I also reviewed these criticisms to determine if and to what degree they incorporated explicit interpretive perspectives. While only McCutcheon (1978) used the label “interpretive perspective,” (p. 189) similar phrases such as:

To aid in their interpretation, I will focus upon three major issues... (Cohen, 1985, p. 330)

The evaluation of a classroom here derives from a particular concept of curriculum... “enacted curriculum”... (Marshall, 1985, p. 301)

At the conclusion of the analytic description, I reflect on the case, using both representational and consequentialist lenses (Schweber, 2003, p. 143).

appeared in a few criticisms. While almost all the criticisms contained some sort of identifiable rationale for “develop[ing] research questions...guid[ing] data collection [or] initial analysis” (LeCompte, 2000, p. 147), many of these rationales had to be inferred and were a combination of tacit theory and formative theory, or they focused on both internal and external interpretation. Rarely were these rationales elaborated upon. In some cases there was only one rationale evident while other criticisms incorporated two or more.

While these past criticisms mingled internal/external interpretation or tacit/formative theories, I assert that “interpretive perspective” (i.e., formative theory/external interpretation) as a separate construct has the advantage of providing a common interpretive framework between criticisms without dismissing the highly personalized nature of the interpretive process. That is, critics of online courses are free to bring their unique tacit theories to the courses they study and to weave emergent patterns from the courses into their rich descriptions (i.e., internal interpretation) while, at

the same time, they use the constant interpretive perspectives to focus their interpretations through a standard set of lenses. As discussed in Chapter 3, this consistent framework allows interpretations from multiple critics about diverse online course contexts to be assembled together more easily at a later date to form meta-patterns with design implications. Applying two or more counterpoised interpretive perspectives within a criticism helps to ensure a more balanced treatment of the online course rather than promoting only one point of view. In the absence of such balance, a critic may tend to privilege one type of online course over another. Drawing on a common theoretical foundation (Schwab's, 1973, commonplaces) for selection of interpretive perspectives used in this model is intended to ameliorate this tendency. My intent is that the interpretive perspectives will serve as lenses that focus the gaze of critics on essential dimensions of online courses without sacrificing the personalized approach of each critic. Before proceeding with a description of each interpretive perspective, I will comment on the criteria used to select four lenses.

Lenses in My Model

My selection of lenses was based upon five criteria. First, I looked for constructs that were clearly related to the three of Schwab's (1973) commonplaces (i.e., teachers, learners, and milieus) that I explained in Chapter 3. Second, I wanted to find lenses that did not assume (and, therefore, *privilege*) a face-to-face modality for instruction. Third, as noted in Chapter 1, I sought elements that would describe instructional settings without promoting one discipline's values over another. Fourth, my concern was for tools that could be used heuristically; that is, constructs broadly defined so that critics could use

them as springboards for their thinking rather than overly defined tools that would restrict their roles to that of mere “checkboxing.” Finally, in order to function heuristically, it was important to me that each lens should have a strong mnemonic quality; clear conceptual components that once learned would be easily remembered. I believe that each of these four lenses meet all five criteria. Possibly, in the future others might call for the inclusion of lenses in addition to these, just as it is likely that additional criteria may one day be suggested for such lenses. I have restricted the initial number of lenses to four in an attempt to provide a balanced representation of the commonplaces while at the same time minimizing the cognitive load on the critic who has to be mindful of the basic elements of each lens as a heuristic tool.

The lenses I have selected include Mosston and Ashworth’s (1990) Spectrum of Teaching Styles, Garrison, Archer, and Anderson’s (2001) Community of Inquiry Model, Perkins’ (1991) learning environment facets, and a new formulation that I’ve labeled “modular reusability.” Following Schwab’s (1973) recognition of the educational commonplaces of students, teachers, subject matter, and milieus (or contexts), these four lenses illuminate and expand upon the commonplace elements. As shown in Table 2 below, the selected lenses counterbalance the student/teacher relationship with milieus. (Subject matter is not directly addressed in any of the selected lenses. As addressed more fully in Chapter 3, this is by design.)

Table 2. Relationship of Lenses to Schwab's (1973) Commonplaces

Lenses	Students	Teachers	Subject Matter	Milieus
Spectrum	X	X		
Mosston and Ashworth (1990)				
COI	X	X		
Garrison, Archer, and Anderson (2001)				
Facets	X	X		X
Perkins (1991)				
Reusability				X

While the Spectrum of Teaching Styles was originally created with the expectation of a face-to-face instructional environment, it lends itself to the online environment easily. The other three constructs were designed to be used in computer-mediated environments (but each is compatible with the face-to-face mode as well, should a critic wish to adapt this criticism model to non-online course contexts). All of these elements are descriptive in nature. None of them promotes one educational value over another. Each of these lenses has a well-articulated presentation in the literature (with the exception of modular reusability which will be explained later), but none of the constructs is so widely adopted

that their use is dependent upon specified protocols. They are well positioned for heuristic use. Finally, each tool has a relatively small number of key components aiding their memorization consistent with Miller's (1956) 7 ± 2 rule. (Although the Spectrum of Teaching Styles has *eleven* milestone "styles" identified, its importance as a heuristic tool lies in its depiction as a continuum from total teacher control to total student control.)

I will now describe each of the four lenses in greater detail.

Spectrum of Teaching Styles

Mosston and Ashworth (1990) assert that formal learning "transactions" (p. 20) are classifiable by the ways that specific kinds of decision-making are allocated to student(s) or teacher(s). They identify at least twenty-four specific decisions that are made before, during, or after a particular encounter between student(s) and teacher(s). (Provision is made for additional decisions that they have not considered.) The authors suggest that the possible allocations of decision-making range from complete decision-making by the teacher(s) (e.g., explicit instructions for performing a dance move) to complete decision-making by the student(s) with the teacher only as a possible resource (e.g., the work of writing a dissertation). Across this range there are patterns of decision-making that emphasize reproduction of past knowledge and patterns that emphasize production of new knowledge. While there are an infinite number of possible decision-making patterns, Mosston and Ashworth have identified eleven milestone patterns called teaching styles that they describe in some detail. The first six styles are associated with reproduction of knowledge while the remaining five styles are associated with knowledge production. These styles are not presented as being mutually exclusive. In fact, Mosston

and Ashworth (1990) promote “deliberate mobility in moving from one style to another” (p 6). The assumption is that the student(s) and teacher(s) encounter each other in a face-to-face setting, but, as noted above, these styles can be readily adapted to other modes as well.

This tool can be visualized as a continuum with total teacher control to the far left and total student control to the far right. To the left of the continuum’s midpoint is an emphasis on reproducing existing knowledge in the instructional setting. The right side of the continuum represents the creation of new knowledge by students in the instructional context. With this interpretive perspective, the critic can consider the online course from the vantage point of the power relationship between teacher(s) and student(s). Questions such as the following may be considered by the critic. Are there times that the teacher exerts more control over the students and their activities than at other times? Why does this happen? Are students expected only to assimilate existing knowledge and reproduce it as evidence of their learning, or are they also asked to create knowledge in some fashion? (Either or both may be appropriate depending on the course, its place in the curriculum, the nature of the discipline, the characteristics of the learners, the philosophy of the teacher, etc.) When does this occur during the course?

Community of Inquiry Model

The centerpiece of the Community of Inquiry model is the educational experience. An educational experience, according to the model’s authors (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000) is a structured opportunity for learning that focuses on the knowledge construction of learners in the context of social interaction. The authors

present the educational experience as an indivisible construct emerging from the intersection of three crucial elements: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.

Social presence is a term that was originally coined by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) to refer to “the salience of the other in a mediated communication and the consequent salience of their interpersonal interactions” (p. 65). Short et al were interested in how various communication media (e.g., television and telephones) affect the perception that participating communicators are present and “real.” Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) use the term in a similar fashion and define social presence as “the ability of learners to project themselves socially and emotionally into a community of inquiry” (p. 2). While social presence is not presented as the focal point for the educational experience, it is seen as important in supporting the learning of participants. Additionally, social presence becomes even more important if there are “affective goals for the educational process, as well as purely cognitive ones” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000, p. 2).

Cognitive presence is defined as “the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000, p. 2). Cognitive presence represents the purposefulness of the educational experience. Although it is only one of three elements comprising the experience, without cognitive presence there would be no learning in the educational experience. It is interesting to note that the above definition includes the assumption that social dynamics are at play in cognitive presence (independent of the social presence construct). Cognitive presence is associated with

critical thinking and practical inquiry, and the authors assert that this element “provides a means to assess the systematic progression of thinking over time” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2001, p. 4).

Teaching presence was originally described by the model’s authors as “the binding element in creating a community of inquiry for educational purposes” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000, p. 8) consisting of “two general functions...the design of the educational experience...[and] facilitation” (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000, p. 3). A more refined definition of teaching presence as “the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purposes of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” is offered in a later paper (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer, 2001, p. 5). Compared to the other two elements comprising the educational experience (i.e., social presence and cognitive presence), this third element appears to be in a state of greater flux. The authors emphasize that the functions listed in their definition of teaching presence (the “structuring” for learning referred to above as the criterion for classification as an educational experience) are not carried out by the teacher only but by any participant in the educational experience or, indeed, by “some person, persons, or agency” (Archer, Garrison, Anderson, and Rourke, 2001, p. 2). There is an explicit recognition that such a conceptualization of teaching presence (versus what might be termed “teacher presence”) can bring about a reexamination of the multiple roles of teacher and learners, thus facilitating a more democratic sharing of control in the educational experience.

While the authors depict their model as a symmetrical Venn diagram (e.g., three intersecting circles of equal size), they recognize that in practice the relative contribution

of each element to the educational experience may vary (Personal communication from D.R. Garrison, April 2, 2003.). Through the lens of the Community of Inquiry Model, the critic can view the online course as a series of teacher-learner interactions. Questions similar to the following might be asked as starting points. How and to what extent do teacher(s) and learner(s) present themselves as “real people” in the online environment? Who plays the facilitative role central to the teaching presence concept? How are any changes in this role negotiated? How are substantive ideas related to the course communicated between participants? What patterns emerge from these communications? How do social communications lubricate the teaching/learning process? Are the three concepts (social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence) emphasized to the same degree throughout the course? When is one of the concepts emphasized over the others?

Learning Environment Facets

Perkins (1991) has advanced a heuristic he calls “five facets of a learning environment” (Perkins, 1991, p.18): sources of information (information banks), means of expression through writing or other symbols (symbol pads), means of expression through manipulation of pre-existing objects (construction kits), authentic as possible areas for trying out concepts (phenomenaria), and means for undertaking and receiving feedback on specific learning tasks (task managers). The individual facets may be people, physical objects, electronic tools, or other resources. Perkins submits that these five facets can be found in any learning environment, but that construction kits and phenomenaria are de-emphasized in environments that are not centered on learners. There

may be more than one example of any of the facets in a given learning environment, and Perkins suggests that his five facets allow any learning environment to be deconstructed with an eye toward constructivism and information technologies. He contends that his facets can be used in any environment (not necessarily a constructivist one) to “offer a perspective on the general structure and style of the environment and its underlying assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning” (Perkins, 1991, p.18).

While Perkins (1991) does not provide a visual representation of his five facets, I will offer the following as a mnemonic device. To remember the five facets, one might imagine a student standing next to a computer in a rainforest, holding a toolbox and a clipboard while looking at a clock attached to a tree. This outlandish visual is intended to anchor each of the five facets to an analogous image (at the risk of diminishing one’s conceptualization of each element). The computer symbolizes the information bank, while the clipboard and the toolbox play the parts of symbol pad and construction kit, respectively. The rainforest is intended to strikingly represent the phenomenarium, the authentic context for trying out concepts, and the clock symbolizes the task manager. Finally, while not one of the five facets, the student represents the learner(s) in the learning environment. Using the five facets as an interpretive perspective, the critic can look for the “general structure and style” (Perkins, 1991, p.18) of the online course. Questions to consider arise accordingly. Who/what determines the order and time length given to specific learning activities? Does this role change? When? Who/what are the sources of course content and other information in the course? (The teacher? The textbook? The content modules? The students?) How do students express themselves symbolically in the course? (Through writing? Is this in the form of discussion postings?

Word processed scholarly papers? Are other symbol systems used?) Do any of the learning activities make use of ready-made components for manipulation by students (whether tangible or conceptual)? Are there “real life” (or near-real simulation) opportunities to apply the course content structured into the course? How are these implemented?

Modular Reusability

As noted above, the preceding interpretive perspectives primarily emphasize the commonplaces of teacher and learner. Only Perkins’ (1991) learning environment facets address the milieu commonplace. In search of another milieu construct to balance the commonplaces, I considered the recent emphasis in instructional technology circles on learning objects. Reusable Learning Objects (RLOs), or just “learning objects,” are stand-alone digital resources combining smaller collections of media assets around a common learning objective (Hodgins, 2004b). As Wiley (2000) observes, this learning object construct

...currently leads other candidates for the position of technology of choice in the next generation of instructional design, development, and delivery, due to its potential for reusability, generativity, adaptability, and scalability (pp. 2-3).

Since all online courses do not incorporate learning objects, however, I decided to broaden the emphasis to consider how elements of online courses lend themselves to reusability as this *is* a relevant issue that affects all online courses. (The learning objects trend being one current reaction to the issue.) Unfortunately, there is not one existing construct that holistically addresses this issue (not to mention one that is useful

heuristically and easily memorable), but I have been able to connect two existing constructs, one from the learning objects dialogue and one from architecture, to arrive at a new formulation for use as an interpretive perspective on modular reusability. First I will discuss the issue of reusability in online courses, and then I will describe this new construct (and the individual components from which it emerged).

Interest in Reusability

There is a growing interest in the reusability of online course components among university faculty, administrators, instructional support staff, and lawmakers. However, the focus and goals of each group are different vis-à-vis reusability. Many university faculty are interested in resources they can use to more quickly build their online courses. For instance, many textbook publishers offer online resources that faculty can use as “starter dough” in the development of their courses. Often these resources are in the form of software packages designed to be “unpacked” into the course management systems (CMS) most prominent in higher education (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard, and others). Faculty can then modify or add to the publisher-supplied materials inside their CMS account. These resources (and non-publisher resources such as those available through sites like <http://www.merlot.org>) are designed to be used again and again by a large number of online course faculty. However, individual implementations of the resources will vary considerably.

University administrators are attracted to re-use as a strategy for responding quickly and flexibly to the need for additional sections of existing online courses. With concerns over appropriate intellectual property clearances and the need for sufficient

faculty development put aside, when course enrollments exceed the capacity for one online course section or when teaching assignments change at the beginning of a term, administrators often feel a need to have an existing online course account duplicated in its entirety so that an additional or replacement instructor can teach it. Lawmakers are similarly attracted to the economy of scale in the idea of developing one online version of a popular course and duplicating it as many times as necessary throughout the educational system. In the state of Florida this interest has been leveraged by the Florida Distance Learning Consortium as the foundation for a statewide learning objects initiative (Personal communication from S. Henderson, August 7, 2002.). Interestingly, the faculty members who find themselves in the position of having to take over an entire course they did not design understand that it can be quite disconcerting to teach in this manner. They typically wish to use the original course materials to a greater or lesser degree as the basis for their own version of the course.

Groups of instructional support staff such as instructional designers, graphic artists, and web developers, each have reasons for pursuing reusable online course components. Through the use of “boilerplate” or template approaches to web page materials, media assets (such as databases of stock photographs), and even raw code, time to develop online course resources is greatly reduced. At UCF, for instance, this emphasis on standardization of reusable components has resulted in a certain “family resemblance” among online courses despite the highly customized nature of each faculty member’s online course implementation. (In addition to this emphasis on reusability of assets, instructional designers are also invested in the promotion of the learning objects concept introduced above.)

Within architecture and the construction industry there is a tradition of dichotomizing standardization-leading-to-reusability and individualization. Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein, Jacobson, Fiksdahl-King, and Angel (1977) observe that

[i]n traditional societies...personal adaptation came about very easily. People lived in the same place for very long periods.... [a]nd houses were made of hand-processed materials like wood, brick, mud, straw, plaster, which are easily modified by hand by the inhabitants themselves (p. 909).

They contrast this with our “modern technological society” (p. 909) in which

[p]eople move frequently, and houses are increasingly built of factory-made, factory-finished materials, like 4X8 foot sheets of finished plaster board, aluminum windows, prefabricated baked enamel steel kitchens, glass, concrete, steel – these materials do not lend themselves at all to the gradual modification which personal adaptation requires. Indeed, the processes of mass production are almost directly incompatible with the possibility of personal adaptation. (pp. 909-910)

However, Brand (1994) notes that modular thinking in building construction is imperative since “[m]any buildings are demolished early if their outdated systems are too deeply embedded to replace easily” (p. 13). In addition, the potential reuse of standardized components has led to an emphasis on the deconstruction of existing buildings to harvest their reusable components. Salvaged components are reused “as is” if their condition permits. If not,

[m]aterials that are not immediately reused can be recycled, downcycled, or upcycled. An example of immediate reuse is large structural timbers for use as

structural members in a new building. Recycling may consist of turning scrap steel into new steel rebar or beams. Downcycling for example, would be turning a concrete slab into road base, and upcycling may consist of salvaging lumber and creating custom cabinetry or other value-added products (Kibert, Chini, and Languell, 2000, p. 182).

This parallels the diversity of interest in online course component reuse discussed above. Some stakeholders are interested in immediate reuse “as is,” while others want to extract sub-components, perhaps modifying them in ways that are similar to recycling, downcycling, or upcycling. What is needed is a way to conceptualize the different types and degrees of reuse (or potential reuse) in online courses.

Component Constructs

Brand (1994) offers a tool for use in conceptualizing the differing types of components in buildings. Similarly, Hodgins (2004a) presents a construct that identifies conditions for optimum reuse of online instructional components. I will summarize each of these ideas and then articulate the proposed modular reusability interpretive perspective for use in constructing educational criticism of online courses.

Six S's

Brand's (1994) “six S's” (p. 13) construct identifies six general layers of which all buildings are constructed. Each functional layer ages at a different rate, with the first layer aging the slowest and the sixth layer aging most quickly. This is also the order in which construction occurs, from first to last. The six layers are: site, structure, skin,

services, space plan, and stuff. *Site* refers to the “geographical setting” (Brand, 1994, p. 13) for the building including the specific property boundaries. *Structure* is what we typically think of *as* the building. It includes the foundation and the load-bearing building frame. As the label implies, *skin* is the building’s outer surface which plays both a protective and an aesthetic role. *Services* are “the working guts of a building” (Brand, 1994, p. 13). These include functions such as electrical and air conditioning systems, plumbing, telecommunications, elevators, and so forth. *Space plan* refers to interior surfaces such as doors, walls, floors, and ceilings, elements which many of us consider to be permanent but which, in actuality, may be altered throughout a building’s lifespan. Finally, *stuff* describes what it names. This is the accumulation of items that building occupants bring with them when they move in. Brand suggests that these layers also speak to the relationship between building and various groups of people:

The building interacts with individuals at the level of Stuff; with the tenant organization (or family) at the Space plan level; with the landlord via the Services (and slower levels) which must be maintained; with the public via the Skin and entry; and with the whole community through city or county decisions about the footprint and volume of the Structure and restrictions on the Site. The community does not tell you where to put your desk or your bed; you do not tell the community where the building will go on the Site (Brand, 1994, p. 17).

Brand represents his six layers as a set of five nested pentagons (labeled structure, skin, services, space plan, and stuff), each with arrows indicating rotation in an alternating direction, sitting atop a horizontal line (labeled site). There are many parallels between these layers and the contexts for online courses. Some of these will be discussed below.

Content Object Model

Hodgins (2004a), the so-called “father of learning objects” (Hodgins, 2004b, p. 82; Wiley, 2000), in his Content Object Model, depicts a hierarchy of components related to the incorporation of learning objects into online courses. These components are arranged by granularity from smallest to largest. *Raw Data & Media Elements* include individual images, animations, simulations, text elements, and similar assets. *Information Objects* specify slightly larger “chunks” of content that can be described by their function (e.g., overviews, concepts, facts, summaries, etc.). *Application Objects* (e.g., learning objects) refer to a number of information objects clustered around a common enabling learning objective. Similarly, *Aggregate Assemblies* (e.g., lessons) are arrays of application objects clustered around a common terminal learning objective. Finally, *Collections* (e.g., courses) are clusters of aggregate assemblies, united by a common theme. Most importantly, Hodgins notes that there is an inverse relationship in his model between contextualization and reusability. That is, the smaller the component, the lower the contextualization, and the higher the reusability. Conversely, the larger the component is in scale, the higher the contextualization, and the lower the reusability. (This is consistent with the tendency, described above, of faculty to decontextualize online course materials in order to incorporate them into their own implementations.) In Hodgins’ model, application objects (such as learning objects) represent the highest reusability while retaining the greatest degree of contextualization. The Content Object Model is presented visually as a continuum on which each of the components described above are represented as a series of boxes arranged in clusters of ever increasing

complexity according to their place on the small-to-large continuum. Against this continuum, Hodgins superimposes two growth curves labeled Context and Reusability.

Modular Reusability as an Interpretive Perspective

To arrive at a construct useful in conceptualizing the different types and degrees of reuse in online courses, I propose melding characteristics of Brand's (1994) six building layers and Hodgins' (2004a) Content Object Model. With Brand's layers in mind, an online course can be viewed as a nested system of functions, each with its own lifecycle and implications for human interactions. For instance, just as building occupants can move furniture around on a daily basis, so can faculty members and students make new discussion postings, make minor edits to course content, submit assignments, etc. Similarly, faculty/course designers can choose to remove or add elements within a course management system (e.g., tools like chat, quizzing, calendar, assignment drop box, etc.) just as building occupants might choose to remove carpeting, add a drop ceiling, or move a doorway. It will be easier for an individual faculty member to add chat to his or her online course than to change their institution's course management system (CMS) implementation. Other analogs may be less precise. Taken as a whole, is the CMS a service (in the sense that Brand means), a part of the structure, or the site? Is there more to the online course than the CMS? What of other components (such as UCF's password-protected database of student/instructor photos and biographies described in Chapter 2)? Regardless of the specifics, Brand's construct facilitates a nuanced view of the online course as a layered entity rather than a monolith. If we superimpose these characteristics of Brand's Six S's with elements from Hodgins'

Content Object Model, we have a way of thinking about how reusability may occur in online courses. Within each layer of the online course, we can look for progressive granularity. The smaller the component (and less contextualized), the more easily reused. The more contextualized (and larger) the component, the less easily reused. I have provided a visual representation of the construct arising from the melding of the Six S's with the Content Object Model. There are five key elements to remember: granularity, benefit, contextualization, reusability, and the layered environment. The layered environment is depicted by six nested pentagons. (It is less important to remember each specific layer than the fact that the environment *is* layered, but, nevertheless, I simplified Brand's visual by presenting six pentagons rather than five pentagons plus the site's horizontal line.) Superimposed against the layered environment, granularity and benefit are arranged as a simple X axis/Y axis configuration, and contextualization and reusability are depicted as curves showing greater or lesser benefit as they touch negative or positive positions on the granularity axis. (See Figure 1.) The intersection of the contextualization and reusability curves with the midpoints of the benefit and granularity lines depicts the relative size of the modular element with the greatest balance between contextualization and reusability. The projection of this intersection on the environmental layers represents the various levels within the online course in which one might find such reusable elements. With these merged constructs in mind as one interpretive perspective, critics might begin to ask questions such as the following about modular reusability. How does the institution supply applications (like a CMS or database application) that can be (re)used by all faculty rather than creating unique applications for each new online course? Within individual online course components, how are assets like coding

conventions, graphics, and other media elements used as reusable elements? Are there instructional components within the course (e.g., publisher-provided resources, external web sites, etc.) that have been or could be reused? Are these elements wholly reusable “as is” or are they reusable only after modification?

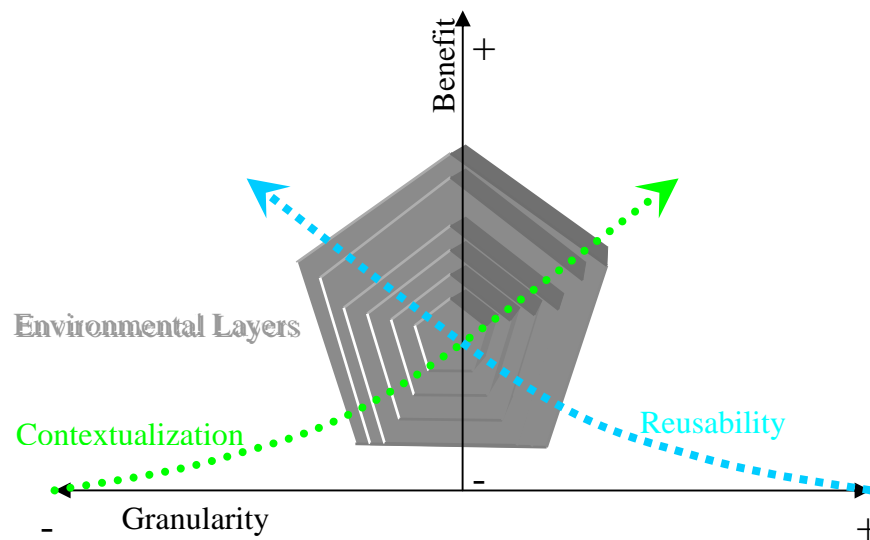


Figure 1. Modular Reusability

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the role interpretive perspectives play in educational criticism, and I presented the criteria I used in selecting the lenses incorporated in my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses. Also, I provided a summary of each of the interpretive perspectives in my model along with suggestions for their use by critics. The modular reusability lens received extensive treatment since it is a

new formulation arising from two existing constructs. This chapter concludes the first section of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I will present my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses (based upon the preceding five chapters). In Chapter 7, I will offer one example of an educational criticism written according to my model. In Chapter 8, I will conclude with some observations on the relationship between this dissertation and the work that remains to be done in educational criticism of online courses.

CHAPTER 6: PRESENTING THE ONLINE COURSE CRITICISM

MODEL

Introduction

While I have articulated the rationale underlying my model throughout the previous five chapters, in this chapter, I will formally present the Online Course Criticism Model. This model consists of a conceptual structure, procedural guidelines, and a list of required elements to include in the criticism. I will discuss each of these components in turn.

Conceptual Structure

Online courses are complex, human-driven contexts for formal learning. Theories that focus on instructional settings and methods that are designed to accommodate inquiry into complex phenomena are essential to the systematic study of online courses. Such a line of research is necessary as the basis for a common language with which we can begin to speak holistically about online courses. I will summarize the conceptual structure supporting my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses by focusing on the structural relationships within the following five conceptual areas: online courses, instructional theory, qualitative research case studies, educational criticism, and online course typologies. (See Figure 2.) The online course construct is the focal point of this model, while instructional theory (particularly Schwab's, 1973, commonplaces)

forms its foundation. Equal support is provided by Eisner's (1985, 1991) educational criticism and the methodological tradition of qualitative research case studies. The eventual outcome of online course criticisms is the emergence of typologies for online courses which can be used for describing and designing such courses in the future. At the end of each conceptual summary below, readers are directed to specific chapters within this dissertation where additional details are provided.

The relationships between the subcomponents of each conceptual area are also presented in a series of concept maps (Novak and Gowin, 1984 and Novak, 1998). At least one concept map illustrates the relationships presented in each of the five summaries. Novak-type concept maps (as opposed to alternate forms) are progressively differentiated with broader, more inclusive concepts at the top and supporting concepts and examples appearing toward the bottom. Concepts are contained in ovals. Linking phrases identify relationships between concepts. Propositions are formed by reading a beginning concept, reading the linking phrase, and then reading the ending concept. The concept maps should be read from top to bottom (except where the direction of arrows indicates otherwise).

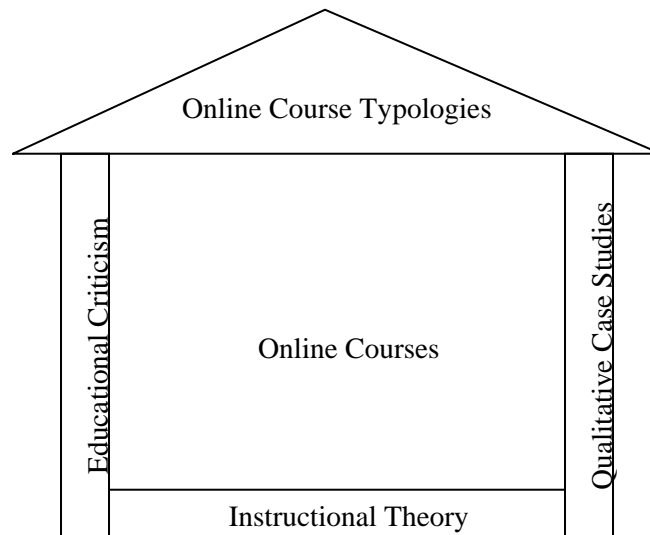


Figure 2. Online Course Criticism Model

Online Courses

The phrase “online course” refers to formal contexts for learning offered by a variety of organizations such as higher educational institutions, K-12 schools, corporate training departments, military, government, and professional associations. The purposes underlying each organization’s implementation of online courses are diverse as are the subject matter and the configuration of elements in the courses. (See Figure 3.) Some online courses are experienced by individual learners who interact, by themselves, with instructional materials (i.e., varied types of media including text, graphics, animations, simulations, assessments, etc.) at times of their own choosing. Other online courses are led by instructors and include interactions between multiple learners, one or more instructors, and instructional materials. Such configurations are typical of those offered in

higher education and may also require completion within an academic term. Learners may have the option of completing their course work asynchronously (at differing times of their own choosing) or synchronously (all learners at the same time). This model for educational criticism is intended for use with online courses offered in higher education settings, but it may be applicable in other settings as well. (Online courses and their study are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.)

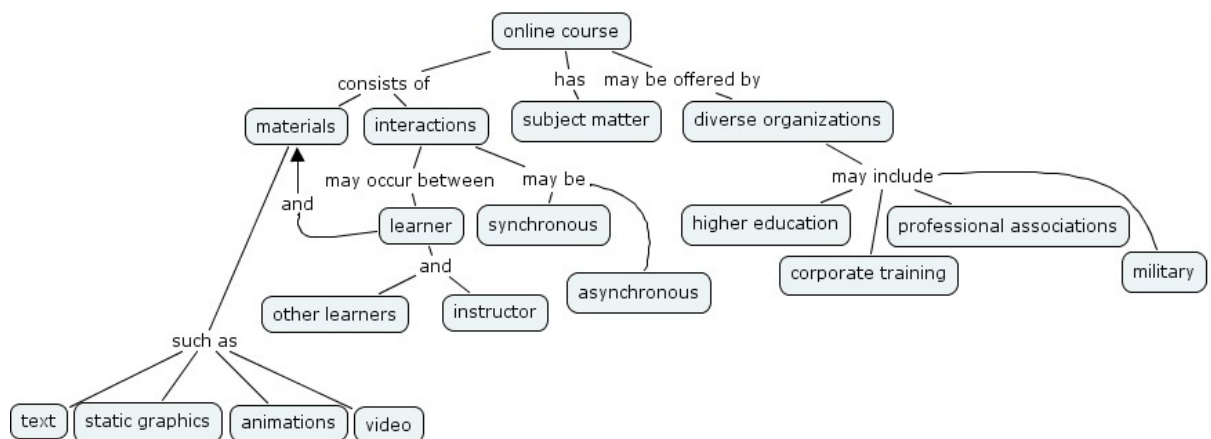


Figure 3. Concepts Underlying Online Courses

Instructional Theory

I am using the phrase “instructional theory” here to refer to various bodies of work related to formal learning contexts. That is, learning may take place for an individual, casually, at any time or place, but this is an informal process. (See Figure 4.) Formal settings for learning occur when an individual submits himself to the intentionality of another person (i.e., an instructor or curriculum developer) for the purpose of learning. This is instruction. Although learners have unique characteristics (including prior experiences, aptitudes, motivation, etc.) that may affect their learning,

the focus of this model is on the learning environment external to the learner. This environment is the place where learners, instructor(s), and instructional materials intersect. In face-to-face courses this is the classroom. In online courses the virtual environment is distributed across multiple venues (discussed below) and includes the instructional experience arising from the interactions each learner has with other learners, instructor(s), and materials. There is an instructional experience that is unique to each individual, but there is also an aggregate instructional experience arising from all the interactions of all the individuals in the course. Although online courses exist at moments in time, the instructional experience and the broader learning environment produce artifacts that can be studied.

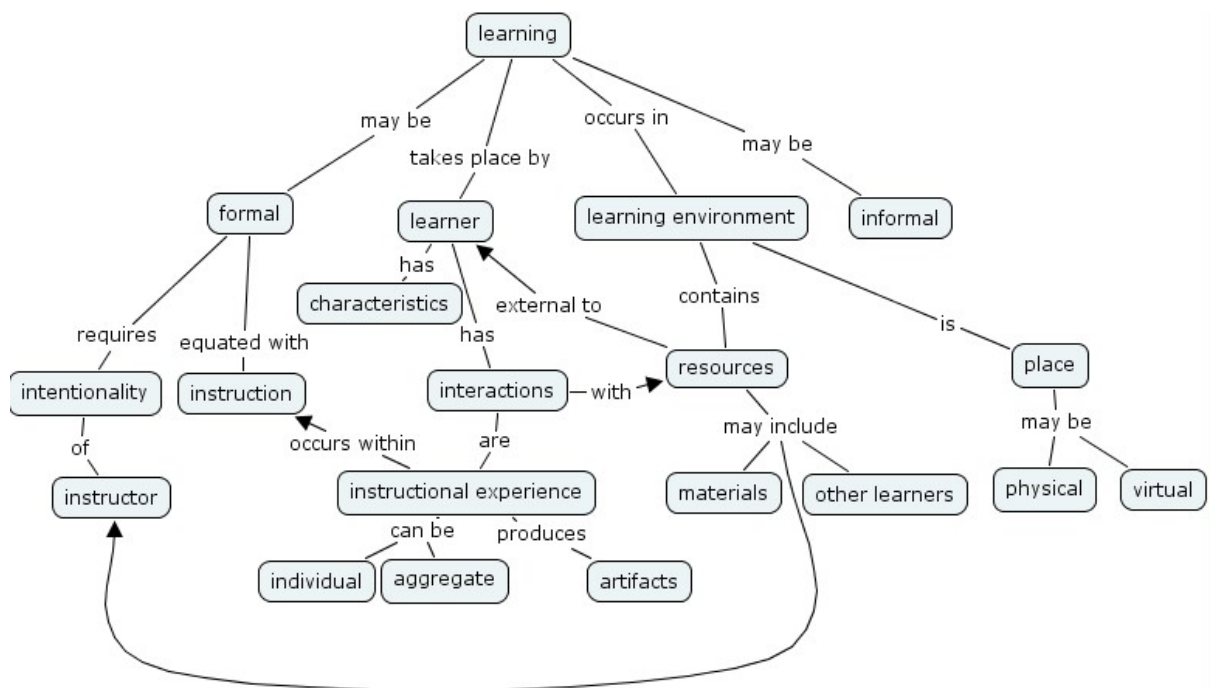


Figure 4. Concepts Underlying Learning

Schwab's (1973) depiction of the educational commonplaces is the most holistic construct to encompass these dimensions of instructional theory and is central to my

online course criticism model. Figure 5 shows the relationships between the four commonplaces (e.g., learners, instructor(s), subject matter, and milieu) and some of the other concepts discussed above. In particular, Schwab’s milieus refer to the various contextual dimensions in which formal learning occurs. These milieus include the immediate learning environment as well as the broader institutional and societal contexts. (Instructional theory is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1. In addition, Chapters 3 and 5 incorporate Schwab’s commonplaces.)

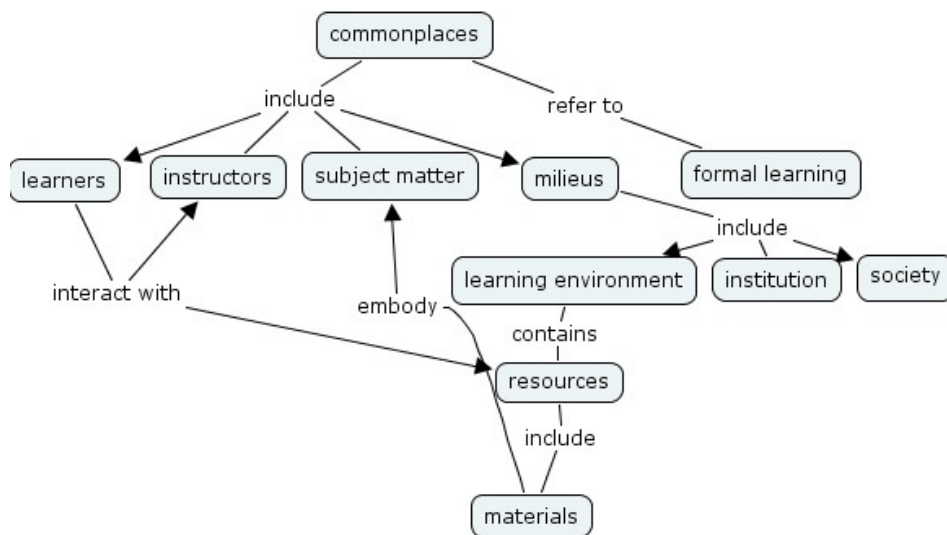


Figure 5. Concepts Underlying Schwab’s (1973) Commonplaces

Qualitative Research Case Studies

Qualitative research case studies refer both to a process of inquiry and to the product that documents this inquiry in the form of a richly descriptive report. (See Figure 6.) Due to the complexity of the cases studied in this research genre, it is important to consider the boundaries (i.e., specific time and place) of the phenomenon (e.g., an online course) and to collect multiple types of data from the naturalistic setting in order to form

a holistic picture. Since the researcher is the principal instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative case studies, particular care is taken to consider how underlying assumptions and values (i.e., tacit theories) and more explicit issues and constructs (i.e., formative theories) affect his or her interpretations. The interpretive process involves looking for themes in the multiple types of data that emerge from the study (i.e., internal interpretation) and examining the case (e.g., the online course) through various interpretive perspectives (i.e., external interpretation). Rigorous validity procedures are followed and documented in order to demonstrate credibility to outside readers and to those involved in the study (e.g., instructors, students, and administrators involved with an online course). There are specific procedures associated with certain paradigmatic perspectives. Postpositivists tend to adopt rather systematic procedures reminiscent of quantitative methods. Constructivists emphasize the constructed nature of reality and favor procedures that embrace varied, organic perspectives compared to the postpositivists. Criticalists employ procedures that call into question forces that preserve existing power structures (such as those related to gender, ethnicity, income, etc.). There are at least nine procedures available to researchers, three from each world view: triangulation, member checking, audit trail, disconfirming evidence, prolonged engagement in the field, thick description, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, and peer debriefing. In this model, researchers are expected to employ at least three validity procedures in their online course criticisms. (Case studies are introduced in Chapter 2 and discussed in detail in Chapter 4.)

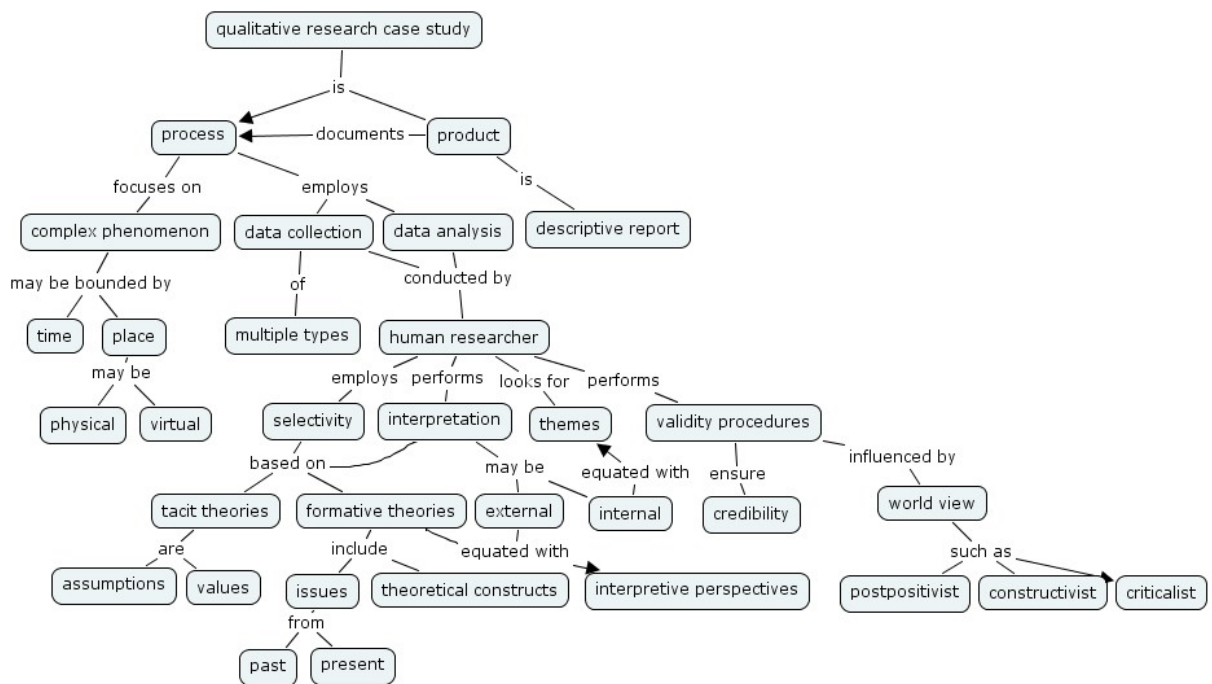


Figure 6. Concepts Underlying Qualitative Research Case Studies

Educational Criticism

Educational criticisms in the Eisnerian (1985, 1991) tradition are a sub-genre of qualitative research case studies. The case study researcher takes on the role of critic, but her role of critic is based in connoisseurship. (See Figure 7.) In my model for educational criticism of online courses, this connoisseurship is distinguished by access to the online course, a honed perceptiveness regarding online course components, and the ability to recognize when certain aspects of the course are instances of a general phenomenon (based on antecedent knowledge of the institutional context and trends beyond the institution). As with case studies, educational criticisms refer both to a research process and a product. With online courses, in particular, it is important for the critic to indicate the bounds of the online course both in terms of time period and of the various

components of the learning environment. (These may include the course management system, web applications, external web sites, and other resources that are considered to be “part of the course.”)

The criticism product includes description, interpretation, evaluation, and themes. Also included is documentation of the research process (outlined above). The rich description of the online course setting is written in an evocative style and includes excerpts from the learning environment. The criticism also includes a view of the online course setting through four interpretive perspectives: the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston and Ashworth, 1990), the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000), five facets of a learning environment (Perkins, 1991), and modular reusability. These four interpretive perspectives are each associated with one or more of Schwab’s (1973) commonplaces (i.e., the Spectrum of Teaching Styles relates to instructors and learners, as does the Community of Inquiry Model, while the learning environment facets and modular reusability each relate primarily to the milieu or learning environment of the online course). The interpretive views of the online course setting allow the critic to include comments about the educational value of aspects of the online course while a summary of the themes arising from the data analysis allows readers to generalize to other settings beyond the immediate course. (Educational criticism/connoisseurship is introduced in Chapter 2. Goals for educational criticisms of online courses are articulated in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 addresses methodological issues in creating educational criticisms, and Chapter 5 provides a detailed view of the role of interpretive perspectives in educational criticisms of online courses.)

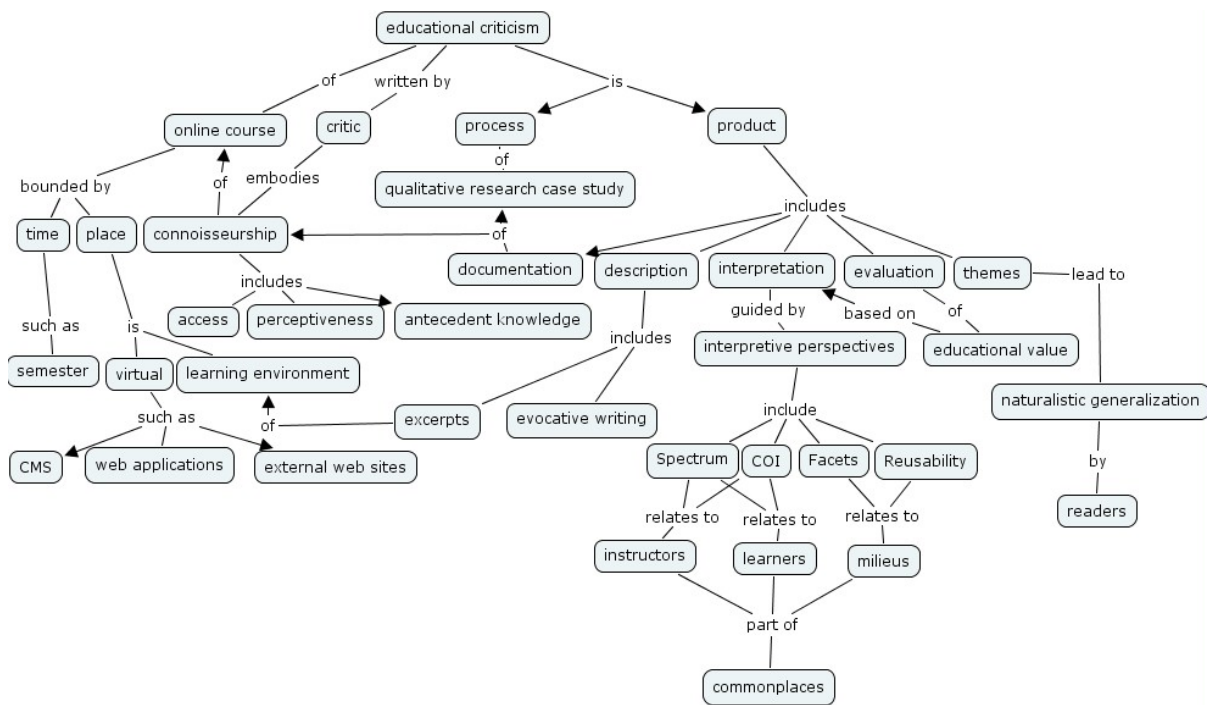


Figure 7. Concepts Underlying Educational Criticism

Online Course Typologies

As a large number of online course criticisms reflecting various disciplines and teaching styles from diverse institutional contexts are published by a variety of critics using the standard approach in this model, meta-patterns will emerge. (See Figure 8.) These meta-patterns can be combined to form one or more online course typologies (or pattern languages) that describe the complexity of online course types and that can be used to guide the design of online courses in the future. This is the long term goal of the implementation of this model for online course criticism. (Online course typologies are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.)

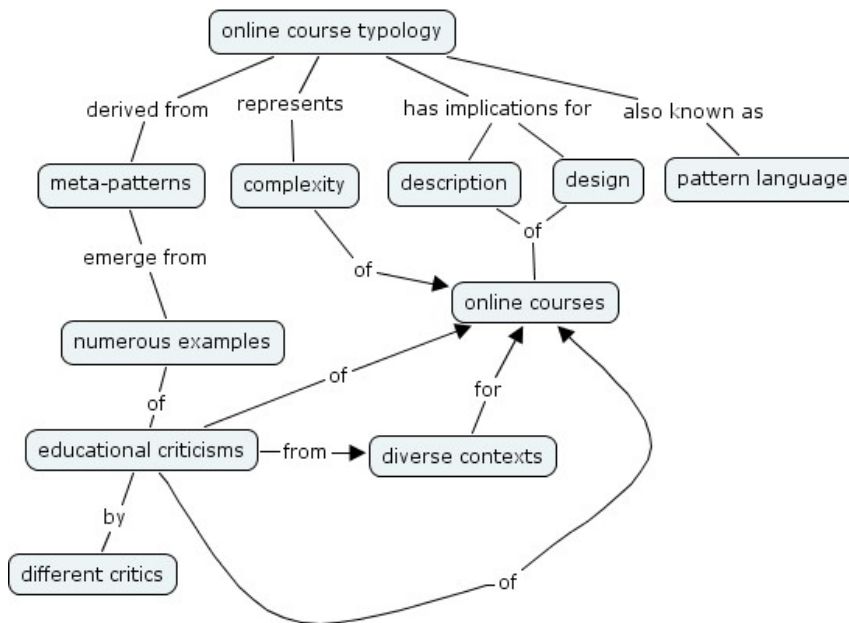


Figure 8. Concepts Underlying Online Course Typologies

Procedural Guidelines

While the unique features of each online course and of individual critics will determine the specific procedures followed in educational criticisms, this model does provide some general guidelines for the process of educational criticism of online courses. The process is essentially that of the qualitative research case study as described above. The procedural guidelines for this model are summarized in Table 3. I will comment briefly on each of these guidelines below. Readers are referred to other sections of this dissertation for additional details.

Table 3. Procedural Guidelines for Criticizing Online Courses

1. Select online course for study
2. Negotiate access to the online course
3. Determine bounds of the online course
4. Choose methods
5. Obtain IRB approval
6. Acquire archive of online course
7. Conduct study
8. Write criticism
9. Ask instructor to respond in writing to the criticism
10. Publish criticism

Select Online Course for Study

There must be some basis for choosing to study one online course as opposed to another. The most likely reason is that a particular online course is an exemplar of some sort. Perhaps it is the first online course offered in a degree program, or it might be considered typical of a particular discipline's approach to online learning. The course or its instructor might have been recognized with an award. It is also possible that a particular term's offering of a course is of interest due to some time-specific occurrence (e.g., the involvement in the course of a noted guest facilitator or a hurricane interfering with the institution's operations). An online course should not be selected because it is

considered to be of poor quality, however. Criticisms should not become the bases for witch hunts. (See Chapters 3 and 4 for more detail on selecting an online course to study.)

Negotiate Access to the Online Course

Permission to study the online course must be obtained from the “owner” of the course. This obviously includes the faculty member who created the online course, but, depending on institutional policies, it may also involve permission from others in the institution. (This is particularly true if the faculty member who designed the course is no longer available and if ownership of the course has ceded to the institution.) These stakeholders should be informed as to the intent of the critic in conducting the study. As elaborated in the next few sections, the critic should also negotiate how far his access extends into the online course, its materials, its students, and its instructor. It is possible that, due to the nature of their jobs, certain practitioners may have access to online courses of which they are not the instructor. Permission and access should still be sought from the appropriate persons. Also, it is assumed that the critic *isn't* the instructor of the course. Credibility issues surface quickly in this case. (How many directors get to publish reviews of their own movie while maintaining credibility?) This is slightly less of an issue if the critic is a practitioner (e.g., administrator or instructional designer) affiliated more loosely with the course than the instructor. (See Chapters 3 and 4 for more on accessing online courses.)

Determine Bounds of the Online Course

It is necessary to determine the bounds of the online course as it will be depicted in the criticism. The boundary is of time and of virtual “place.” For instance, which term’s course offering will be studied? Are artifacts from this entire time period available? Will the scope of these materials extend only to those contained in the course management system (CMS), or will other materials be included also (e.g., web sites maintained by the instructor, external web sites linked from course materials, other web applications, etc.)? This model assumes that the online course is represented only in archived materials and will likely be studied after the completion of the course. It is possible, however, that a critic might choose to study the course as a participant-observer as the course proceeds and include interviews with or surveys of students or others as well. (See Chapter 4 for more on establishing boundaries for study of the online course.)

Choose Methods

Validity procedures and methods for data collection and analysis should be selected as soon as feasible, since the methods chosen by a researcher may affect even the early stages of the study. For instance, the selected methods have implications for the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) approval of the study. As another example, if an audit trail is to be employed as a validity procedure, the researcher must have a plan in place for documenting each step of the transformation from online course materials to the various forms of qualitative data that will result. (Nine validity procedures are detailed in Chapter 4 as are methods for data collection. Data analysis is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.)

Obtain IRB Approval

After getting permission from the owner(s) of the course, setting the scope of the study, and choosing validity procedures, studies of university online courses must be submitted to the institution's IRB to ensure that the humans involved in the online course are not harmed in any way by the study. If the study is of archived materials and if student information is kept anonymous (including any screen captures of discussion postings or email messages), it is not likely that students will be harmed by the study. However, all university studies should be reviewed by the IRB for approval.

Acquire Archive of Online Course

It is preferable to obtain a set of archived course materials (as bounded above) as a "snapshot" in time. To depend upon the actual online course materials as the basis of the study risks degradation of the course. That is, a new term may start, and the instructor may start making modifications to the materials before they can be studied. External web sites are of particular concern as they might be modified or deleted at any time without regard for others who link to them. The snapshot of the course materials may be in the form of downloaded web pages, a CMS archive, screenshots, printouts, or a combination of one or more of these. Some formats are easier than others to incorporate as excerpts into the actual criticism. For instance, if the only representation of an important web page is a printout, this might be difficult to incorporate visually into the narrative of the online course criticism. (See Chapter 4 for more on archived online course materials.)

Conduct Study

The actual study of the online course forms the basis for the criticism that follows. This involves implementing the methods for data collection, data analysis and validity chosen earlier. The interpretive process, involving the interplay of the researcher's assumptions and the four interpretive perspectives with the collected data, proceeds at this point also. The researcher looks for themes here that will be incorporated into the criticism (along with potential excerpts supporting these themes). The specific choices of methods and implementation are left to individual researchers. (Methodology is discussed in great detail in Chapters 4 and 5, and the interpretive perspectives are additionally discussed in Chapter 3.)

Write Criticism

Educational criticisms of online courses should convey the essence of the online course to the reader. Emphasis should be placed on evocative writing in the critic's personal style. The specific elements called for in this model are listed in the next section of this chapter, but the format of the criticism is determined by the critic. (Educational criticisms are discussed in great detail in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.)

Ask Instructor to Respond In Writing to the Criticism

After the online course criticism has been written, it should be presented to the course's instructor for review and comment. The instructor's written comments should be included in the final version of the criticism. This serves several functions. First, it allows the critic's inference of the instructor's intentions in the course to be confirmed or denied

by the instructor. Second, the involvement of the instructor in the final version of the criticism helps ensure that the focus of the criticism is essentially positive (despite any individual evaluative statements contained in the criticism.) Third, by doing so the credibility of the study is enhanced. (The purpose of the instructor's response to the criticism is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.)

Publish Criticism

To be effective, educational criticisms of online courses must be distributed through publication venues. Given the emphasis in this model on methodological and theoretical rigor, it is preferable that criticisms following this model be published in scholarly journals devoted to instruction, instructional technology, online learning and related topics. The publication of practitioner-created criticisms in such venues (rather than in targeting subject matter-specific journals) helps centralize the body of knowledge derived from online course criticisms and prevents the formation of a rift between online course practitioners and instructional technology scholars.

I contacted the editors of over 40 journals such as the ones described above and asked if they were open to submissions of educational criticisms of online courses written in compliance with this model. (See Appendix F for a listing of journals contacted for which a non-negative response was received and Appendix G for the message sent to the editors.) In addition to a few automated responses due to outdated email addresses, slightly more than 30% of the editors responded. Most of these indicated that if an online course criticism met submission requirements for their journal, they would be willing to accept it. That is, there was no *prima facie* rejection of educational criticisms of online

courses among these editors. However, in several instances, an initial response from the editor indicated that such a manuscript would not be acceptable. In these cases, the editor had a preconception of what was meant by “educational criticism of online courses” that I was able to clarify to the extent that each editor changed his mind. In one case, an editor stated that since his journal was not read by practitioners, practitioner-written online course criticisms would not be accepted. Additionally, one journal editor refused to comment on her journal’s receptivity due to the journal’s policy of only accepting submissions referred by reviewers. She suggested that interested authors should refer to the journal’s submission guidelines. (In fact, almost every replying editor made at least passing reference to their journal’s submission guidelines.) My point in sharing this anecdote is to indicate something of the current receptivity among journal editors to online course criticisms. Critics following this model will undoubtedly want to clarify the nature of such criticisms when submitting for publication.

Required Elements in Criticisms of Online Courses

While I am sensitive to Eisner’s (1985, 1991) wishes not to constrain educational critics to any particular required writing format, I include a list of required items in this model (See Table 4.) for two reasons. First, as a practitioner myself, I find that practitioners (at least those who do not regularly conduct research as a part of their jobs) want guidance in choosing procedures to follow in studies and in elements to include in reports. Such elements facilitate the ability to get started in criticizing online courses, but they do not impose any restrictions on the writing style or the specific structural format of the criticism. I find an analogous intent and spirit in Glesne’s (1999) striking description

of the qualitative research proposal as “a recipe for improvisational cooks” (p. 17). Second, a central purpose behind offering this model for constructing educational criticism of online courses is to provide a modicum of standardization such that one criticism might be linked to another (however different the criticisms might be) in order to facilitate the eventual emergence of meta-patterns. The following list of criticism elements is offered for both of these reasons.

Now, a word about what this list is *not*. This list is not a prescriptive outline for all criticisms of online courses. Certainly, one option would be to use each of these elements in the order they are presented as headings or unlabelled sections of the criticism, but that need not be the case. These elements can be included in any way and in any order that the critic wishes to include them. Each element is explained below. Where additional detail would be helpful, I refer the reader to the appropriate earlier chapter.

Table 4. Online Course Criticism Checklist

-
- Documentation of case study process
 - Eisner’s elements:
 - Description
 - Interpretation
 - Evaluation
 - Thematics
 - Documentation of connoisseurship
 - Written response to criticism by the online course instructor
-

Documentation of Case Study Process

In pursuit of the clarity of methodological rigor discussed at length in Chapter 5, it is important that the case study process (as outlined above) be documented in the online course criticism. In brief, this documentation should accomplish the following goals. It is possible that all of these can be addressed in only a few comprehensive sentences.

Documentation of the case study process should answer the question, “Why *this* course?” It should also describe the larger context (i.e., program, discipline, university) of which the online course is a part, including anything that distinguishes online courses from this context. The critic should mention how he or she got access to the course (including acknowledgement of any past relationship with the course). The time and (virtual) place boundaries of the online course should be established. Data sources, collection protocols, and analysis methods should be identified, as should the three validity procedures followed in the study. Finally, there should be some statement of the length of time that the critic studied the archived course materials as a further indication of thoroughness.

Eisner’s Elements

Elliot Eisner’s (1985, 1991) four criticism elements (i.e., description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics) have been discussed in Chapter 2 (and at length in Eisner’s writing). I will comment on each element briefly here as it pertains to educational criticism of online courses. Description of the online course should be evocative in effect and should incorporate excerpts (e.g., screen shots, discussions, materials, tables summarizing numerical data, timelines, etc.) for structural corroboration

of the critic's conclusions. Interpretation in the criticism should reflect a view of the online course through each of the four interpretive perspectives, but it may also involve bringing critics' unique assumptions and values to bear on the courses they study. Although online course criticisms should not set out to disparage online courses or their instructors, the critic should include a statement about the educational value of elements in the online course. Since the emphasis in this model is on studying exemplars, it is expected that there will be much in the way of value found, but areas for improvement should also be noted. The development of themes is a part of the interpretive process, but themes (i.e., "thematics") are also shared in the criticism as the basis for naturalistic generalization by readers. (In addition to the overview of these elements in Chapter 2, see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of interpretive perspectives and the interpretive process.)

Documentation of Connoisseurship

As discussed at length in Chapter 2, it is important to provide some indication of a critic's connoisseurship of online courses in the body of the criticism. It is important to balance thoroughness with brevity to achieve credibility while not detracting from the actual criticism.

Written Response to Criticism by the Instructor

This response was discussed in the procedural guidelines section above. Additionally, the statement from the course's instructor should, preferably, be incorporated in its entirety in the criticism. Space limitations may require using excerpts

of the instructor's statement instead. However, care should be taken not to mis-characterize the instructor's message. (As noted above, more on this instructor statement can be found in Chapters 3 and 4.)

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the conceptual structure, procedural guidelines, and criticism checklist that form my model for constructing educational criticism of online courses. Details associated with each of these elements can be found in the preceding chapters of this dissertation as noted above.

In the next chapter, I will apply this model to the study of one UCF online course. This criticism is offered as a non-perfect application of my model for constructing educational criticisms of online courses. It is not expected that other practitioner/critics will emulate my writing style or structural outline. They should apply the model according to their own styles and the nature of the online courses that they are studying. I agree with Eisner (1985) that "educational critics exploit their own sensibilities and their own unique perceptions. They invoke their own voices to give life to their writing. Each educational criticism has its own signature" (p. 340). I look forward to what others will create. However, I recognize the helpfulness of having an example when one seeks to internalize a construct such as this model. This example criticism should be read as one self-contained piece. Although I have elsewhere in this dissertation documented my connoisseurship and discussed at some length the online course context at UCF, these elements are touched upon in the criticism example as well.

CHAPTER 7: APPLYING THE MODEL

Introduction

Online course criticism, a form of educational criticism in the tradition of Elliot Eisner (1985, 1991), depends upon the heightened perceptions of an expert practitioner and a rigorous qualitative research case study methodology as the bases for portrayal and appraisal of individual online courses. This rendering progresses in a narrowing spiral fashion. That is, the actual course is represented in a rich but limited description followed by progressively narrower treatments of interpretation, evaluation, and a few overarching themes. From the themes presented, readers may choose to generalize to other courses. I present the following example of online course criticism in six sections: background, portrayal, methodological side note, appraisal, instructor response, and conclusion.

Background

I elected to study the fall 2003 iteration of English Grammar and Usage (LIN 5675) taught by Dr. Beth Rapp Young at the University of Central Florida (UCF) for four reasons. First, online courses offered by the University of Central Florida have been distinguished by their reliance on institutionally supported models of practice (Hartman, 2002) and common course conventions (Truman-Davis, Futch, Yonekura, and Thompson, 2000). Second, the instructor of this course had been previously recognized with a WebCT Exemplary Course award for a similar course offered at the undergraduate

level. Third, the graduate focus of this course aligned with my interest in adult learners. Finally, the instructor, Dr. Young, was willing to open her course for review.

English Grammar and Usage (LIN 5675) serves as an elective for both the Graduate Certificate Program in Professional Writing and the Master of Arts in Rhetoric and Composition at UCF. As a UCF online course, LIN 5675 comprises three component areas: a public course web site, a password-protected database of student biographies and photos, and a password-protected account within WebCT (UCF's course management system).

Portrayal

It is nearly 10:30pm on a Wednesday night the week before Halloween. Three women sit in front of computer screens in three different homes, sharing the experience of working together as they grapple with nominal clauses, gerund phrases, and the like. "Dominique" and "Alice" were "talking" in the chat room for a half hour as they got organized. "Carmen" was a little late due to picking up her husband after the family van broke down. After a few minutes of commiserating while the prep work was finished, the conversation has taken a decidedly focused and "grammatical" turn:

"DOMINIQUE">>1 down 7 to go ;)

"DOMINIQUE">>yes!

"ALICE">>let's go

"DOMINIQUE">>oh huh

"DOMINIQUE">>I don't know that either of the first two work

"ALICE">>I think that all work, except for the third one

"CARMEN">>I think we should ditch the one about what prompted Tracy singing. The gerund is not the subject

"DOMINIQUE">>it's a gerund as a subject

"DOMINIQUE">>yea

"DOMINIQUE">>but then is Candice flying the subject either?

"ALICE">>I think that #2 works

"DOMINIQUE">>ok

"CARMEN">>I did not keep that one about Candice either

These three women are a part of a four-member team known as "The Nouns" within a graduate-level "English Grammar and Usage" course. (They *were* a five-member team for almost a month until "Katerina" withdrew from the class.) "Betty," the last member has a few days left on her vacation, but she submitted her work ahead of time so that her group wouldn't be inconvenienced. The team's current task is to complete "Part II" (of a three-part assignment) due by midnight. As the teamwork continues, "Carmen" finds it difficult to follow the exchange and suggests that the other two members finalize the submission, and then she'll review it before the final version is posted to the class discussion board.

"Carmen" is a self-proclaimed "grammar phobic," which is not that uncommon in this course. Even some of the students who earn a living as writers and editors admit to a degree of trepidation over the subject matter. The students all have each other to depend upon, though. LIN 5675 makes *extensive* use of group work. Very few of the course's assignments involve work that can be completed without the assistance of others. As the students read on the course web site:

[K]eep in mind that a significant portion of your course grade will be determined by collaborative work. Whether you want to or not, you will have to learn how to collaborate with others to succeed in this class. In the “real world,” you won't have any choice either.

Indeed, as the web site also points out, team-based assignments account for 25% of each student's final grade. In fact, the course web site points out many things.

The publicly-accessible course web site for LIN 5675 contains nine distinct pages, each with its own prominent button on the site's control panel (with titles like, Overview, Collaboration, Protocols, Policies, etc.) in addition to a few buttons that link to other web sites. All the LIN 5675 course web pages have a distinct appearance. They all have a background that looks a bit like the off-white pages of a much-loved book, accented with graphical elements set off in red. Each page also has a “logo” containing the course title, a cartoon figure peering out through a set of binoculars from behind some shrubbery, and one of those sentence diagrams that many of us remember from junior high school English class. (See Figure 9.) This web site is primarily for would-be students to visit prior to their enrollment in LIN 5675, but it is also consulted by registered students as the authoritative source for certain matters of policy and procedure. There are mundane pieces of information such as how to contact the instructor and how to log in to the course, but there are other, more intriguing features, such as the Pretest that invites students to see if they are ready to take this course. Pretest-takers are confronted with questions such as “Which word or group of words in the following sentence is an object complement?” and “Which of the following sentences contains an unclear pronoun?” The

feedback given to those who get less than 10 of the 15 questions correct includes the following measured response,

Not bad. You can earn a good grade in this course, but only if you work hard.

Consider using one of the following supplementary texts (the bookstore can order them for you)....

This professional tone with a slight tinge of humor is the voice in which all the course web pages are written. It is Dr. Young's. Other examples include:

[Y]ou'll be expected to complete several (some students would say "numerous") assignments every week, and you'll be encouraged to complete additional practice exercises on your own.

and

If one member of your team continually causes problems and your team can't stand it anymore, you can vote that member out of your team. Here's how...

Once students have registered for the course, they are asked to complete a Student Information Form also located on the course web site. The form prompts students for their contact information, their computer platform, and the reasons for taking this course. Dr. Young uses this information to send detailed follow-up information about the course to her new students.

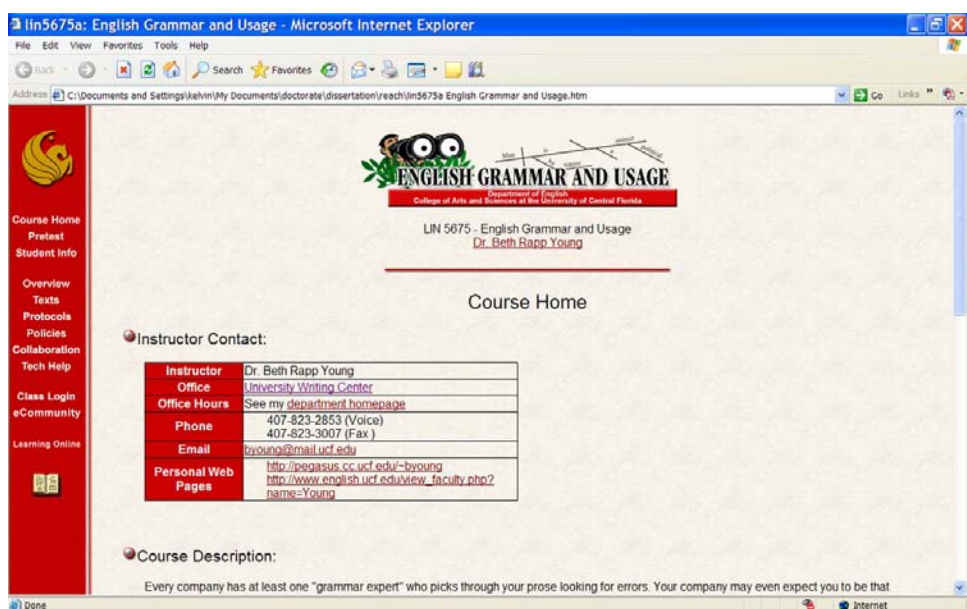


Figure 9. LIN 5675 Web Site

Now, a week before Halloween, “Carmen” and her classmates are in their ninth week of LIN 5675. They are five days past UCF’s formal withdrawal deadline. Prior to the deadline, five of their number elected to leave the class for various reasons. Twelve remain. More than midway through the 16-week term, these students have become well acquainted with each other. They are familiar with the weekly rhythm of the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday due dates. Each of them is comfortable navigating the areas within their password-protected WebCT account where their course “happens.” Initially, their comfort level was facilitated by the visual resemblance of their WebCT account to the course web site. (See Figure 10.) Most helpful was the admonition by Dr. Young to “click... on the different buttons to see what they do.” While the 12 students do much of their course work in three teams, they also interact as a whole class with their instructor. Both forms of interaction are predominantly in the form of asynchronous discussion postings within WebCT.

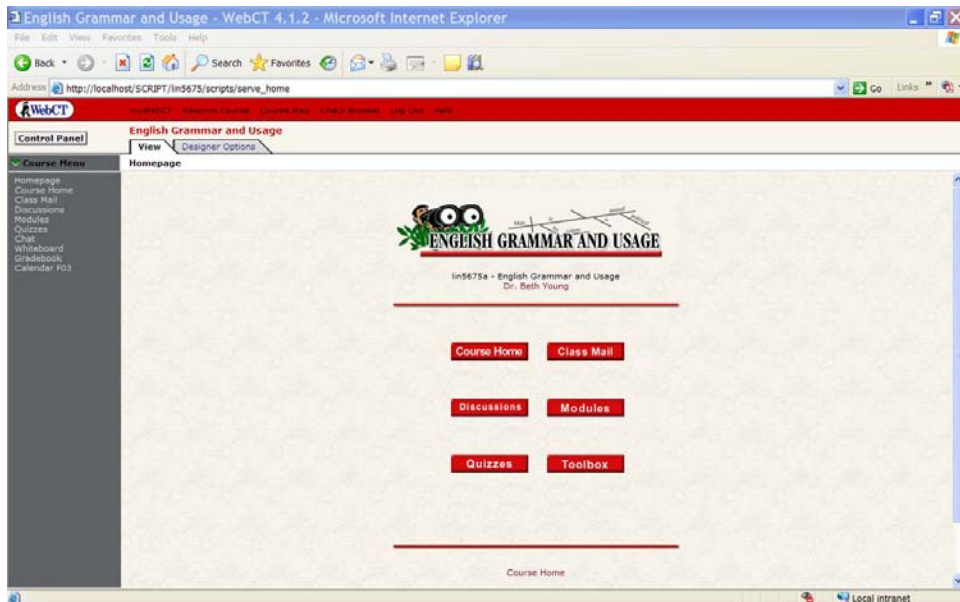


Figure 10. LIN 5675 WebCT Account

During the fall term of 2003, there are 18 separate discussion areas (or “topics”) available to the 12 students in LIN 5675. (See Figure 11). One discussion topic is “private” and only available to each group’s members. Most of the remaining topics are for specific assignments involving required discussions. Two of the topics meet other needs. “Main” is used primarily by Dr. Young to post announcements of a general nature, while “Help!” receives postings from students who need assistance with various aspects of the course (i.e., technical problems, procedural questions, and course content clarifications). By the end of the semester, these 12 students and their instructor (plus their five former classmates) will have posted 1614 messages. The 12 students who complete the course will be responsible for posting 1332 messages (an average of 111 posts per student), while the instructor will ultimately make 163 postings (over 10% of the total messages).

Discussions			
Compose message Search Topic settings			
Click on a topic name to see its messages.			
Topic	Unread	Total	Status
SenDraw	0	23	public, unlocked
Perceived Grammaticality	0	67	public, unlocked
Grammar Instruction	0	79	public, unlocked
Gender	0	80	public, unlocked
Passive Voice	0	35	public, unlocked
E-Prime	0	63	public, unlocked
Make-Believe Grammar	0	18	public, unlocked
New Words	0	44	public, unlocked
Phenomenology	0	34	public, unlocked
Grammar Cops	0	47	public, unlocked
Word Guess	0	47	public, unlocked
Expert Style	0	44	public, unlocked
Spelling Reform	0	63	public, unlocked
Punctuation	0	12	public, unlocked
Improving Your Writing/Teaching	0	30	public, unlocked
The Nouns	0	242	private, unlocked
The Pronouns	0	64	private, locked
The Verbs	0	144	private, unlocked
The Adverbs	0	351	private, unlocked
The Adjectives	0	1	private, locked
Help!	0	51	public, unlocked
Main	0	75	public, unlocked
Notes	0	0	public, unlocked
All	0	1614	---

Figure 11. LIN 5675 Discussion Topics

“Carmen” is a prolific post-er. She is in the habit of responding substantively to postings from her classmates and always has an encouraging word for them. (In the final discussion assignment of the term she will respond thoughtfully to postings from every student in the class. She is the only student to respond to these messages.) She also makes substantive original assignment postings. By the end of the course, she will have posted more than any other student (i.e., 256 messages). Although Dr. Young has said that, “I expect you to read as many discussion messages as necessary to do a good job on each assignment,” “Carmen” makes it a point to read as many messages as she can. She is also

determined to log in regularly to the WebCT account as Dr. Young suggested on the Protocols page of the course web site. This high level of activity doesn't translate clearly into consistently high achievement, however. For most of the graded components of the course, "Carmen" will fall in the lower 50% of the course. Despite this, however, she will end the course with the fifth highest grade in the class. Another classmate, "Janice" from the "Adverbs" team, also has a high level of activity (only slightly less than "Carmen"). She also makes it a point to stay engaged with her classmates from a personal or social perspective. For instance, amid a content-focused posting, she interjects the following phrases, "Great suggestions!... "Margarita," thanks for the info on subject/subject complements... I really appreciate everyone's input." Just a few minutes later she adds a follow-up posting to clarify her appreciation and to give everyone their "due":

I meant to say thanks to "Sheri" for the sub/sub.comp.

info and to "Margarita" for the "that" and "which" stuff.

"Janice" will continue to have consistently high achievement throughout the graded components of the course, and she will end the course with the third highest grade in the class. By contrast, "George," from the "Verbs" team, has a low level of activity.

Although he posts substantively and "carries his weight" on his team, he has the lowest number of discussion posts and the second lowest number of postings read in the class. He provides little in the way of "extra" communication on a personal level. Nevertheless, "George" achieves consistently. Only in the team-based assignments do his grades dip slightly. However, at the end of the course he will have the second highest grade in the class.

At the moment, though, “Carmen,” “Janice,” “George,” and the other nine students in LIN 5675 are focused on completing “Part II” of their “Team Inventing Sentences” assignment. After nine weeks of the course, the students have completed more than 10 multi-part assignments. The details of these and other assignments are divided between the Course Calendar (See Figure 12.), the Modules (See Figure 13.), and, to a lesser extent, the Quizzes (See Figure 14.). The LIN 5675 students have become used to coordinating these different sources of information. As complex as this task is, however, their instructor facilitates the process by providing consistent and occasionally repetitive messages throughout the course materials while maintaining one authoritative source for each type of information. For instance, the Course Calendar provides Due Dates, Assignments, and Descriptions for the entire term on one page. In some cases, the Course Calendar refers students to other areas:

See Modules for more information about this assignment; complete Part I ONLY for today....

See the Quizzes page for more information on when this quiz is available.

Quizzes and tests can be taken on any day or time they are available without penalty, even if the quiz is available a different day than listed in the calendar.

The Modules and the Quizzes vary, though, in the type of authoritative information they supply to students. Quizzes provide detailed time-sensitive information beyond what is contained in the Calendar, while the Modules contain details on procedures for completing assignments for which the Calendar provides timeframes. There is one module for every week and one or more weekly quizzes or tests. While all but one of the quizzes and tests are required (and are, therefore, graded), there are some module

components that are optional (not graded). Many of these optional elements are readings from various web sites, while others are interactive multimedia components. One set of optional assignments was experienced by “Carmen” and her classmates during Week 1 of LIN 5675. Labeled “First Day Activities,” these assignments are recommended by Dr. Young because

Completing the activities will introduce you to your classmates, provide some basic technical information about the course, and help "smoke out" any technical problems that might keep you from doing future assignments.

Included among these activities is a suggestion for students to “Update E-Community [sic] Information.” While students had provided some of this information via the Student Information Form, they are reminded that “everyone in the class can see the E-Community [sic], but the Student Information Form is sent only to your teacher.” (See Figure 15.)

WEEK ONE		
<i>DUE DATE</i>	<i>ASSIGNMENT</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>
Monday, August 25, 2003	First Day Activities	These activities won't be graded, but they will help you get the semester off to a good start. Completing the activities will introduce you to your classmates, provide some basic technical information about the course, and help "smoke out" any technical problems that might keep you from doing future assignments.
Wednesday, August 27, 2003	SenDraw practice	Using SenDraw, recreate the sentence diagram on p. 222 of Kolln/Funk (in 8th ed. p. 248). Type your name and the date on the same page as the diagram. When you save the diagram, call it, "SenDraw Practice yourlastname.mdr" (substituting your last name for the word 'yourlastname'). Then, post the diagram as an attachment to a message in the SenDraw discussion topic. If you can't run SenDraw, complete this assignment with a different program, and tell us what program you used in the message to which you attach your diagram. This assignment is not graded, but by completing it, you will make sure that you have the technical capability to create and post readable diagrams. You'll need this capability to complete some extra credit assignments.

Figure 12. LIN 5675 Course Calendar

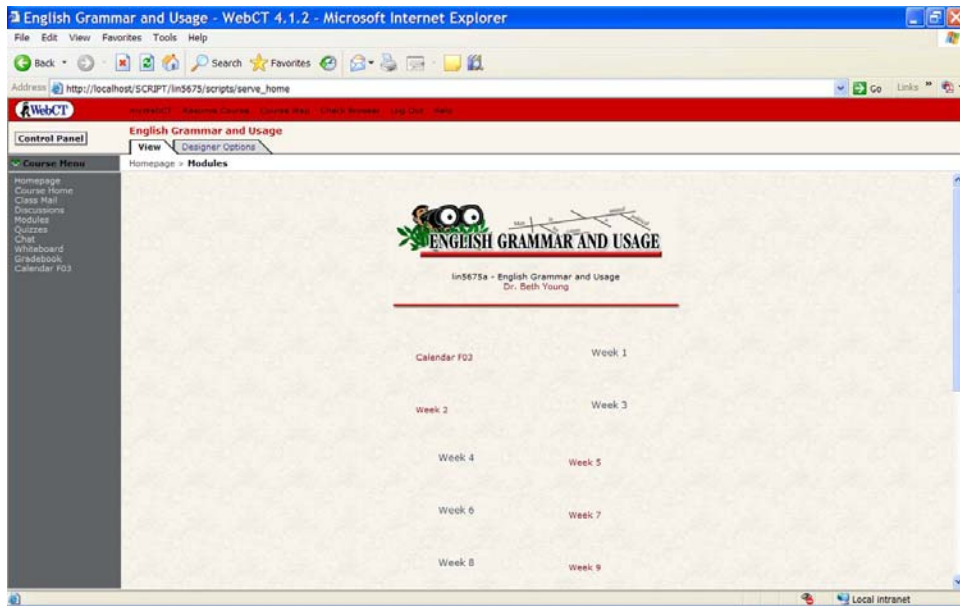


Figure 13. LIN 5675 Modules Page

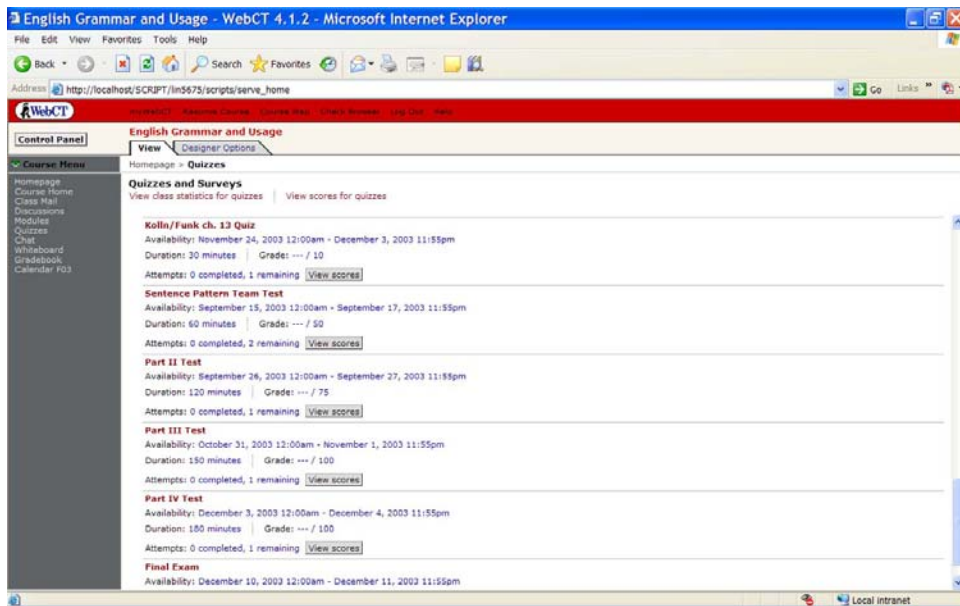


Figure 14. LIN 5675 Quizzes Page



Figure 15. Sample eCommunity Profile

As “Carmen’s” group finalizes their submission of “Team Inventing Sentences II” late on October 22, 2003 it is unlikely that “Carmen” anticipates the holistic remarks she will make at the conclusion of the course in a summary posting:

I felt that by taking this course I had essentially set myself up for failure—and several times during the course my doubt and expectations of failure almost became a self-fulfilling prophecy.... However, there were four key points from this course that resulted in significant paradigm shifts for me that I think will help me to improve my writing and my teaching of writing.... These principles, recommendations, and distinctions have helped me to understand how to make word and punctuation choices—and how to teach students to do the same...

Perhaps she would also be surprised to discover the personal course mail Dr. Young will send her later in which she praises “Carmen:”

I really appreciate all your hard work this semester. You definitely went above and beyond the bare minimum. I hope you are proud of what you have accomplished, because you definitely have accomplished a lot!

Methodological Side Note

LIN 5675 was represented in this study by materials archived at the end of a 16-week term from within the three constituent areas listed above (i.e., course web site, database of student photographs and biographies, and WebCT). The age of this course iteration commends it for review using a model designed for case study of archival materials. Employing ethnographic procedures, including the maintenance of a research journal and a series of comprehensive field notes with embedded analytic notes, I recorded observations, noted emergent themes, and documented methodological rationales for more than 30 hours as I iteratively examined each course component in detail (with the exception of course mail messages initiated by students). Taken as a whole, these individual sets of notes are both process and product. That is, writing them enabled me to conceptualize the course as a whole and to surface elements of particular interest for further study while the existence of these notes served as documentation of the contextual, methodological, analytic, and personal response data that Rodgers and Cowles (1993) call for in qualitative research studies. This research methodology is the basis for both the thick description in the portrayal above and the analysis underlying the appraisal below. Although reliability is a moot point in case study research (Janesick,

2000), I initially employed three validity procedures (Creswell and Miller, 2000) to ensure credibility in this study: triangulation, member checking (see instructor response below), and audit trail. Unfortunately, the audit trail of systematic documentation was corrupted due to a computer malfunction, so I can now only claim two validity procedures. (However, as noted above, the process of creating this documentation played an invaluable role in my analysis.)

Online course criticisms are based on connoisseurship of online courses and, online course critics are expected to document this expertise. I have worked within UCF's online learning initiative for the past seven years, leading faculty development courses, advising faculty in course design, and consulting for other institutions. As an instructional designer, I assisted Dr. Young in the initial design of LIN 5675 in 1999, more than four years prior to the particular iteration featured in this criticism.

Appraisal

Following Eisner (1985, 1991), this appraisal will consist of interpretive comments about the online course iteration described above, remarks about the educational value of aspects of this course, and themes that emerged during the study with implications for other online course settings. After the appraisal, a written response to this criticism by Dr. Young, the instructor of LIN 5675, will be included before my conclusion.

Interpretation

Four interpretive perspectives (McCutcheon, 1978 and 1981) addressing three of Schwab's (1973) educational commonplaces (i.e., students, teachers, and milieus or learning environment) guide my interpretation of this online course: the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Mosston and Ashworth, 1990), the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000), learning environment facets (Perkins, 1991), and modular reusability. The Spectrum of Teaching Styles draws a distinction between the extremes of teacher-direction and student-direction while emphasizing the goals of knowledge reproduction and knowledge production, respectively. The Community of Inquiry Model presents the intersection of social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence. The learning environment facets are information banks, symbol pads, task managers, construction kits and phenomenaria. Modular reusability differentiates multiple layers of the instructional environment and identifies the dichotomy between contextualization and reusability of instructional materials at each of these environmental levels. All four of these lenses will be brought to bear on this course simultaneously.

This course evidences extensive use of modular reusability. At the systems level, WebCT and eCommunity are enterprise applications that expedite the development of online courses through (re)use by multiple faculty. At the course web site and Module level, the decontextualization of time-sensitive content allows reuse of these materials in this course (and possibly in similar courses) from semester to semester with little modification needed. Within individual modules, Dr. Young has chosen to incorporate various multimedia components that are reusable in other grammar courses. Dr. Young notes in a discussion posting that when a given situation arises in LIN 5675, "I even have

a standard...response at the ready. And I don't need to post that standard response [this time]!” This indicates mindfulness of the utility of “stock” instructor discussion postings which may be reused from semester to semester in this course. I noted at least twelve instructor discussion postings that either have been or could be reused in this way.

Through her implementation of WebCT and eCommunity, Dr. Young makes available to students various standard tools (e.g., picture selection, discussions, and chat) for expressing themselves through symbolic communications (symbol pads). In addition to these standard system tools, she provides a custom software application (SenDraw) that students may use to create and share sentence diagrams when called for by assignments. (See Figure 16.)

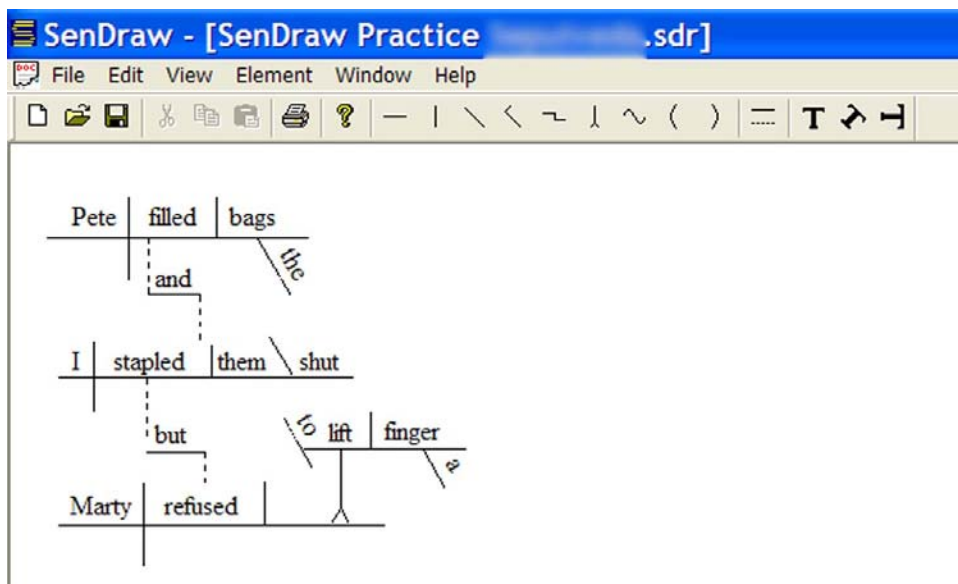


Figure 16. SenDraw Example.

Indirectly, through her development of course web pages, Module pages, and the Course Calendar, Dr. Young serves as an authoritative source of information for students (information bank) while structuring the instructional context (teaching presence) and

providing guidance to students in when and how to complete activities (task manager) as a means of facilitating interaction between students and content (cognitive presence). A particularly elegant example of facilitating cognitive presence from the Modules is found in Week 10:

Identify the point that Williams uses his special technique to make. (When you have read the entire article, you will know what that technique is.)

Another two examples are found in the structuring of the discussion topics themselves. The Punctuation discussion has relatively few postings because these few are team postings produced through a series of team interactions. The end product is a high concentration of cognitive presence. One of the last discussion topics to be used, “Improving Your Writing/Teaching” with its associated end-of-term reflection on what has been learned also reveals a concentrated cognitive presence.

In addition to her design of course materials, Dr. Young embodies the roles of information bank and teaching presence as she stimulates the critical thinking and personal meaning making of students (cognitive presence) through her substantive content discussion postings and personalized replies to student postings. Although she also exemplifies teaching presence in the Main and Help! discussion topics, she willingly shares this responsibility with the students who spontaneously provide guidance to their classmates. In fact, while the subject matter of her course seems inclined toward students’ reproduction of existing knowledge, Dr. Young seems more personally predisposed to knowledge production and shared responsibility for student learning.

As demonstrated repeatedly in the portrayal above, within the course materials (i.e., course web site, Modules, and Calendar), Dr. Young’s voice reflects a high degree

of social presence. She routinely interjects humor and anecdotes to personalize the materials. However, it is in the discussion postings of both instructor and students that the social presence of this instructional experience is most evident. Through numerous personal, humorous, and emotive comments (usually interspersed with postings that are primarily on-task and reflective of cognitive or teaching presence), the instructor and students of LIN 5675 present themselves to each other as “real people” through this text-based communications medium. (Excerpts from such discussions are provided in the portrayal above and in the evaluation section below.)

Finally, through the design and implementation of various multi-part assignments (e.g., the Team Inventing Sentences assignment featured in the portrayal above), Dr. Young facilitates (teaching presence) a high degree of interactivity in this course. These multi-part assignments often require students to create construction kits of knowledge “objects” which they then use in their team assignments. The following excerpts from parts 1-3 of the Team Inventing Sentences assignment provide a taste of this process:

Part I...create sentences that fulfill the requirements listed below...Post your work to your team discussion....Write a sentence in which a gerund phrase is the direct object in a nominal clause. Capitalize the gerund phrase and put the nominal clause in brackets, e.g., I know [that Joe enjoys SWIMMING].... Part II...As a team choose the best 1-3 examples of each sentence, and choose someone to compile, format, and submit the answers on behalf of your team....Part III...Look in your team forum for the sentences created for this assignment by another team (to be posted by Dr. Young sometime today). Do the other team's sentences correctly fulfill the assignment?...If not, your team must

correct the sentences. Add the corrected sentences and the words "Checked by [Team Name]" to their list, and post it to your team forum, using the subject line: "[Team Name's] Final Verified Sentences." It should be clear which sentences you wrote and which sentences the original team wrote

The multi-part Grammar Voyeur activities, in particular, are also, arguably, a kind of phenomenaria in that these assignments ask students to find grammar in its natural habitat out in the "real world" and to interact with it according to the concepts being learned in LIN 5675:

For this course, you'll be a "voyeur," peeking at other texts in order to figure out their grammatical form and function. You'll collect "snapshots" (by cutting and pasting text into a word processor) to turn in regularly. Internet browsers make it easy to find the most enticing examples....Research indicates that grammar instruction which focuses exclusively on grammar exercises doesn't transfer well into reading/writing...Through Grammar Voyeur assignments, you'll apply what you learn in class to your own reading and writing. In this way, not only will you learn about grammar, you'll learn how grammar is used to communicate.

Seen through the lenses of the four interpretive perspectives introduced above (i.e., the Community of Inquiry Model, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000; modular reusability; learning environment facets, Perkins, 1991; and the Spectrum of Teaching Styles, Mosston and Ashworth, 1990), LIN 5675 is revealed as a systematically implemented, highly interactive experience that promotes student learning through a complex array of coordinated activities. I'll summarize my interpretations through each of the four lenses below.

The lens of the Community of Inquiry Model displays a large amount of teaching presence in LIN 5675. This is not surprising, given that, in my experience, students of online courses typically require more structured guidance in their instructional experience than students in face-to-face courses. However, when this teaching presence is presented in the course discussions, to some extent it is shared between instructor and students. There are also concentrated bursts of cognitive presence throughout the course, manifested in the assignments carried out in the discussion area. However, the teaching presence and cognitive presence in the course are seasoned with ample doses of social presence. The social presence of the instructor is primarily designed into the course, while the social presence of individual students arises from their own inclinations and from the facilitation offered by the course design.

Hodgins (2004a) observes that, in general, “courses” are typically low in overall reusability. Viewed through the lens of modular reusability, despite the fact that LIN 5675 is highly contextualized and therefore low in reusability as a whole, Dr. Young’s course manifests a number of reusable elements as evidenced above. This emphasis on reusability minimizes the time required for maintenance between course offerings, mitigates the time requirements of course administration during a term, and facilitates the creation or updating of other courses.

The interpretive perspective of the learning environment facets presents a view of LIN 5675 that highlights the administrative role of task manager and the resource role of information bank played predominantly by the course materials. These two roles taken together mirror the emphasis on teaching presence noted above. Students are expected to express themselves symbolically through use of the symbol pads built into the course

management system and through other tools provided by the instructor. As Perkins (1991) notes, these three facets are expected to appear in any learning environment. In addition, as shown above, a number of Dr. Young's assignments exhibit characteristics of the construction kits and phenomenaria that Perkins indicates are indicative of a constructivist orientation in which students' construction of knowledge is emphasized over reproduction of received knowledge.

The final lens of the Spectrum of Teaching Styles reveals that control of student learning in LIN 5675 is balanced delicately between the instructor and the students themselves. As shown above, the instructor's display of teaching presence and her functions of task manager and information bank evidence a clear authoritative role for Dr. Young. However, through her expectation of active student participation in assignments with a constructivist orientation and her encouragement of student involvement in the Main and Help! discussions (shared teaching presence), Dr. Young balances her authoritativeness against what seems to be a desire for students to take responsibility for their own learning. This emphasis is consistent with the balance also held between the reproduction of existing knowledge and the creation or discovery of new knowledge.

Evaluation

As a result of these interpretations, I offer the following comments on the educational value of this course. In addition to my own experience with online courses, Eisner's (1991) view of educative experiences as those which "foster the growth of human intelligence, nurture curiosity, and yield satisfaction in the doing of those things worth doing" (p. 99) guides my comments.

Dr. Young *humanizes* the instructional materials and the instructor interactions of LIN 5675 through interjection of her voice (professional, yet humorous):

When Dr. Young did these assignments herself, she noticed that she had a certain tendency to get very interested in the web pages she was reading.... pretty soon you know the definition of "elutriate" and "foudroyant" and "melliforous" but you still don't know what you went to the dictionary to look up. (And please don't ask how long it took to find those examples of interesting words!)... You may not lose yourself in web surfing, but for normal people, this tip works!

Within discussion postings, how disarming it must be for students to "hear" their grammar teacher say things like

By now, y'all have started reading chapter two. The information in this chapter is new to all of you, probably. Hooray! Isn't that great--now you know that you really will learn something new from this course! Some of you are worried because the material is so unfamiliar. I am VERY confident that you will learn it.

And how reassuring it must be for this statement to be followed by practical tips that have worked for students in the past.

In LIN 5675, high expectations are made of students, and sophisticated coordination between multiple task manager sources is required of them as they pursue learning. Some students may not be up to the challenge, however. Although Dr. Young's clear pre-enrollment information on the course web site and consistent communications during the early days (drop/add period) of the course afford every opportunity for students to make an informed decision about whether to rise to her course's expectations or not, multiple deadlines per week involving various types of individual work (e.g.,

readings, quizzes, web searches, etc.), collaborative work with team mates, and group communications in addition to the challenging subject matter may be more than some graduate students are prepared to accept in an elective course. (In fact, five of the original 17 students in this course withdrew, although their withdrawal may not have been due to the course workload.) This level of sophistication in instructional tasks is consistent with a constructivist orientation to learning in that students engage in complex tasks in order to facilitate higher levels of learning. Wilson's (1996a) definition of a constructivist learning environment as "a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem-solving activities" (p. 5) could easily be a description of LIN 5675.

At the same time, despite Dr. Young's systematic approach to course administration, the facilitation of such a complex environment is time consuming. As an example, Dr. Young is particularly skilled at providing repetition of a unified message throughout her instructional materials and her communications with students while maintaining one authoritative source. A minor technical concern (with instructor workload implications) arises when she incorporates multiple files with similar content at various places in the course (e.g., in Week 4 and Week 7). When updates have to be made, each file location must be remembered and modified accordingly. It is unlikely that instructors without a constructivist value orientation would undertake such a challenge.

What the LIN 5675 course web site refers to as "collaboration" is obviously more than an instructional strategy. Its prominence in this course, as cited throughout this

criticism, indicates that the valuing of student interaction leading to collaboration (and perhaps independence?) is a part of the core curriculum of LIN 5675. As such, it is assessed in various ways throughout the course. However, perhaps there should be *more* alignment between students' collaborative work and student grades. Currently, team-based assignments account for 25% of the final grade. As in the case of "George" in the portrayal above, however, it is still possible to do the bare minimum interaction and excel. Alternatively, perhaps there is an *over*-emphasis on collaboration in this course in that there are currently no demonstrable gains for students who are highly interactive. Nevertheless, collaboration *is* integrated into this course to such a degree that perhaps there are unseen social learning gains that could be assessed and made evident.

Themes

Based on a close examination of the course materials from this fall 2003 course iteration as portrayed and discussed above, I offer the following themes for consideration as propositions:

- Clear and consistent communication of expectations for students runs throughout course materials and instructor communications.
- Multi-part assignments (with multiple due dates) facilitate high student-student interaction.
- Course materials and instructor communications incorporate the instructor's "voice" as a humanizing element in online courses.
- The instructor-as-human embodies aspects of the curriculum as realized in the instructor's personal values.

- Instructor values, curriculum, assessment, and grading are aligned.
- The practice of being authoritative without being authoritarian leads both to clear student expectations and opportunities for student-instructor interdependence.

Response by Instructor

The full text of Dr. Beth Young's instructor response follows below as a single-spaced block quote:

While it's always interesting to hear a different perspective on one's courses, what I particularly appreciate about this analysis was that it supports my teaching goals for this course.

I consciously worked towards three goals as I was designing LIN 5675:

1. I wanted to use the technology efficiently for course management, freeing me to adopt a "coach" role while the semester was underway.

I'd much rather spend my time helping students learn the course content than distributing materials or even assigning grades, as I suspect most faculty would. The efforts toward communicating clear expectations, and the modular re-usability of course elements, enable me to focus more energy on answering questions, participating in discussions, and other types of "social presence."

In fact, major changes I have made in the course all relate to this goal. This fall 2003 course was the first time I put calendar information into a single webpage, because updating the WebCT Calendar tool had become too labor-intensive. Since fall 2003, I have moved the information in "Modules" out of its weekly organization (separate modules for week one, week two, etc.) and onto a single page for the same reason. This change also eliminated the technical concern mentioned earlier of needing to update duplicate pages. And when I find myself repeating discussion messages from semester to semester, I try to find a way to work that information into the "Modules."

2. I wanted to encourage helpful learning behaviors while still grading on mastery of course content.

I find that many of my students have not formally studied grammar since they were in middle school. Even for students who remember what they learned in middle school, the grammar in this class is more challenging. Still, many students

often assume that because material looks familiar (e.g., they recognize terms such as “noun” and “clause”), they have studied sufficiently, even though they cannot apply the material to new passages.

The different assignments in the class are intended to give students a better test than the “looks familiar” test to assess their own knowledge, helping them know when they need to study more, and to engage students in behaviors that will facilitate their learning the material. For example, the Grammar Voyeur assignments require students to apply what they are learning to “real-life” texts by having them find examples of particular structures and assess whether their examples are correct. By completing these projects in groups, students gain more material with which to practice, an audience to whom concepts must be explained, and additional people of whom questions can be asked.

All of this, I believe, helps most students learn the material. However, engaging in these collaborative behaviors cannot substitute for learning. Because the course grade is based on content mastery rather than learning behaviors, it’s possible that students can engage in these behaviors and not get a good grade (as “Carmen” did), or they can get a good grade without engaging in these behaviors (as “George” did). I don’t see this as a weakness in the course.

However, this second goal often conflicts with the first, because all these smaller assignments make the course more complex. I would love to reduce the complexity, but I haven’t figured out how to do that without sacrificing student interaction with each other and with the material.

3. I wanted to make good use of the Internet environment, drawing on the online resources and tools rather than simply translating face-to-face activities to an online medium.

Here, I am helped by the fact that linguistics is a social science. Not only does the Internet provide a rich source of appropriate data, but computers are wonderful tools for compiling student-generated data. The constructivist approach noted in this analysis, I think, arises from assignments that require students to act like social scientists, gathering data and drawing conclusions based on evidence.

Often when I teach this class, students contribute related material that they have discovered on their own. For example, one year a student mentioned a National Public Radio (NPR) story about linguistic research suggesting that the word “like” as used by teenagers (“And I was, like, really happy that . . .”) was not “empty language” but rather carried important features of meaning. Other students responded with accounts of their own experiences and related links they had found online. The Internet environment is particularly helpful for these student-generated discussions because it is so easy to draw in additional materials.

During fall 2003, unfortunately, students did not spontaneously contribute material to the course. I'm not sure why they didn't, and the analysis doesn't give many clues either.

Overall, this analysis helpfully illuminates what the course does that works. The analysis seems less useful for explaining what the course doesn't do or what hasn't worked. However, if more analyses like this one were available, it would be possible to compare different courses. I know I would find such a comparison very useful. Even without comparing different courses, this analysis helps me understand what worked in LIN 5675 during fall 2003 and why, so I appreciate the opportunity to have the course examined here. (Personal communication from B. Young, July 25, 2005.)

Conclusion

In this online course criticism of the UCF graduate course "English Grammar and Usage," I portrayed the instructional experience of the course as it was offered in fall term 2003. I documented the methodology for the case study underlying this criticism based on my experience with online learning. I also provided interpretation, evaluative comments, and emergent themes from the study. In response to this criticism, the instructor of LIN 5675 presented her written reaction.

Readers should bear in mind that, despite the guidance of the four interpretive perspectives and the rigorous methodology underlying this criticism, the perspective presented here relies to a great degree on my perceptions as an online course connoisseur. Because of this, some readers may have lingering concerns with the credibility of this account. To offset these concerns, I will close with some reflective comments on the process of conducting this online course criticism.

As I studied LIN 5675, a guiding question that I kept before me was, "What was it like to experience this course offering? Throughout the iterative series of fieldnotes,

memos, and journal entries based on my “observations” of the course materials, I was ever mindful of the four interpretive perspectives summarized above. Student names were converted to numbers to more easily recognize patterns and in order to minimize any influence of student names. In brief, the observations followed this sequence: (1) observations of the three broad component areas (i.e., public web site, eCommunity, and WebCT); (2) summary records in WebCT (e.g., discussion summary, student tracking, grades, etc.); (3) all instructor discussion postings; (4) all discussion postings of several students of interest; (5) all course content (starting with the Course Calendar); (6) all discussion postings within the team discussions of each student of interest; (7) instructor course e-mail messages (outgoing messages only). In addition to the iterative versions of documents based on these observations, I also created a timeline spreadsheet based on the Course Calendar and the timestamps of various WebCT records (e.g., assignment due dates, first course access, last course access, chat sessions, key discussion postings, etc.). Timestamps were converted to a numeric format (i.e., year, month, day, hour, minute) that could be easily sorted.

As I reflect back on this process, I recall identifying the high interactivity of the student called “Carmen” in the portrayal above and *assuming* that she would have high performance as well. This led to a comparison of interactivity ratings and performance ratings (i.e., component and overall grades converted to percentages and rank ordered). The students identified above as “George” and “Janice” surfaced from this comparison as students of interest (i.e., high performance/low interactivity and high performance/high interactivity respectively) along with “Carmen.” I “followed” these students throughout their discussion postings, chat sessions, and graded assignments in order to gain insight

into the whole instructional experience through their eyes as they interacted with their teams, the whole class, and the instructor. As I proceeded, I noted any questions that surfaced so that I could follow-up with additional observation/note-taking.

In writing the portrayal above, I endeavored to construct a narrative that would tie together the insights gained from the case study process and that would represent as richly and neutrally as possible the instructional experience of the fall 2003 offering of LIN 5675. The appraisal that follows the portrayal was based in the case study process and in my own perceptions as an online course connoisseur. Based on the themes presented in this criticism, readers may choose to look for similarities and contrasts within other instructional contexts.

CHAPTER 8: “CONCLUSION” (THE ROAD FORWARD FROM HERE)

Limitations of This Dissertation

In this dissertation I have outlined a rationale for studying online courses using Eisner’s (1985, 1991) educational connoisseurship/criticism approach, and I have applied the resulting model to the study of one online course from the University of Central Florida (UCF). Obviously, the one example criticism in this dissertation, taken by itself, does not address the richness and complexity of all online courses. Neither does it represent all online courses at UCF. This example criticism is one practitioner/connoisseur’s portrayal of one UCF online course. Hopefully, I have been successful through this one criticism in revealing something about the intricacies of the featured online course that readers would not have seen on their own and that “rings true” to them. (Any naturalistic generalizations, to use Eisner’s term, to settings other than this one are left for the reader to determine.) However, it is in the context of a larger number of diverse online course criticisms that this one example fulfills its purpose.

The Need for Practitioner-Written, Article-Length Criticisms

First and foremost, to move forward from this dissertation, what is needed is for practitioners (e.g., instructional designers, online faculty, online program administrators, etc.) to begin publishing article-length criticisms of online courses. Since the focus of this dissertation is the formulation of a model that practitioners can use to conduct

educational criticism of online courses, I will point out that each educational criticism that results from following this model need not be dissertation length. It is not necessary, nor is it profitable, for each educational criticism of an online course to cover the same ground again and again (as would surely be the case if individual educational criticisms were the focus of future dissertations; writers would undoubtedly feel compelled to articulate an accompanying methodology, literature review, etc.). If the only examples of online course criticism we find are in dissertations, many practitioners will associate educational criticism with a book-length process and will be deterred from participating. However, this is not to say that more work on educational criticism of online courses should not occur in future dissertations. There are dissertation-length questions to consider and refinements to be made.

Future Studies

In the decades since educational criticism was first proposed as a mode of inquiry, it seems that there have been relatively few article-length educational criticisms published. Future studies should examine the diffusion of the educational criticism construct and identify characteristics leading to or preventing its adoption. For instance, has there not been sufficient “championing” by Elliot Eisner and other scholars of repute? Have existing publishing venues been unsupportive of this approach? Has the methodological rigor been suspect? To what extent is educational criticism regarded as a qualitative research genre as opposed to a literary style? Contexts such as academic fields outside of education as well as particular sub-disciplines within education should be considered. Such an investigation could assist in the diffusion of the educational criticism

model for online courses proposed in this dissertation. In time, a similar adoption study of this model should be conducted as well.

Eisner (1985, 1991) has promoted the value of educational criticism in “educating” the perceptions of criticism readers. Potentially, this function could be valuable to both online course practitioners and novices (whether their role is that of instructor, administrator, instructional designer, or student). However, it remains unclear to what degree criticisms do provide this heightened perception. Future studies should examine what effects reading criticisms of online courses have on novice and experienced faculty, administrators, instructional designers, and others.

Further, it is unknown whether individual readers interpret the relative quality of the online course featured in an educational criticism in the same way. Controlled studies in which participants read a criticism, complete a questionnaire about the online course in the criticism, and have their ratings compared would be informative. Attention should be paid to background experience and demographics of participants.

Eisner (1985, 1991) has argued that although educational criticisms of the same setting written by different critics will vary in their style and focus, readers should still recognize in each criticism many of the inherent qualities unique to that setting. This should be examined. Controlled studies should be conducted in which participants read multiple criticisms and then complete a questionnaire that addresses whether the same online course is featured in each criticism. Writing style and format of the criticisms employed as well as the characteristics of the participants should be taken into consideration.

Also, I have argued in this dissertation that documentation of connoisseurship is essential in educational criticisms of online courses. To investigate this claim, criticisms written by connoisseurs with and without documentation should be included along with similarly differentiated criticisms written by novices in a study of the effects of connoisseurship and the documentation of connoisseurship. After reading a criticism, participants should rate characteristics such as the authoritativeness, persuasiveness, and quality of the criticism. Similar studies in which individual elements of my model are selectively removed from criticisms of online courses could also reveal the relative effects of other model elements on the quality, persuasiveness, authoritativeness, etc. of the criticism.

I have suggested that each offering of an online course is unique due to the distinct contributions of a particular assembly of students, faculty, and instructional resources at one moment in time. How different *are* distinct offerings of the same online course (e.g., between two consecutive semesters or one year apart)? Multi-case studies of the same online courses over time could address this question.

In addition to the above proposed studies, more theoretical work is needed on this model for educational criticism. Has too much emphasis been placed on methodological rigor? Should fewer than three validity procedures be required? Are four interpretive perspectives too few, or are four overwhelming to some critics? Should the criteria for selecting interpretive perspectives be amended? In particular, the new formulation focused on “modular reusability” should be developed further. Additionally, parallels between Brand’s (1994) “six S’s” in building construction and the infrastructure and components in online courses should be explored.

Discussion of Implications

The educational criticism model constructed and applied in this dissertation entails certain implications for further consideration. First, there is a fine balance between the needs of practitioner/critics and Eisner's (1985, 1991) intentions vis-à-vis educational criticism. Second, although I have presented a model for implementation by practitioners, there are concerns to address regarding motivation for practitioner implementation on either an individual or organizational level. Third, while the focus of this dissertation has been on the higher education online course context, the Online Course Criticism Model may be applied in other settings as well. Each of these implications will be discussed below.

Balancing Eisner's Intentions with Practitioners' Needs

In his approach to connoisseurship-based educational criticism, Eisner (1985, 1991) has argued against providing critics with prescriptive guidelines for conducting and writing criticisms. In contrast, practitioners who have reviewed drafts of this dissertation and with whom I've discussed the Online Course Criticism Model have agreed that they need guidance in order to plan and execute educational criticisms of online courses. In fact, some have called for *more* prescriptiveness, particularly regarding methodology and overall process, than I have provided in this model. Some practitioners who do not routinely conduct research (i.e., instructional designers) have expressed concerns with knowing how to implement a research case study while other practitioners with research experience (i.e., faculty and administrators) have requested unequivocal procedures so as to execute the precise steps involved in the case study that result in an online course

criticism. My response to both practitioner groups is similar to Eisner's in that I am convinced that critics must make specific methodological decisions based on the unique contexts in which they find themselves (and the particular antecedent knowledge that they bring to the context). Unlike Eisner, however, I believe that the needs for practitioner guidance, methodological rigor, and this model's long term goals require a certain broad prescriptiveness as presented in Chapter 6. It has been my aim to balance these requirements against Eisner's intentions. It is my belief that the resulting model provides appropriate guidance to practitioners, ensures methodological rigor, and facilitates integration between multiple criticisms to form meta-patterns while not hampering the individual writing styles and situational demands of practitioners. However, critics writing individual criticisms of online courses must continually assess whether they are maintaining a balance between the disclosure of their own unique connoisseurship-based perspective and adherence to the model's conventions. Erring on the side of individualization leads to criticisms that lack rigor, credibility, and the ability to integrate with other criticisms while too much emphasis on standardization results in criticisms that are models of systematization yet functionally irrelevant. I expect that with each online course criticism that is published, the tendency toward equilibrium will increase.

Practitioner Motivation

Although I have articulated a model for use by practitioners that facilitates the process of creating educational criticisms of online courses, the fact is that, despite my efforts, the entire process is still challenging and time consuming. What will motivate the

large number of online course connoisseurs to make public their expertise by actually writing online course criticisms remains an open question. As I have discussed the model with practitioners, I have been gratified to confirm that both the Online Course Criticism Model and its goals are valued. However, many of these same practitioners have expressed some hesitation in actually undertaking online course criticisms. Common reasons for reluctance include competing time commitments, inexperience with this mode of inquiry, and uncertainty whether the gains from “having” online course criticisms are worth the practitioner’s personal involvement in writing a criticism. This ambivalence regarding the opportunity costs of writing online course criticisms is reminiscent of the cognitive dissonance experienced by many regular listeners/viewers of public broadcasting. As consistent audience members, such individuals obviously value the programming and benefit from it. Public broadcasting stations are dependent on the financial contributions of their audience to fund their activities. However, it is common knowledge that most regular listeners/viewers do *not* make financial contributions to support public broadcasting. While the product is valued, the majority of audience members find the opportunity costs of financial support to be too high. Campaigns are held regularly to persuade the audience to make contributions by requesting that individuals “convert” their passive audience status to “membership.” The membership metaphor appeals to individuals who share or “believe in” the vision of public broadcasting. Similarly, the most idealistic motivation for practitioners to create online course criticisms is their sharing of the vision for the Online Course Criticism Model as outlined in Chapter 3. For these individuals, the benefits of seeing this vision realized are worth their own investments in writing criticisms or in opening their courses for review.

However, just as public broadcasting stations offer incentives or “premiums” to new members, some practitioners will need to see more tangible benefits arising from their contributions of time and mental effort to make their investment worthwhile.

There are at least four benefits to practitioners in writing educational criticisms of online courses (or in participating as the instructor of the showcased course). First, practitioners have the opportunity to “educate” the uninitiated (e.g., administrators, faculty, instructional designers, or students) with whom they must interact and who are unaware of what is involved in the online course instructional experience. Online course criticisms provide a vehicle for exposing such individuals to the nuances of online courses. Second, writing online course criticisms provides practitioners who have a “story to tell” with a venue for sharing these stories. That is, practitioners with a vested interest in some successful aspect of an institution’s online course activity (whether at the institutional, program, or course level) can showcase a particular online course offering in an online course criticism as a means of telling this story (with the proviso that individual faculty should not write criticisms of their own courses, as discussed in Chapter 6). Examples of such “stories” might include effective instructional models, innovative strategies, learners with characteristics of interest, etc. Third, practitioners with an “advocacy” agenda to advance that is tangentially related to online courses may find online course criticisms to be useful tools. For instance, an experienced online instructor who finds that her administrators do not realize how time consuming it is to teach online might write online course criticisms in order to demonstrate the time demands of an online course (other than her own). Similarly, an instructional designer who works for an institution in which instructional designers are not viewed as peers by teaching faculty

might create online course criticisms to showcase his expertise as an education professional. (Of course, practitioners with such advocacy agendas should disclose their agenda in their online course criticisms.) Fourth, if practitioners have the need or desire to publish original research, online course criticism is a mode of inquiry that allows online course practitioners to conduct and publish research that is focused on an area of activity in which they are already engaged.

While the above discussion addresses the motivations for individual practitioners to initiate online course criticisms, a more systematic approach is found in organizational implementations of the Online Course Criticism Model in which online course criticisms are written in the service of some other initiative of the organization. I will use three active or planned initiatives from the University of Central Florida (UCF) at the time of this writing as examples. The Online Course Criticism Model is not currently connected with any of these initiatives, but I will illustrate how a connection could be made with each. First, at the college/department level there are recurring calls for assistance in determining “quality” in online courses. The focus of some of these has been on “checklist” type criteria that a department chairperson (or her designee) could apply to determine whether the online course is of acceptable standards. Others have emphasized a peer review process in which all departmental faculty are involved. Another group of these has involved the establishment of institution-wide “best practices” as a way of showcasing certain courses. In any of its incarnations, an initiative for evaluating instruction *could* integrate online course criticisms into its processes, but the scale of the initiative would need to match the level of detail afforded in the Online Course Criticism Model. For instance, it would not be feasible to have one or more individuals tasked with

writing a criticism of each online course offered by a department every semester. Nevertheless, the model has much to offer such an initiative. Second, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a requirement for accreditation reaffirmation, is an institution-wide initiative that enhances student learning. UCF's QEP will focus on information fluency. While the QEP is obviously far broader in scope than the focus of the Online Course Criticism Model, a systematic implementation of the model could serve to illustrate how information fluency is manifested in the instructional experiences of online courses offered by the university. Third, at the direction of UCF's provost, the university is in the process of institutionalizing an emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) "... defined as research into [one's] teaching methods and effectiveness, with the ultimate goal of evaluating student learning" (Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Although the emphasis in SoTL is on faculty members' research into their own courses, I will suggest that partnerships between practitioners in which online courses taught by one instructor are featured in criticisms written by another practitioner (whether instructor, administrator, or instructional designer), are a means of bringing about SoTL of online courses within the larger SoTL initiative. Each of these examples of organizational implementation of the Online Course Criticism Model involves the writing of numerous criticisms in support of a larger initiative. Such a systematic approach provides inherent motivation for practitioners to create online course criticisms.

Application to Other Settings

The Online Course Criticism Model ostensibly focuses on enabling educational criticisms of online courses within higher education. However, the model's theoretical

foundation on Schwab's (1973) commonplaces and the generic utility of the four interpretive perspectives afford applicability of the model to other settings. Of course, similar approaches to online courses at other levels (such as the many virtual high schools for example) are well suited to the model as presented. By contrast, content-centric online courses of the types prominent in corporate training settings (among others) do not typically have instructors per se, nor do they usually feature learner-to-learner interactions. Nevertheless, these courses can still be addressed in online course criticisms. In terms of the commonplaces, the course designer(s) may serve as a proxy for the teacher. This substitution carries throughout the interpretive perspectives with possibly one exception. While the social presence of the course designer(s) may be evidenced in the design of the course materials, it is also possible that the content-centric course may feature an avatar (i.e., a virtual "host" for the course) that conveys certain social characteristics representing the persona(s) of the designer(s). (Apart from this, to the extent that the course lacks social interactions, it is likely that it will evidence low social presence.) Despite the fact that the Online Course Criticism Model has been constructed to address online courses, it is also possible that the same framework can be applied to the practitioner study of course settings in other modes as well (e.g., face-to-face courses, interactive television courses, "hybrid" face-to-face/online courses, etc.). One decision that would need to be made by the critic of courses in these other modes is whether to study the course while it is in progress or after the fact through its artifacts (as suggested for online courses in this model). The utility of the Online Course Criticism Model for the presentation of case studies of various instructional contexts may also provide a means for more effective comparisons of courses in differing modes than is currently practiced.

A Final Word

It has been my goal to facilitate the creation of a large number of robust criticisms of diverse online courses by practitioner/connoisseurs from a variety of contexts and to make it easier for these criticisms to be read by and to benefit others. Time and the efforts of many other practitioner/critics will bear out whether I have been successful in reaching this goal.

APPENDIX A: IRB EXEMPTION LETTER



Office of Research

September 8, 2004

Kelvin Thompson
301 Ringwood Circle
Winter Springs, FL 32708

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your protocol entitled, "Constructing Educational Criticism in Online Courses". The IRB Chair did not have any concerns with the proposed project and has indicated that under federal regulations this project using de-identified data is exempt from review by our IRB, so an approval is not applicable and a renewal within one year is not required.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 823-2901.

Cordially,

Barbara Ward, CIM
IRB Coordinator

Copies: IRB File
Dr. Charles Dziuban, Educational Research, Technology and Leadership, LR 107

APPENDIX B: EXCERPT FROM AUDIO FIELDNOTES

[Excerpt](#) (8 minute wav file) of audio fieldnotes from “observation” of course web site

APPENDIX C: EXCERPT FROM TEXT FIELDNOTES

WebCT Broad Observation

6/18/2005

[Notes from memory after 27 minute recording failed.]

After logging in to WebCT, I was presented with three "panes."

Across these three panes, there runs a run vertical panel. At the far left of this panel is a white oval labeled "WebCT" followed by six black text labels (links): "myWebCT," "Resume Course," "Course Map," "Check Browser," "Log Out," and "Help."

Beneath the red panel, there is another neutral color vertical panel. To the far left is a grey, rectangular command button labeled with black text, "Control Panel." To the right of this is the red text label, "English Grammar and Usage." Beneath this label are the visual representations of two tabs (like file folder tabs). One is labeled "View" and the other is labeled "Designer Options." (This is the frontmost tab currently.)

The three panes are a small one on the far left of the screen, a large one in the center of the screen, and a small one on the right side of the screen. The far left pane is labeled "Course Menu" and is followed by several light grey text labels (links): "Homepage," "Course Home," "Class Mail," "Discussions," "Modules," "Quizzes," "Chat," "Whiteboard," "Gradebook," and "Calendar F03."

The center pane is off white in color and matches the visual "look" of the course web site. It is divided into three sections from top to bottom. Each section is preceded by a radio button. The topmost section contains a logo much like the one on the course web site (with the cartoon figure with the binoculars, the sentence diagram, and the name of the course). Beneath the graphic in text is "ln5675a - English Grammar and Usage" and on the next line "Dr. Beth Young" (linked to an email address). This top section ends with a red vertical graphic bar (as on the course web site).

The bottom section of the center pane begins with a vertical, red bar like the one above and is followed by a text label (link) titled "Course Home" and a statement like the one at the bottom of the course web site pages: "This page was last updated on March 11, 2002. Pages are maintained by Dr. Beth Young and the Techrangers at Course Development & Web Services, IT&R. © Copyright 2002, University of Central Florida." (The following names are hyperlinked: Dr. Beth Young, Techrangers, Course Development & Web

**APPENDIX D: EXCERPT FROM NOTES BASED ON CMS
RECORDS**

Field Notes on LIN5675

6/17/2005

Discussion Topics

23 named discussion topics (see below)

Topic	Total Posts	Student Posts	Instructor Posts	Avg Per Person	Avg Per Student	% Posted by Instructor	% Posted by Students	% Total
Expert Style	12	12	0	0.92	1.00	0.00	100.00	100.00
Improving Your Writing/Teaching	30	30	0	2.31	2.50	0.00	100.00	100.00
Punctuation	44	44	0	3.38	3.67	0.00	100.00	100.00
Spelling Reform	63	62	1	4.85	5.25	1.59	98.41	100.00
Passive Voice	35	34	1	2.69	2.92	2.86	97.14	100.00
Phenomenology	34	33	1	2.62	2.83	2.94	97.08	100.00
E-Prime	63	61	2	4.85	5.25	3.17	96.83	100.00
New Words	44	42	2	3.38	3.67	4.55	95.45	100.00
Make-Believe Grammar	18	17	1	1.38	1.50	5.56	94.44	100.00
The Adverbs	351	331	20	70.20	87.75	5.70	94.30	100.00
Word Guess	47	44	3	3.62	3.92	6.38	93.62	100.00
Grammar Instruction	79	73	6	6.08	6.58	7.59	92.41	100.00
The Nouns	242	223	19	48.40	60.50	7.85	92.15	100.00
SenDraw	23	21	2	1.77	1.92	8.70	91.30	100.00
All	1614	1451	163	124.15	134.50	10.10	89.90	100.00
Grammar Cops	47	42	5	3.62	3.92	10.64	89.36	100.00
The Pronouns	64	57	7	12.80	16.00	10.94	89.06	100.00
The Verbs	144	128	16	28.80	36.00	11.11	88.89	100.00
Gender	80	68	12	6.15	6.67	15.00	85.00	100.00
Perceived Grammaticality	67	54	13	5.15	5.58	19.40	80.60	100.00
Help!	51	33	18	3.92	4.25	35.29	64.71	100.00
Main	75	43	32	5.77	6.25	42.67	57.33	100.00
The Adjectives	1	0	1	1.00	#DIV/0!	100.00	0.00	100.00
Notes	0	0	0	0.00	0.00	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!

How many and what kind of discussion postings are there in this course?

What is the nature of the instructor posts in each of these topics? Does the nature differ by topic? When are there more or less postings by role? What is the average # of posts per student vs. the average per person (including the instructor)? If this varies, why does it?

I see that some instructor postings cluster in one time frame? Is this always the case? What does this mean? How are the student postings grouped by time? Are all discussion topics linear? (Are there postings in "earlier" topics later during the term?)

There are a lot of instructor postings (and at many different times) in the private topics!!

**APPENDIX E: TIMELINE EXCERPT WITH RESEARCHER
MEMOS**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Calendar	Due date: First Day Activities	200308250000				
2	Student 1	First access	200308250120				
3	Student 4	First access	200308250734				
4	Student 4	Content Hit	200308250743				
5	Student 4	Content Hit	200308250745				
6	Student 4	Content Hit	200308250751				
7	Student 4	Content Hit	200308250754				
8	Student 4	Content Hit	200308250754				
9	Student 10	First access	200308250822				
10	Student 11	First access	200308250830				
11	Student 7	First access	200308250948				
12	Student 7	Content Hit	200308250948				
13	Student 6	First access	200308251205				
14	Student 5	First access	200308251458				
15	Student 2	First access	200308251525				
16	Student 2	Content Hit	200308251527				
17	Student 10	Content Hit	200308251743				
18	Student 10	Content Hit	200308251749				
19	Student 10	Content Hit	200308251751				
20	Student 10	Content Hit	200308251752				
21	Student 10	Content Hit	200308251753				
22	Student 9	First access	200308251904				
23	Student 9	Content Hit	200308251908				
24	Student 12	First access	200308251913				
25	Student 9	Content Hit	200308251913				
26	Student 5	Content Hit	200308251942				
27	Student 5	Content Hit	200308251947				
28	Student 5	Content Hit	200308251957				
29	Student 2	Content Hit	200308252026				
30	Student 2	Content Hit	200308252030				
31	Student 2	Content Hit	200308252031				
32	Student 11	Content Hit	200308252050				
33	Student 11	Content Hit	200308252051				
34	Student 11	Content Hit	200308252053				
35	Student 11	Content Hit	200308252053				
36	Student 2	Content Hit	200308252101				

When did this course "open?" When was the official first day of classes? Was there an orientation? There are a lot of students who logged in on the same day for the first time.

Do students hold to the same rhythms of course work throughout the course (i.e., middle of the night, morning, afternoon, evening, etc.)?

I'm including the first five content accesses, the last five, items 101-105 (if available) for each student. I can always look up *all* the accesses if needed. There are a lot of records for each student. Since I'm manually converting the timestamps, this is prohibitive.

Are there any content page mods between the first and last student accesses of the course? If so, why might that be? (Check mod timestamps.)

Do all students view the same content *first* or *last*? (Same with discussion

APPENDIX F: POSSIBLE PUBLISHING VENUES

American Journal of Distance Education
Australian Journal of Educational Technology
British Journal of Educational Technology
Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology
Curriculum Inquiry
Education, Communication & Information
Educational Technology Review
Electronic Journal for the Integration of Technology in Education
Innovate Journal of Online Education
Instructional Science
Interactive Educational Multimedia
Interactive Multimedia Electronic Journal of Computer-enhanced Learning
International Journal of Educational Technology
International Journal of Instructional Media
International Journal of Technology and Design Education
International Journal on E-Learning
International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning
Interpersonal Computing and Technology Journal
Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks
Journal of Information Science and Technology
Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication
Journal of Computing in Higher Education
Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia

Journal of Educational Technology & Society
Journal of Interactive Learning Research
Journal of Interactive Media in Education
Journal of Online Learning and Technology
Journal of Research on Technology in Education
Journal of Technology Studies
Journal of Technology, Learning and Assessment
Journal of the Learning Sciences
Kairos: Rhetoric Technology Pedagogy
Learning, Media & Technology
Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration
Open Learning: The Journal of Open and Distance Learning
Quarterly Review of Distance Education
Technology, Instruction, Cognition and Learning
The Internet and Higher Education
Theory Into Practice
United States Distance Learning Association Journal

APPENDIX G: E-MAIL MESSAGE SENT TO JOURNAL EDITORS

SUBJ: Acceptance of Educational Criticisms As Submissions?

Dear Editor:

My dissertation is proposing a model for practitioner inquiry into online courses based on Elliot Eisner's work in "educational criticism." I would of course like to promote to practitioners journals that would be willing to publish educational criticisms of online courses (subject to the articles otherwise meeting your journal's submission requirements). Educational criticisms of online courses are essentially qualitative case studies with an emphasis on description, interpretation, evaluation, and naturalistic generalization. Steps are taken to ensure methodological rigor.

Could you please take a moment to reply to this note with:

- 1) Your willingness to accept submissions of educational criticisms of online courses?
- 2) Your willingness for me to state this fact in my dissertation (making no promises of acceptance, of course)?

Thank you for your time!

Kelvin Thompson

APPENDIX H: WEB SITE FOR THE MODEL

As the Online Course Criticism Model evolves, this information will be shared on the web site listed below. Readers wishing to learn more about online course criticisms or those interested in sharing criticisms that they have written are invited to visit:

<http://onlinecoursecriticism.com>

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