EXPLORING FACTORS THAT LEAD TO PERCEIVED INSTRUCTIONAL IMMEDIACY IN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Instructional communication research clearly indicates that instructor immediacy contributes significantly to effective instruction. However, the majority of immediacy studies have been conducted in traditional (face-to-face) classroom environments. More recently, instructional communication research has focused on assessing the impact of immediacy in online classroom environments. Again, immediacy appears to significantly contribute to effective instruction. The challenge is that most recent immediacy studies use immediacy measurements developed to test immediacy behaviors in face-to-face settings. Considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication in online instructional settings, the behaviors contributing most significantly to perceived immediacy, researchers need to reassess the immediacy construct in online environments. The present research explores and identifies behaviors reported by instructors to establish psychological closeness (i.e., immediacy) in online learning environments and assesses to what extent these behaviors are similar to or different from face-to-face immediacy-producing behaviors.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................................................................... iii

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................................................ vii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................................................... 1

  Overview .............................................................................................................................................................................. 1

  Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................................................................... 2

  Significance of Study .......................................................................................................................................................... 7

  Purpose of Study ............................................................................................................................................................... 8

  Limitations ........................................................................................................................................................................... 9

  Summary ........................................................................................................................................................................... 10

  Definition of Terms .......................................................................................................................................................... 11

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE .................................................................................................................................. 13

  Overview .............................................................................................................................................................................. 13

  Interaction .......................................................................................................................................................................... 13

  Immediacy .......................................................................................................................................................................... 15

  Critiques Associated with Existing Immediacy Measures ............................................................................................ 20

  Immediacy and Online Instruction ................................................................................................................................... 22

  Summary ........................................................................................................................................................................... 27

CHAPTER 3 GENERAL METHOD ............................................................................................................................................ 28

  Overview .............................................................................................................................................................................. 28

  Phase 1 Method ................................................................................................................................................................. 29

  Phase 1 Participants .......................................................................................................................................................... 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Instructor Demographics</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Reported Behaviors</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Student Observation of Instructor Behavior</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Questionnaire Data Analysis</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the early days of distance learning research, reports published in scholarly journals focused on possible uses of technology to promote learning in the online classroom (Arbaugh, 2001) and on the efficacy of online instruction as compared to face-to-face instruction (e.g., Akdemir & Oguz, 2008; Cook et al., 2008; Frydenberg, 2007; McClaren, 2004; Press, 2005; Silver & Nickel, 2005; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, & Wisher, 2006; Smith & Palm, 2007; Vroeginday, 2005). For the sake of this discussion, online instruction within distance education is defined as “a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance...designed to encourage learner interaction and certification of learning” (Greenberg, 1998, p. 36). Today, online instruction research tends to focus on defining theoretical frameworks for explaining online teaching and learning processes and effectiveness and identifying ways distance-learning practitioners can increase the conceptual and methodological rigor of online instruction.

Within classroom communication research, researchers have placed significant focus on instructor immediacy. Instructor immediacy is defined as perceived psychological closeness between instructors and students. As Witt, Schrodt, and Truman (2010) noted, instructor immediacy is one of the most widely researched variables in the last 30 years because the construct has nearly universal appeal for communication research scholars. It is a natural progression that researchers of online instruction should further investigate instructor immediacy as a means for explaining online learning processes and their effectiveness in the
online classroom. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate online interactions and behaviors contributing to a sense of perceived instructor immediacy in the online classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Two topics in the areas of instructional communication research provide the theoretical framework for immediacy as a form of interaction within distance learning practice. From distance education research comes Moore’s transactional distance theory (Moore, 1973; Moore & Kearsley, 1996) and from classroom communication research comes Mehrabian’s (1971) concept of communication immediacy. Originally, a set of basic insights regarding independent learning and learning autonomy, Moore’s transactional distance theory was one of the first attempts to define distance education and formulate a theory about its underlying mechanisms (Gorsky & Caspi, 2005). The theory posits that figurative distance is a current pedagogical phenomenon in distance education. Moore emphasized that the distance in distance education is transactional, not spatial or temporal; that is, distance is a communicative activity involving two or more parties who reciprocally affect one another. This emphasis on distance is significant in that it places transaction at the core of distance education and online instruction. Transactional distance theory also provides an explanation for why the use of electronic communication tools may bridge the transactional distance observed between learners and the instructor in an online environment (Baker, 2010).

Moore (1993) described transactional distance as "the universe of teacher-learner relationships that exist when learners and instructors are separated by space and/or by time" (p. 22). The separation observed between instructors and students, especially in distance
learning environments, leads to communication gaps that contribute to psychological distance and may further lead to potential misunderstanding on the part of students. Moore further explained that transactional distance is a function of three variables: **dialog**, **structure**, and **learner autonomy**. Dialog refers to all forms of interaction “within the context of clearly defined educational targets, cooperation and understanding on the part of the teacher” (Giossos, Koutsoubas, Lionarakis, & Skavantzos, 2009, p. 2). This variable does not necessarily refer to the frequency of interaction, but to the quality and the extent to which it resolves problems for the learner. Structure focuses on the pedagogical design of a course and is described as the level of rigidity or flexibility within a course as well as the ability of the course to accommodate individual student needs (Zhang, 2003). The third variable, learner autonomy, refers to the sense of independence and interdependence perceived by the learner. According to Giossos et al. (2009), this variable is closely related to the learner’s sense of self-direction and is substantially affected by both dialog and structure.

Moore (1993) defined several relationships among the three variables. First, dialog and transactional distance are inversely proportional: “One of the major determinants of the extent to which transactional distance will be overcome is whether dialog between learners and instructors is possible, and the extent to which it is achieved” (Moore, 1996, p. 26). Second, increased structure decreases dialog, which, in turn, increases transactional distance. Finally, Moore suggested that transactional distance and learner autonomy are directly proportional. As structure increases and dialog decreases, learner autonomy must increase.

Moore also indicated that separation between what the instructor knows and what the learner learns leads to discernible patterns of interaction between learners and teachers, a
psychological and communication space between the two, and potential misunderstanding.

This statement provides reasoning for why instructors must bridge the psychological and communication space. Moore proposed three distinct types of interaction in distance education to counteract this transactional distance: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. Learner-content interaction is the process by which students examine, consider, and process the course information presented during the educational experience (Woods & Baker, 2004).

Learner-instructor interaction is communication between the instructor and the student in a course. Learner-learner interaction is communication between two or more students in a course. Such interaction often occurs via asynchronous computer-mediated communication, although it may include other forms of interpersonal and small-group communication, online and offline, that occurs during the duration of a course. (Woods & Baker, 2004, p. 2)

Moore’s transactional distance theory establishes that interaction between learners and teachers is integral to effective online instruction. Due to the separation between online instructors and students, the potential for psychological distance is high, and, according to Moore, dialog provides the means for resolving problems that arise as a result of this distance. One may conclude that it is this interaction that provides the setting for immediacy-producing behaviors.

The second area of research informing the present study is communication immediacy. Mehrabian (1971) defined communication immediacy as verbal and nonverbal behaviors that reduce psychological and physical distance between individuals. Mehrabian suggested that immediacy is one of the major ways affect or closeness is communicated in interpersonal relationships. Verbal behaviors contributing to immediacy include the use of the present tense instead of the past tense, the use of inclusive language, and volunteerism (Gorham, 1988).
Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include eye contact, body position, gesture, facial expression, touch, space, and vocal qualities (Anderson, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987).

Anderson (1979) summarized the impact of immediacy in the following way:

The more immediate a person is, the more likely he/she is to communicate at close distances, smile, engage in eye contact, use direct body orientations, use overall body movement and gesture, touch others, relax, and be vocally expressive. In other words, we might say that an immediate person is perceived as overtly friendly and warm. (p. 545)

Gorham (1988) extended immediacy research by identifying specific verbal behaviors that increase perceived teacher immediacy, or perceived psychological closeness between students and instructors. Simply stated, the immediate instructor is one who is perceived by students as being overtly friendly and warm. Gorham established the teacher immediacy scale by asking students to describe their most effective instructors. Through data analysis, Gorham determined that behaviors contributing to perceived teacher immediacy include the use of personal examples, encouraging students to talk, discussing the issues students bring up in class, and using humor (Gorham, 1988). Within instructional settings, existing research suggests that the most significant teacher immediacy behaviors contributing to student learning are vocal expressiveness, smiling, and a relaxed body position (Richmond, Gorham, et al., 1987; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham, 1988). McCroskey and Richmond concluded, “Immediacy may be one of the most critical variables in determining teacher effectiveness” (1992, p. 118). For the present study, one must note that these behaviors are limited or non-existent in environments lacking a face-to-face component (e.g., online, computer-mediated environments).
The immediacy construct was originally developed within communication research to explain how interpersonal relationships develop. In more recent years, the construct has also been used extensively to explain how relationships develop within instructional settings. With the rapid adoption of the Internet into a mainstream communication medium, research has shifted slightly, emphasizing the dynamics of interpersonal communication interaction in online environments, where the potential for communication and psychological gaps is high (Woods & Baker, 2004). Although the research does not specifically reference immediacy, investigations of traditional immediacy-producing behaviors and discussions of ways electronic communication tools may bridge transactional distance in online environments seem to overlap (Baker, 2008). In particular, researchers have explored how to promote interaction with the understanding that high levels of interaction will produce positive results, particularly results related to social dynamics. Baker made explicit the unstated assumption that “promoting interaction will lead to positive communication behaviors such as instructor immediacy in the online classroom.” Accordingly, much of the literature integrates the concepts of interaction and immediacy into a seamless presentation promoting the benefits of social interaction. As Moore (1996) wrote, the extent to which transactional distance will be overcome is dependent on whether dialog or interaction between learners and instructors is possible and achieved. If the absence of interaction between learners and teachers leads to psychological distance, communication space, and potential misunderstanding, immediacy behaviors that reduce psychological distance may provide a mechanism for overcoming transactional distance in online instruction.
From an interdisciplinary perspective, the field of information science also provides for and expands the theoretical framework for this research. As Williams (2009) notes, information science deals with social, cultural, economic, psychological, and technological aspects of information and the impact of information on social systems (e.g., online educational environments). Information science centers on the representation, storage, transmission, selection, and the use of documents and messages created for use by humans (Buckland & Liu, 1998). Information science further provides a backdrop for how and why electronic communication tools bridge transactional distance and allow instructors and students to establish distributed social systems where the individuals are separated by space or by time. Moreover, information science provides insight and explanation into how instructors purposively construct and deliver documents and messages to students to reduce uncertainty (psychological distance) and address other psychological needs of students.

**Significance of Study**

Instructional communication research indicates that instructor immediacy contributes significantly to effective instruction. In other words, the effective instructor tends to be perceived as immediate. Concurrently, Moore (1996) posited that the separation occurring between instructors and students in online teaching and learning environments may lead to communication gaps, psychological distance, and potential misunderstanding. As more instructors bridge the gap between traditional classroom instruction and online instruction, one may assume that establishing a sense of psychological closeness with students remains crucial. At the same time, we must recognize that traditional, face-to-face, instructional environments and online environments are different contexts. Although a number of recent studies have
addressed immediacy in the online environment using traditional measures designed for face-to-face environments (e.g., Baker, 2010; Bozkaya & Aydin, 2008; Carrell & Menzel, 2001; Conaway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005; Ni & Aust, 2008; O’Connor & Ross, 2004; Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2003), none have specifically focused on redefining the concept of immediacy in the online environment, where those behaviors that are most likely to promote immediacy are absent. This study is significant in that it attempts to identify and organize online behaviors contributing to establishing immediacy in environments where nonverbal communication is virtually nonexistent, verbal communication is limited, and most learner-instructor interaction occurs through computer-mediated communication. Additionally, this study attempts to identify those specific behaviors in online teaching and learning environments that lead to perceived instructor immediacy. Equally important, this study seeks to clarify whether traditional face-to-face behaviors contributing to immediacy are the same as or different from online teacher behaviors.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify instructor behaviors contributing to immediacy in online environments. Moreover, this study seeks to determine whether behaviors employed by online instructors to establish psychological closeness are the same as or different from behaviors identified by existing research in traditional face-to-face environments.

RQ1: What behaviors do instructors report engaging in online learning environments in order to establish psychological closeness with students considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication?
RQ2: To what extent are online behaviors congruent with or different from face-to-face immediacy-producing behaviors?

Limitations

This research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research often depends on the researcher’s interpretations. Therefore, results may be easily influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and idiosyncrasies, which may call into question the validity of the results. The researcher will need to consciously attempt to avoid encouraging one outcome or answer over others.

Because this research is exploratory, extrapolating findings to a larger audience can be difficult. Broad, sweeping recommendations for improving the practice of online teaching and quantitative predictions may be likewise difficult to formulate. To address this issue of generalizability, the researcher will collect and analyze data from multiple populations and data sources to gain multiple perspectives and saturation. Finally, reproducing this study with consistent results may pose a challenge. Another researcher attempting to recreate this particular study may not achieve the same results.

This study is an inductive, qualitative analysis and is limited to college or university instructors who teach online courses or who are considered experts in online education. For participants to be considered an expert in online education, they must possess extensive knowledge of or the ability to facilitate online courses as demonstrated by research, past experience, or occupation. Individuals selected to participate in an interview must have enough direct, practical experience or knowledge of teaching in an online environment to be able to actively respond to questions regarding interaction in the online classroom. Moreover,
participants must have had enough experience that they can share what they consider to be effective techniques for increasing interaction and be able to describe those techniques in rich detail.

This study is further limited to text-based content within online courses. As information science and communication technology advances, newer tools are available in the online instructional environment that allow instructors to incorporate video and audio messages into their online courses, as well as forms of synchronous communication including chat rooms, instant messaging and text-based cellular messages. The study will not consider voice or video announcements, voice boards or pre-recorded instructor videos, or other synchronous communication channels. This study is limited to text-based, asynchronous communication. Additionally, this study will not consider the use of simulated non-verbal behaviors in online environments (e.g., the use of graphics, emoticons, color, and fonts).

Finally, this study is limited to instructional communication research. Although additional theoretical support for the current study can also be drawn from a number of information science concepts (e.g., Krippendorff’s (1977) Information Choices, Desanctis and Pools’ (1994) Adaptive Structuration Theory, Heath and Bryant’s (1996) Uncertainty Reduction Theory, etc.), the present study exists primarily within the field of instructional communication.

Summary

This chapter detailed the origins and importance of interaction and immediacy for online instructional settings in distance learning environments. Two research areas in the field of instructional communication were described to provide a theoretical framework for instructor immediacy as a form of interaction: Moore’s transactional distance theory (Moore,
1973; Moore & Kearsley, 1996) and Mehrabian’s (1971) concept of communication immediacy. The significance of this study was presented for its relevance in adding to the body of knowledge on instructor immediacy. The purpose of this study and a corresponding list of research questions were provided.

Definition of Terms

- Communication immediacy – Verbal and nonverbal behaviors reducing psychological and physical distance between individuals (Mehrabian, 1971). Verbal behaviors contributing to immediacy include the use of the present tense rather than the past tense, the use of inclusive language, and volunteerism (Gorham, 1988). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include eye contact, body position, gesture, facial expression, touch, space, and vocal qualities (Anderson, 1979, Richmond, Gorham, et al., 1987).

- Online learning/distance education – Planned teaching/learning experiences using technology to reach learners at a distance (Greenberg, 1998).

- Online courses – Courses in which at least 80% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

- Face-to-face instruction – Planned teaching/learning experiences in which 0% to 29% of the content is delivered online; this category includes both traditional and Web-facilitated courses (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

- Information science - an interdisciplinary field primarily concerned with the analysis, collection, classification, manipulation, storage, retrieval, movement, dissemination, and protection of information.
- Instructor/teacher immediacy – Specific verbal behaviors increasing perceived psychological closeness between instructors and students. Behaviors contributing to teacher immediacy include using personal examples and humor, encouraging students to talk, and discussing the issues students bring up in class (Gorham, 1988).

- Transactional Distance Theory – The theory that distance is a pedagogical phenomenon existing in both face-to-face and online classes. Moore proposed three variables contributing to transactional distance: dialog, structure, and learner autonomy (1996). Moore also defined three distinct types of interaction in distance education to counter transactional distance: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner (Moore, 1973).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

This review of literature provides two discussions related to the present study. The first discussion provides a fundamental definition of interaction. Subsequent discussion focuses on the historical definitions of immediacy. This review establishes a basis for understanding the construct of instructor-student immediacy in online education and will illustrate that prior research has not attended to the tenets of educational research in online instructional environments. This information provides a framework for the online instructional immediacy construct and its relevancy to the present study.

Interaction

De Verneil and Berge (2000) argued that promoting student interaction through class discussions is integral to effective online learning. Harasim (1989) advanced similar conclusions regarding student interaction:

Knowledge building occurs as students explore issues, examine one another’s arguments, agree, disagree, and question positions. Collaboration contributes to higher order learning through cognitive restructuring or conflict resolution, in which new ways of understanding the material emerge as a result of contact with new or different perspectives. (p. 55)

Kearsley (2000) argued that the role of the instructor in online instruction is to promote high levels of interaction and participation. Parker (1999) made comparable arguments regarding the pedagogical benefits of interaction and added that it is the role of the instructor in online settings to promote such interaction. Parker also noted that the instructor role likely changes as online courses progress. For example, early in a course, the instructor should model
desired behaviors and direct discussions. However, as the courses progresses, the instructor must assume the role of “provocateur” rather than “academician” (p. 16). Parker also encouraged faculty to incorporate personal experiences, use humor, and foster a discussion-friendly environment. De Verneil and Berge (2000) further recommended that instructors ask students to post a biography, request active participation, provide feedback to students about their participation level, and provide a virtual space for socializing purposes. One should note that these behaviors could be classified as immediacy producing.

Berge (1997) conducted a survey of online instructors and found that most instructors purposely fostered a student-centered environment rather than a teacher-centered one. A student-centered environment is an approach to education focusing on the needs of the students. “Predominant among these were discussion, collaborative learning activities, authentic learning activities, and self-reflection” (p. 44). Woods and Ebersole (2003) reported that when instructors encouraged student interactions, their actions contributed to positive faculty-student relationships, positive relationships among students, a sense of community, and satisfaction with the overall learning experience. Woods and Baker (2004) suggested that such efforts could be used to encourage openness—the free expression of opinions—among the students and could lead to a high level of student interaction: “As interaction increases, particularly interaction of the type which promotes immediacy, opportunities for social penetration abound” (p. 5). Social penetration refers to the process by which relationships develop; that is, as relationships develop, interpersonal communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more intimate ones (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Similar to
immediacy, opportunities such as these foster a climate of interpersonal interaction that may have positive benefits for interaction in course-related discussion areas.

Fulford and Zhang (1993) found that the perception of interaction predicted student satisfaction. “This finding strongly suggests that learner satisfaction may be attributed more to perceived overall interactivity than to individual participation” (p. 18). Students’ perceptions of sufficient interaction with instructors and other students were positively correlated with levels of satisfaction with the overall online learning experience (Clow, 1999; Hacker & Wignall, 1997; Phillips & Peters, 1999; Roblyer, 1999). In a related line of inquiry, Arbaugh (2000) discovered that perceived interaction difficulty was negatively correlated with student satisfaction, while perceived instructor emphasis on interaction was positively correlated with student satisfaction. Arbaugh concluded, “The flexibility of the medium and the ability to develop an interactive course environment play a larger role in determining student satisfaction than the ease or frequency with which the medium can be used” (p. 43). Additionally, Zapf (2008) found that academic engagement generally increased as perceived instructor interaction increased; in effect, students experience greater academic engagement as perceived instructor immediacy increases.

**Immediacy**

Within communication research, immediacy is a broadly and thoroughly researched topic and is generally defined as the degree of perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people. Mehrabian (1967) initially defined the construct as stylistic differences in expression from which one may infer individuals’ likes and dislikes. Mehrabian (1971) argued, “People are drawn towards persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and
prefer; they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer” (p. 1). Mehrabian characterized immediacy as behaviors that reduce physical and psychological distance between interactants and indicated that immediacy relates to approach and avoidance behaviors. Therefore, immediacy can be thought of as the perceived psychological distance between two people and immediacy-producing behaviors that reduce this psychological distance.

In more recent years, researchers have clarified that immediacy consists of both verbal and nonverbal dimensions. Verbal behaviors contributing to immediacy include the use of the present tense, the use of inclusive language, and volunteerism (Gorham, 1988). Verbal immediacy appears to be an overtly communicative ability that does not require substantial interpretation on the part of the recipient. In comparison, nonverbal immediacy behaviors include eye contact, body position, gesture, facial expression, touch, space, and vocal qualities (Anderson, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, et al., 1987).

Gorham (1988) extended immediacy research into the educational research arena by identifying specific verbal behaviors that increased perceived teacher immediacy, that is, behaviors reducing psychological distance between instructors and students. Within educational settings, the use of personal examples and humor, encouraging students to talk, and discussing the issues students bring up in class all reportedly contribute to perceived teacher immediacy. A substantial amount of research indicates that the most significant teacher behaviors contributing to student learning include vocal expressiveness, smiling, and a relaxed body position (Richmond, Gorham, et al., 1987; Gorham, 1988; Kelley & Gorham, 1988).
Immediacy research has been thoroughly explored within traditional instructional settings. For example, immediacy has a significant relationship with affective learning. Affective learning describes the learner’s emotions, attitudes, interest, attention, awareness, and values toward learning experiences (Clark, 1999). Based on self-reports, students experience more affective learning, motivation, and positive attitudes with a highly immediate, highly credible teacher and experience less motivation and affective learning when the teacher is perceived as being less immediate and credible (Anderson, 2000a; Anderson, 2000b; Baker, 2004; McDowell, McDowell, & Hyerdahl, 1980; Neuliep, 1997; Plax, Kearney, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1986; Pogue & Ahyun, 2006; Roach, Cornett-Devito, & Devito, 2005; Sorenson, 1989; Witt, Wheeless, & Allen, 2004).

Immediacy appears also to relate to perceived cognitive learning. Bloom (1956) identified cognitive learning as students’ acquisition, understanding, and recall of specific facts, concepts, and theories covered in a course. Researchers operationalize cognitive learning in a variety of ways, including grades on specific assignments, course grades, GPA, and self-reports of students’ own perceptions of learning. When students perceive the instructor to be more immediate, they report higher levels of perceived cognitive learning (Gorham, 1988; King & Witt, 2009; Richmond, McCroskey, et al., 1987). Kelley and Gorham (1988) also offered a four-step model that relates teacher immediacy to arousal. Arousal is related to attention, attention is related to memory, and memory is related to perceived cognitive learning.

Motivation, which mediates the effects of teacher immediacy on cognitive learning, may also increase perceived cognitive learning (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1994; Richmond, 1990). Christophel (1990) found that teacher immediacy affects levels of learning by modifying student
classroom motivation. When students are motivated, they are more likely to learn. Therefore, if highly immediate instructors increase motivation in students and motivation increases learning, immediacy may indirectly increase learning. Interestingly, nonverbal immediacy appears to be more predictive of learning than verbal immediacy (Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 1990). This research leads to the following question: If nonverbal immediacy behaviors are predictive of learning, what is the impact on learning in online environments when nonverbal and other immediacy-producing behaviors are absent? Frymier (1993, 1994) further noted that teacher immediacy, when combined with students’ state motivation, has an even greater effect on learning.

Immediacy interacts with other factors to enhance learning. For example, immediacy may affect classroom attendance (Rocca, 2004; Romer, 1993). Students are more likely to attend class when the instructor is highly immediate. Immediacy also relates to information recall (Kelley & Gorham, 1988). Immediacy increases arousal, which influences attention and recall. Powell and Harville (1990) reported that teachers perceived as highly immediate also tend to be perceived as having higher clarity. Similarly, Chesebro (2003) found that students learned more and possessed higher affect for the instructor and the course material when the instructor was perceived as having higher clarity and nonverbal immediacy. Immediacy is also shown to decrease anxiety (Creasey, Jarvis, & Knapcik, 2009).

Teacher immediacy also serves as the filter or frame for students’ perceptions of their instructors. For example, Thweatt (1999) reported that immediacy directly relates to perceived instructor competence, caring, and trustworthiness. Thomas, Richmond, and McCroskey (1994) demonstrated that immediacy is strongly associated with the socio-communicative style of
teachers. Teachers who engage in specific behaviors described as immediate are perceived as being more competent (both more responsive and more assertive). Responsiveness manifests in behaviors commonly associated with being warm and open, whereas assertiveness manifests itself in taking control and acting as a leader. Teacher immediacy also mediates how students perceive teacher behaviors, motives, and intentions in the classroom (Kelsey, Kearney, Plax, Allen, & Ritter, 2004).

Furthermore, teacher immediacy plays a significant role in managing classroom interaction and minimizing social distance. Immediate teachers gain student attention (Frymier, 1994), which serves as an affective arousal cue for students (Chesebro, 2003; Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001; Titworth, 2001; Witt & Wheeless, 2001). When students pay attention, they are more likely to learn. In a related line of inquiry, Rocca (2008) found that students who perceived their teachers as higher in immediacy were more likely to participate in class, and students who perceived their instructors as verbally aggressive were less likely to participate in class. In other words, immediacy promotes classroom interaction and participation, whereas a lack of immediacy decreases it.

Borrough (2007) observed that students reported a greater willingness to comply with immediate as opposed to nonimmediate teachers, and their willingness to comply was related to cognitive and affective learning. Interestingly, Titworth (2004) discovered that in conditions of high immediacy, when students are more likely to pay attention, students take fewer notes, whereas students take more notes in low-immediacy environments. Immediate teachers also rely on pro-social alteration techniques to maintain control of the classroom environment.
(Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Plax et al., 1986). Moreover, students are less likely to resist highly immediate teachers (Kearney, Plax, Smith, & Sorenson, 1988).

Another impact of immediacy is its effect on students’ willingness to talk in class. Menzel and Carrell (1999) observed that when the instructor was highly immediate, students were more willing to participate. Additionally, an instructor’s verbal immediacy also affects formal and informal contact between students and instructors outside of the classroom (Jaasma & Koper, 1999). This research further supports the link between immediacy and interaction.

An associated concept to immediacy proposed by Kearney is “teacher responsiveness,” that is, how quickly and openly the instructor replies to students. Kearney (Kearney Knutson, 1979; Kearney & McCroskey, 1980) hypothesized that teacher communication styles affect learning. Kearney reported a correlation between teacher responsiveness and student affect and behavioral commitment. Kearney also reported that responsive teachers enhance student participation by reducing communication apprehension, which correlates positively with student learning outcomes. Kearney’s research indicates that teachers who are perceived to employ a responsive (immediate) style enhance student affective learning and behavioral commitment.

Critiques Associated with Existing Immediacy Measures

Most research studies use Gorham’s (1988) immediacy scale, as well as quantitative statistical methods correlating immediacy with other communication concepts. Although the nonverbal immediacy scale is generally accepted as a legitimate measurement of immediacy, several researchers have questioned the validity of the verbal immediacy instrument. Early
versions of the immediacy scale were characterized largely in terms of nonverbal behaviors, such as eye contact, gesture, and vocal qualities (Anderson, 1979; Richmond, Gorham, et al., 1987). Later, and arguing that an instructor’s communicative behaviors would operationally influence students’ perceptions of immediacy, Gorham (1988) characterized verbal immediacy behaviors as the use of the present tense, the use of inclusive language, and volunteerism. Slight variations of the scale followed (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). Robinson and Richmond (1995), however, called into question the face, construct, and predictive validity of the verbal immediacy scale. Robinson and Richmond argued that verbal items in the immediacy scale did not measure immediacy, but instead teacher effectiveness. They recommended that the scale not be used for communication research until the instrument was reformulated and tested for validity (Witt et al., 2010). Hess and Smythe (2001) further criticized the survey development procedures Gorham employed by arguing that asking students to describe their best teachers made the concept of immediacy interchangeable with effective teaching. Hess and Smythe believed that the conceptualization of verbal immediacy was not plausible when one considered Mehrabian’s original formulation of the immediacy construct [behaviors reducing psychological distance].

In response to these critiques, Wilson and Locker (2007) examined the face and construct validity of the verbal immediacy scale by conducting a factor analysis and concluded that verbal items included in the scale were valid. Wilson and Locker proposed that verbal items did not measure teacher effectiveness, but were in fact correlated with teaching effectiveness. Moreover, the verbal items only shared a moderate overlap with teacher effectiveness. The researchers proposed that immediacy consists of four components:
individual friendliness, flexibility during lecture, nonverbal behaviors, and an openness to allowing students to use the instructor’s first name. The authors concluded that immediacy is a multidimensional construct that can be assessed using both verbal and nonverbal items. Because of the absence of nonverbal behaviors in online instructional settings, and in order to address the concerns with existing measures, researchers need to begin fresh and reassess instructor immediacy in online environments. Any reassessment should address those problems identified in the original measure and recognize that online communication environments are different from face-to-face environments.

Immediacy and Online Instruction

Immediacy and its impact on effective instruction has been thoroughly researched. However, the majority of studies on immediacy have been conducted in the traditional (face-to-face) classroom. Online instruction is a mode of delivering instruction via distributed information management system to students who are not physically present in a classroom. The majority of online instruction is text-based and asynchronous. Course materials and communication are delivered via asynchronous technology, such as discussion or message boards, email, course documents, and announcements. Although instructional goals and outcomes may be the same, the online instructional environment is distinctly different from the traditional classroom. Therefore, one would assume that immediacy-producing behaviors are different.

Only recently have studies considered immediacy behaviors in alternative delivery mediums, such as video, television, or Web-based courses (e.g., Carrell & Menzel, 2001; Comeaux, 1995; Hackman & Walker, 1990; LaRose, Gregg, & Eastin, 1998; LaRose & Whitten,
Two trends are apparent. When video is involved in distance learning, students continue to perceive nonverbal immediacy. When instruction is delivered via text-based media, visual cues are reduced as is nonverbal immediacy, and verbal behaviors resembling immediacy take on greater significance. For example, in analyzing telecourses (courses delivered via video or television) and student expectations and perceptions, Hackman and Walker (1990) reported that perceptions of teacher immediacy increased when the telecourse instructor offered individual attention and encouragement to students in classroom broadcasts or videos. Hackman and Walker further suggested that instructors of telecourses would be perceived as more effective if they incorporated a variety of vocal cues into their recorded lectures that made distance students feel as if they were part of the class. Similar research conducted by Carrell and Menzel (2001) support these findings. In the Carrell and Menzel study, students perceived higher levels of immediacy in video-based courses when visual, nonverbal cues were available, and lower levels of immediacy when video-based courses consisted of PowerPoint presentations where no visual, nonverbal cues were available.

Interestingly, Freitas, Myers, and Avtgis (1998) found that distance-learning students did not perceive a significant difference in instructor verbal immediacy when a course was delivered in the traditional classroom as opposed to a telecourse classroom; however, the authors noted that students may perceive instructor nonverbal behaviors, such as gesture, eye contact, and movement, as forced in the telecourse environment (Freitas et al., 1998). In contrast, Witt and Wheeless (1999) determined that distance-learning students expected less nonverbal immediacy from telecourse teachers than on-site students expected of their
instructors. The authors noted that students with previous distance-learning experience had even lower immediacy expectancies than those with no experience (Witt & Wheeless, 1999).

Comeaux (1995), in looking specifically at instructor behaviors, revealed that distance-learning instructors who used a sense of humor in dealing with technical issues with students, embraced a relaxed interpersonal style focusing on the interaction, and involved students directly in the course content were perceived as more immediate and more successful. Comeaux went on to recommend that distance courses be designed so as to bridge “psychological” distance (p. 353). This is similar to Moore’s (1993) proposal that instructors must overcome transactional distance in online environments (learner-content interaction). Based on the definition of immediacy, one might suggest that Comeaux is actually identifying a need for more immediacy in online courses.

In a similar study, Arbaugh (2001) determined that instructors who provide personal examples in online discussions, demonstrate a sense of humor, and invite students to seek feedback from the instructor and from each other were generally perceived as having higher levels of verbal immediacy, which, in turn, increased student motivation. These findings seem consistent with the findings of Wilson and Locker’s (2007) factor analysis. Moreover, Arbaugh (2001) asserted that the online learning environment may actually “reduce social distance between the instructor and students because the online environment is more dependent upon the collective effort of all class participants rather than on the instructor” (p. 48).

Likewise, LaRose et al. (1998) observed that witnessing the text-based, discussion board interactions between the instructor and other students may evoke feelings of closeness with the instructor. The authors coined the term “vicarious immediacy” to describe the behaviors.
This line of inquiry is consistent with the findings of Arbaugh (2000a, 2000b, 2001) and the concept of the collective nature of the online environment. Following this line of research, O’Sullivan, Hunt, and Lippert (2004) found that Web courses based on the telecourse model proved to be as effective, immediate, and enjoyable to learners as live instruction but noted that lower levels of perceived immediacy occurred primarily as a result of a lack of eye contact with the instructor. The authors went on to suggest that teachers can convey immediacy via different mediated channels that otherwise do not convey many of the conventional forms of nonverbal immediacy (O’Sullivan et al., 2004).

LaRose and Whitten (2000) sought to create a model that incorporated not only teacher and student immediacy but also computer immediacy. Within this social cognitive framework, they concluded that there are three possible sources of immediacy in online classrooms: (1) the interactions between teacher and students (teacher immediacy); (2) interactions between students (student immediacy); and (3) interactions with the computer system that delivers the course (computer immediacy). One could question whether this is a similar concept to Moore’s learner-content interaction. LaRose and Whitten further indicated that learning is motivated through social incentives (e.g., approval for good behavior and expressions of interest in the student) or status incentives that recognize or enhance the status of the learner.

In recent years, variations of traditional, face-to-face immediacy studies have been conducted in online environments using the traditional immediacy measure Gorham (1988) developed. For example, online teacher verbal immediacy positively affects student satisfaction (Bozkaya & Aydin, 2008; Johnson & Card, 2007; Ni & Aust, 2008) and perceived learning (Ni & Aust, 2008). Johnson and Card (2007) reported that qualitative and quantitative data indicated
that chronemics—what the authors call temporal immediacy—contributed to higher levels of student achievement, and Kucuch (2009) found that teacher immediacy increased participation. As a side note, several of the cited studies also reported that immediacy impacts discussion frequency and frequency of participation in online discussion boards (Bozkaya & Aydin, 2008; Johnson & Card, 2007; Ni & Aust, 2008).

This body of research seems to indicate that indeed immediacy continues to be an important factor in delivering effective courses online. However, these results are based on measurements that were originally designed to test face-to-face interactions. While the data on verbal immediacy behaviors are somewhat more specific for online courses, limited data are available to determine specifically how instructors achieve immediacy affects in online courses. While recent research supports the notion that immediacy occurs in online environments, researchers must step back from both existing measurements and accepted immediacy producing behaviors to assess whether online behaviors are the same as or different from accepted face-to-face immediacy producing behaviors. If behaviors are similar, researchers should investigate how instructors adapt these behaviors for the online environment. If behaviors are different, researchers must then consider and further research whether these other behaviors contribute to immediacy in online environments.

These lines of inquiry take on additional importance considering that enrollment in distance learning courses and, more specifically, in Web-delivered courses continues to increase (Sloan-C, 2010; U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; Web-Based Education Commission, 2000). Equally important, other studies (Clark & Jones, 2001; Dobrin, 1999; Keogh & Smeaton, 1999) have found student achievement in Web-
based classes as comparable to or better than that found in face-face instructional settings.

Further research (e.g., Parks & Floyd, 1996; Walther & Burgoon, 1992) has indicated that computer-mediated communication channels (i.e., distance learning channels) can be used effectively to initiate, develop, and maintain relationships that are comparable in closeness and richness to conventional face-to-face relationships.

Scholars must then extend the research to more specifically explore interactions in online instructional environments to determine what behaviors appear to contribute to perceived instructor immediacy. Based on this reasoning, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What behaviors do instructors report engaging in online learning environments in order to establish psychological closeness with students considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication?

RQ2: To what extent are online behaviors congruent with or different from face-to-face immediacy-producing behaviors?

Summary

This review of literature established that interaction, overcoming figurative distance, and immediacy are paramount to effective instruction. Further, research suggests that the potential for immediacy exists within and promotes interaction. However, most existing studies of immediacy in online environments use instruments designed for face-to-face settings; thus, the results are similar (i.e., immediacy is important to effective instruction). Research has not addressed the fundamental question of whether immediacy-producing behaviors are the same as or different from existing behaviors, or if, indeed, the behaviors represent a new construct.
The purpose of this research was to explore and identify instructor behaviors contributing to immediacy, that is, perceived psychological closeness between instructors and students in online environments; and to determine whether those behaviors reported by online instructors to establish psychological closeness were the same as or different from behaviors identified by existing research in traditional face-to-face environments. The overall methodological approach for this study consisted of mixed methods. Exploratory and sequential in nature, this study included qualitative interviews, and mixed method, open ended questionnaires. The exploratory, sequential nature of this research allowed me to generalize qualitative findings from a first phase method to help develop and inform the subsequent methods (Greene et al., 1989). This approach to research also allowed collection and analysis of one set of data to occur after the collection and analysis of another.

The research method proceeded in distinct phases. During Phase 1, I created an interview protocol, selected interviewees, and conducted in-depth interviews with online instructors. Then through a rigorous coding process, I formed a checklist of instructor-reported behaviors contributing to immediacy. This process laid the groundwork for a second and third phase. In Phase 2, I proposed performing a directed content analysis of documentary, asynchronous communication (discussion board postings and course documents and announcements) within online courses to determine the number of occurrences of reported behaviors. During Phase 3, I used the checklist of instructor-reported behaviors to create a
baseline assessment of student perceptions of those behaviors reported by instructors to increase immediacy. I then administered the questionnaire to students enrolled in online courses.

This research design had several strengths. First, interviews yielded data with high internal validity about how instructors attempt to bridge the psychological distance that occurs in online courses and increase immediacy. Second, responses collected from questionnaires provided additional validation for the variables identified in Phase 1. Responses from questionnaires also provide data triangulation and insight as to the extent to which reported behaviors affect student perceptions of immediacy.

Phase 1 Method

The purpose of Phase 1 of this study was to answer the research questions exploring how instructors in online learning environments engage in behaviors to establish psychological closeness (i.e., immediacy) with students and to what extent these behaviors were similar to or different from behaviors in traditional, face-to-face classrooms.

RQ1: What behaviors do instructors report engaging in online learning environments in order to establish psychological closeness with students considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication?

RQ2: To what extent are online behaviors congruent with or different from face-to-face immediacy-producing behaviors?

In the present study, I worked from inductive, constructivist principles to gain a deeper understanding (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of the immediacy phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Using a constructivist approach, I asked online instructors from a broad range of
disciplines to describe the behaviors they employ while teaching online courses to convey a sense of immediacy to their students and to promote psychological closeness. Interviews were used to gain a more concrete understanding of how instructors establish a sense of psychological closeness between instructors and students in the online classroom.

I designed the interview protocol in such a way as to identify, describe, and examine behaviors that instructors reported to use to increase psychological closeness, immediacy, or a sense of warmth and friendliness with students. Questions were written ahead of time and were open-ended in nature. As necessary and appropriate, I asked additional probing questions to clarify meaning and provide additional detail.

Phase 1 Participants

Participants consisted of a broad array of undergraduate and graduate instructors from a variety of colleges and universities, both public and private, who teach online courses. The selected sample was both convenient and purposive. I recruited participants from social and professional networks and chose those individuals who were most accessible and willing to participate in the study. From the pool of volunteers, those individuals selected to participate in an interview possessed enough direct, practical experience or knowledge of teaching in an online environment that they could actively respond to questions regarding interaction and instructor behaviors in the online classroom.

This research was conducted with the approval of the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). All interviewees were assured of confidentiality, the option to decline participation, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any point. The interviews were etic in nature in
that the interview questions were culturally neutral. Demographic information including age, gender and ethnicity were collected but were not considered in the immediate study.

Phase 1 Procedure

For general immediacy, online instructors were asked to identify and describe the types of interactions experienced within their online courses. Instructors were then asked to identify and describe how they overcome psychological distance within an online course and how they encouraged students to get to know participants in the course and the instructor. Over a two-month period, I collected data using one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. At the time of each interview, participants were provided with an informed consent form prior to collecting data, and anonymity and confidentiality of subjects were guaranteed. Interviews were conducted via Skype, a voice-over-IP software service and instant messaging client that allows users to communicate with peers by voice over the Internet using a computer and microphone. The audio interviews were recorded for later transcription and analysis using the Evaer software program. All participants agreed to be recorded with the exception of one.

I anticipated that 15-20 interviews lasting on average 30-35 minutes would provide a minimum sample size to achieve saturation (Guest, et al., 2006). At seventeen interviews and approximately 604 minutes of recording, the data returned no new codes during analysis and saturation was achieved (Bertaux, 1981; Cresswell, 1998; Guest, et al., 2006). At the same time, I took copious notes and observations as the interviews occurred and later compared the notes against the data sets. At the conclusion of each interview, data were transcribed using a third-party service. The transcription service signed an academic non-disclosure form prior to gaining access to or transcribing any audio recordings. Once transcribed, the total number of pages to
be analyzed was 307, equating to an average of 18 pages per interview. Transcripts of interviews were then loaded into MAXQDA, a software program used for qualitative and mixed methods data analysis.

Phase 1 Data Analysis

This study focused on identifying how instructors establish immediacy in the online classroom. Therefore, I conducted a content analysis of transcribed interviews to develop a list of variables to describe instructor behaviors that are expected to promote teacher-student immediacy (Krippendorf, 2013). Through an inductive process, the data collected from interviews and related to the immediacy process were coded into categories. Coding is the process of dividing the data into segments and then scrutinizing the data for categories or themes and occurs in distinct phases: Open coding, Axial coding, and Selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding focused on identifying, naming, categorizing and describing immediacy phenomena found in the text. During open coding, data was broken into segments that describe the phenomena (e.g., immediacy behaviors). Next, I labeled these parts using broad, categorical names. The next coding step was axial coding—the process of relating codes to each other through inductive and deductive reasoning. During axial coding, I organized the open codes and grouped them into broader, abstract categories of meaning, function, and purpose. I did not perform selective coding for this data set; however, I do propose and discuss selective, core categories of behaviors in the discussion section of this paper. I coded the seventeen interviews over a two-month period.

The coding sequence for this content analysis was as follows: select an interview, review the data to identify concepts or ideas that seem important, and highlight data that relates to
the concept being studied. Next, I created open codes, noted the codes in the interview, and created a list of defined codes (codebook) for the entire interview. I then performed axial coding to develop a robust codebook. After conducting inter-rater reliability methods, I re-analyzed all transcripts using the revised axial codebook.

For the sake of coding reliability (Hruschka et al, 2004), I randomly selected three transcripts to be coded by a colleague with a similar academic background and research agenda. The colleague coded three transcripts randomly and independently. I then compared the two codebooks to ensure that the codes corresponded to one another and were consistent. Inter-rater reliability was 95%. Of 75 segments highlighted in three documents, approximately 54 pages, 71 codes were similar or had significant overlap. I discussed the remaining 4 codes with the independent coder and made adjustments to the descriptions of the codes. The colleague and I coded one additional transcript using the revised codebook and compared the results to establish inter-rater reliability. I then coded the remaining transcripts using the final codebook to represent those behaviors reported by instructors to contribute to instructor immediacy. Analysis of data initially revealed fifteen behaviors that instructors reported employing to overcome psychological distance within their online courses.

Trustworthiness and credibility were addressed by establishing content validity. Content validity occurs when a sample of items truly reflects items in a certain topic (Salkind, 2004). Content validity is usually established by working with content experts who confirm that the items are appropriate for the topic. For this study, data and interpretations were provided to study participants who confirmed the credibility of the immediacy items (Cresswell, 2008). Additionally, one external content expert who was not involved in the interviews reviewed the
list of items to further establish validity. The external content expert also confirmed the credibility of the immediacy items. At the conclusion of Phase 1, I formulated propositions and compared these to immediacy behaviors identified in existing literature to determine whether the behaviors were similar or different.

**Phase 2 Method**

The purpose of Phase 2 of this study was to clarify and expand the checklist of immediacy-producing behaviors identified in Phase 1 and to provide further evidence in support any preliminary answers to Research Question 1:

**RQ1:** What behaviors do instructors report engaging in online learning environments in order to establish psychological closeness with students considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication?

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the completion of this phase was not feasible.

During Phase 2, I proposed performing directed content analysis of text-based, asynchronous communication (discussion boards and announcements) that occur in online classrooms to determine the number of occurrences of those behaviors reported by instructors in Phase 1. When performing directed content analysis, initial coding of data starts with a theory or, in this case, relevant findings from a previous study (Zhang & Wildemoth, 2009) to predict the variables of interest in the current method. For this study, I intended to analyze text-based, online course communication via discussion board postings and course announcements using the coding scheme developed in the first phase of the study. This methodological approach would have allowed me to accumulate and compare the data collected in the present analysis against data from the previous phase of the study (Miles &
Huberman, 1994). Moreover, this data collection would have provided additional detailed support, practical examples, and rich descriptions of those behaviors reported by instructors to promote warmth and friendliness.

Phase 2 Documentary Evidence

I proposed analyzing asynchronous components of 8-10 online courses offered at a variety of colleges and universities. Because the focus of this research was on instructor behaviors and not content, courses for analysis were to be selected from a broad range of topics and disciplines including undergraduate and graduate level courses. To minimize risks to students, documents for the content analysis were to be collected at the end of the semester after the course was complete and course grades had been posted. To avoid bias, courses selected for analysis were to have been taught by instructors who were not involved in the Phase 1 interviews. Components to be analyzed were to consist of discussion boards, general informational announcements, and introductory letters and information provided by the instructor to students. I intended to obtain electronic files for all asynchronous components for each course and perform content analysis using a similar coding procedure to that developed in Phase 1 of the study.

This research was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board. Those instructors who elected to have their courses analyzed were assured of confidentiality, provided the option to decline participation, and informed of the ability to withdraw from the study at any point. Every text-based, discussion posting was to be de-identified by removing the participant's name and assigning participant numbers to instructors to protect their privacy.
Phase 2 Data Analysis

Since the goal of this research was identify and categorize instances of an identified phenomena, I proposed reading all documentary evidence and highlighting all text that appeared on first impression to represent instructor behaviors that promote immediacy. I would then have loaded the documents into MAXQDA for data analysis and looked for themes in the form of words, phrases, or sentences that reflect or exemplify the proposed behaviors identified in Phase 1. Next, I would have coded all highlighted passages using the coding procedure identified in Phase 1. Any text that could not be categorized with the initial coding scheme would have been given a new code. I would have recorded a description of observed events and processes, as well as reflective notes about emerging codes, themes, and concerns that arose during the observation. Evidence would then have been presented using rank order comparisons of frequency.

As proposed, the data gathered in this phase would have guided the discussion of findings. The collected data would also have been used to provide rich descriptions and practical examples of reported behaviors. This purpose of this process was to increase the transferability of the research findings to different settings and contexts.

Phase 3 Method

The purpose of Phase 3 was to confirm and augment the findings from Phase 1 and to increase trustworthiness and credibility of the results. As proposed, this phase was to occur concurrently with Phase 2. Using the checklist of instructor-reported behaviors identified in Phase 1, I created an original baseline assessment of student perceptions of said behaviors. Using a mixed methods approach, the questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first
section, students were asked to confirm whether they had observed a specific instructor behavior in their most recently completed course. In the second section, students were asked to indicate how frequently they observed the instructor behavior, and in the third section, students were asked to describe which instructor behavior had the most influence on their perceptions of the instructor as being open, warm, and friendly.

Phase 3 Participants

Participants in this phase of the study consisted of college and university students who had previously enrolled in and completed at least one online course. For this phase, I intentionally recruited participants who had experienced the central phenomenon being explored (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010) by taking an online course. To avoid any potential effect resulting from participating in the study, I recruited students from different schools than those where the instructors involved in Phase 1 taught. Respondents were asked to complete a brief questionnaire using the online survey tool www.surveymonkey.com. Participation in the survey was voluntary. All respondents were assured of confidentiality and given the option to decline participation. Lacking prior rationale, demographic information, such as class rank, age, gender, or ethnicity, was collected but was not be considered in the present study.

Phase 3 Procedure

The procedure for Phase 3 consisted of developing and administering an original questionnaire to students who identified themselves as previously having been enrolled in at least one online course. Scale development followed the procedures first identified by DeVellis (1991). I generated an item pool from the data collected and analyzed in Phase 1. In the first section of the questionnaire, the item pool consisted of short items, written at an appropriate
reading level, with each item asking a single question. Using simple yes/no questions, respondents were asked to indicate whether they observed a specific instructor behavior being demonstrated in their most recently completed online course.

In the second portion of the student questionnaire, subjects were asked to indicate the frequency with which the instructor in the class used each behavior presented. Frequency scores ranged from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost all the Time). This section also included the response option “I did not observe this behavior.” The final question in the survey was open-ended and asked students to describe which instructor behaviors “had the most impact on perceptions of the instructor as being open and friendly.”

Phase 3 Data Analysis

Because the purpose of Phase 3 was to provide additional support for the findings from Phase 1 and to increase trustworthiness and credibility for the results, only simple data analysis was performed. For the first section of the questionnaire, Yes/No responses were collected and tabulated. For the section two of the questionnaire, descriptive statistics including Mean Scores were calculated. For the third section of the questionnaire, a list of the most influential behaviors was created.
Summary

This chapter detailed the methodological approach for this study. During Phase 1, I created an interview protocol, selected interviewees, and conducted in-depth interviews with online instructors. Then through a rigorous coding process, I formed a checklist of instructor-reported behaviors contributing to immediacy. In Phase 2, I proposed performing a directed content analysis of asynchronous communication (discussion board postings and course documents and announcements) within online courses to determine the number of occurrences of reported behaviors; however, completion of this procedure was not feasible. During Phase 3, I used the checklist of instructor-reported behaviors to create a baseline assessment of student perceptions of those behaviors reported by instructors to increase immediacy.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents three discussions. In the first discussion, the results of Phase 1 data analysis are presented and discussed. In the second discussion, the results of Phase 2 are discussed as well how a lack of data from this phase impacts the overall credibility of this research. In the third discussion, the results of Phase 3 data analysis are discussed and contrasted with the results from Phase 1.

Phase 1 Results

In Phase 1, I interviewed online instructors about what actions they took in their courses to promote immediacy with their students. Selected participants had on average a total of 16.5 years of teaching experience and 8.5 years of teaching experience in online environments. Instructors who had limited experience teaching online courses were excluded from the study because they may not have been able to provide the same level of detail or to discern the more effective techniques from less effective ones. In this study, limited experience was defined as less than 1-2 years’ experience teaching online courses. The rationale for this decision was that new online instructors are more likely in their first one to two semesters to be learning how to use the distance learning platform. Moreover, one to two semesters of teaching online may not provide enough practical experience for new instructors to learn and understand which behaviors, patterns and personal preferences are most effective for that instructor in managing and facilitating interaction and dialog in an online course.
Participants came from a variety of teaching disciplines including education, nursing, library and information science, biology and communication studies. Participants taught for public and for-profit colleges and universities in the United States, as well as two-year institutions, four-year institutions, and graduate schools. Nine participants had terminal degrees in their field of study and seven held master’s degrees. The average age of participants fell between 46-50 years of age. Of those selected, 15 participants were female and two were male. Two participants identified themselves as Native American and 15 identified themselves as White. All participants were provided with an informed consent form prior to collecting data, and anonymity and confidentiality of subjects were guaranteed.

Table 1

Instructor Demographics

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Online Teaching</th>
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</table>

Average 16.5 8.5
Once data collection was complete, I transcribed the interviews and performed qualitative content analysis on the transcripts. Content analysis of transcribed interviews revealed 393 segments initially organized into 15 categories. These categories, or behaviors, are described and presented in ascending order from the least frequently appearing to the most frequently appearing. All behaviors with the exception of one reflect instructor communicative actions intended to promote closeness with students. Two codes were discarded after additional review because one code appeared to be a manifestation of the immediacy construct rather than a set of behaviors that contribute to immediacy and the other appeared to be a manifestation of teacher clarity.

Table 2

*Reported Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Total Number of Occurrences</th>
<th>Number of Interviews in which behavior appeared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification *</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Behaviors</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of First Names</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Students</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachable*</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalize</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define Expectations</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Language</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* excluded from final list.

Clarification. The first of fifteen, and the least reported behavior reported by instructors to promote a sense of psychological closeness with students, was *clarification*. Clarification appeared 12 times in five different interviews. Clarification refers to the act of making course
content including assignments, lectures or lessons more clear, intelligible and free from ambiguity. Clarification can also be described as an attempt by the instructor to minimize confusion. Data analysis revealed that clarification behaviors may manifest in three forms. First it manifests as responding to questions or inquiries from students. Second, the instructor may perform communicative acts such as previewing topics or assignments, intentionally using simple language, providing samples and relevant examples, etc. In its third form, the clarification behavior can manifest as an instructor asking students if they understand content or assignments, if they have questions, or inviting students to request additional information. This behavior may overlap with Teacher Clarity (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997; Simonds, 1997). Chesebro and McCroskey define teacher clarity as “the process by which an instructor is able to effectively stimulate the desired meaning of course content and processes in the minds of students” (1998, p. 262).

Frequency. The second least occurring behavior was frequency. Frequency appeared as a coded segment 12 times in data analysis and was mentioned in interviews with four different instructors. Frequency refers to the rate of occurrence of instructors responding to or interacting with students, whether in public forums such as discussion boards or private mediums such as email or written feedback on assignments and other forms of assessment. According to one instructor, “Frequency [of interaction] has to reach across all of the different modes of communication. It can’t just be in the discussion forum. It also has to come through on assignments and email and responding to those as well. I give feedback on every assignment, every discussion board, every week.” Frequency can also be described as regular, purposeful and intentional interaction between students and the instructor. For example, by
logging into the online classroom and by regularly and intentionally posting messages and other communications to students, the instructor establishes a presence in the course. As another instructor suggested, regular and purposeful interaction with students was one of her best tools in promoting “closeness” with her students as well as a “large quantity of interaction” between her students.

Responsiveness. **Responsiveness** appeared as a code in the data analysis 15 times and was mentioned in five different interviews. Instructors described responsiveness as the act of reacting to or replying quickly or supportively to student inquiries and questions. According to one instructor, “[Students] need to know that they can get a hold of you within their sense of urgency time. When they reach out it’s because they really need to know something right then as far as an assignment or an emergency.” Another instructor described being responsive as conveying to students a sense that “what they’re doing is important and that there is somebody there, that the faculty member is there and present. You know present.”

Humor. The use of **humor** as a communicative behavior appeared 19 times in data analysis and appeared in nine transcripts. It should be noted that the interview protocol included a specific question regarding the use of humor. The 19 occurrences of humor include only those instances where instructors reported that they intentionally used humor. As the analysis revealed, humor as an intentional communicative act refers to the tendency of instructors to create particular cognitive experiences that provide amusement or provoke laughter. According to instructors, when used appropriately, humor can lighten a mood or present the instructor in a more human light. For example, one instructor described her use of humor as a “way of helping [students] feel comfortable in communicating with me.”
However, most instructors reported using humor sparingly and cautiously as it can have an opposite effect.

The type of humor I think I use the most is more self-deprecating. There are certain protocols that we should be following to keep things as professional as possible but at the same time I like to add in humor where appropriate to provide levity.

More specifically, a number of instructors indicated that when they made humorous statements, the statements were usually directed at themselves so as to avoid isolating students or making statements that could be misinterpreted:

[Humor] is good but you really have to be careful with humor in an online classroom because it can definitely be misinterpreted. I tend to keep away from humor that can be misinterpreted or humor that targets a specific group.

Modeling behaviors. *Modeling behaviors* appeared as a coded segment 19 times in nine different interviews. Data analysis revealed that modeling behaviors is an act whereby the instructor deliberately displays a desired behavior to students who then may learn that behavior and mimic or carry it on. One instructor described this behavior as *walking the walk*:

“If you expect students to communicate with you in a timely and professional manner, I think [instructors] have to do the same.” Examples of modeling behaviors included posting initial messages, initiating communication, responding to messages in a timely manners, writing in a scholarly format, and setting an appropriate tone of voice. Data analysis also revealed that instructors are more likely to model desired behaviors early in a course, especially when students are new to distance learning, but then “pull back” later in a course when students have a better understanding of what are desired behaviors. As one instructor described, in the early portion of the course, he models behaviors, but at about midpoint in the course, he becomes a facilitator.
Use of first names. The interview protocol for this study included a specific question regarding the use of first names. Therefore, the 23 coded segments that appeared in nine different interviews included only those responses where instructors described when and how they used first names, as well as why instructors felt that the use of first names was important. Several instructors indicated that using a student’s name personalized the experience for the student and encouraged engagement and collaboration. As one instructor noted, “Using somebody’s name is one of the most personal things you can do.” Instructors indicated that they made an effort to address students by their first names in all communication settings including message postings, in email communications and in feedback written on assignments and assessments.

Interestingly, whether the instructor called students by their first names appeared to be highly influenced by the academic field in which the instructor taught. For example, in social sciences and technical fields such as Communication Studies and Nursing, instructors were more likely to call students by their first name. However, in the field of Education almost all instructors referred to students by their formal or sir names. When asked to explain this phenomena, one Education instructor explained that once the “students became classroom teachers, their students will be required to call them by their last names”, and therefore, the use of formal names in the university setting reflected the expectations of their future profession. Other instructors indicated that the use of formal names was a sign of professionalism, respect and formality.

Acknowledging students. The next communicative behavior reported by instructors to promote a sense of psychological closeness with students was acknowledging students. This
code appeared 24 times in seven different interviews. Acknowledging students appears to take two forms. The first form is showing awareness that a communication such as a message or email has been received or noticed. This form of acknowledging students appears to be mechanical in nature in that it is simply the act of recognizing or confirming receipt of a communication. In its second form, acknowledging students appears to be more affective in that the instructor shows appreciation or expresses gratitude for a student’s question or contribution. Instructors reported that the acknowledgement may be private (“I can see you worked hard on this assignment” in an email response or in assignment feedback) or public (posting a message to a discussion board). As one instructor described, acknowledgement of students, whether affirmative or negative, may also contribute to establishing a sense of validation for students:

My job as an instructor is to validate that person’s opinion matters. Even if I don’t like [the opinion] and disagree with it, I validate that their opinion has a place in our course; I express appreciation for the fact that they have brought that opinion to the discussion. And then I move on from there to either agree with it or to constructively disagree with it and try to redirect the conversation by making students feel like they matter.

According to instructors, both forms of acknowledgement (mechanical and affective) serve the purpose of recognizing students and their contributions. To a lesser extent, acknowledgement can also refer to noting and then correcting any errors that are discovered in the course materials.

Monitoring course progress / being attentive. The next behavior is monitoring course progress. This code appeared 25 times in nine different interviews. As revealed in data analysis, monitoring refers to observing and checking the progress or quality of student activity over the duration of a course and being attentive to student activities. This behavior does not
necessarily appear to be direct communicative act, but more of an indirect act. In other words, the instructor performs activities (posting short messages, announcements, liking comments, etc.) to indirectly communicate to students that he or she is in the online classroom, aware, and paying attention to student activities. As one instructor stated, she wanted students to know “I am online. I am listening just as if I was in a classroom.” Another instructor described how she monitored student activity and progress through her grade book: “I’ll go in through the grade book and individually e-mail each student that doesn’t usually make a 75 or better on my exams... and check base with them to see, was there any problem, was there some issues, some content that we need to discuss.”

On the surface, the monitoring behaviors appears to overlap the acknowledging behaviors. However the two have different intents. The acknowledgement behavior affirms that the instructor is paying attention to student communications whereas the monitoring behaviors is reflective of the instructor monitoring general online classroom behaviors and progress.

Approachability. The next behavior identified in data analysis was approachability. This code occurred 27 times and appeared in eight different interviews. In the context of this study, approachable refers to student perceptions of the instructor as being, for example, easy to talk to or deal with, able to be reached or accessible. When asked to describe how instructors established themselves as approachable, instructors indicated that they might establish an open door policy whereby they invite students to discuss any issues or concerns. Other behaviors included the use of informal and friendly salutations, or the sharing of anecdotes. One instructor expressed that “being approachable” means “establishing a human connection”
with her students whereby students “feel comfortable approaching me.” Collectively, it appears that approachability consists of a variety of direct and indirect communicative behaviors that, when combined, or in conjunction with one another, establish a sense of being approachable. Many of the segments coded as being approachable were also cross-coded as other behaviors (e.g., use of first names, acknowledging students, personalization, etc.). This leads me to suggest that alternatively, being perceived as approachable, that is, friendly and welcoming, may be another expression of immediacy and may occur as a result of the other behaviors presented in this study.

Showing empathy. Showing empathy refers to attempting to intellectually identify with students’ experiences, thoughts, feelings and attitudes. This code occurred 29 times and appeared in 10 interviews. Showing empathy appears to manifest in how instructors respond to students, especially in situations when students are facing personal challenges outside of the online classroom or difficulties in completing coursework. For example, as one instructor described, “…the first thing that comes to my mind [when dealing with student issues] is something that I’ve typed many times, I totally understand.” In this example, the instructor is describing how she attempts to give non-traditional students “a little bit of leeway to get things done” because she understands that many students complete their coursework after a “five-day, eight-hour workweek.” As another instructor described why she tries to show empathy to students, “when I was a student myself, I easily remember how it felt to have that urgent question and really desire to have an immediate response from a professor, and how frustrating it is when you didn’t get that response. And finally, as one other instructor described
his approach to showing empathy: he reflects on actions that would have caused him, as a student, to “disconnect” from the course content, and does the opposite.

Personalization. The next code was personalization. This code occurred 29 times and appeared in 9 interviews. Personalization appears to occur in one of two ways. First is personalizing messages to students. When personalizing a message, the instructor responds to the student in such a way to show that the message is intended for that particular student. As one instructor described personalization, “It makes them feel like I’m talking to them.” For example, the instructor may include the student’s name in the salutation, the instructor may reference a unique attribute of the student; that is, a comment the student made or some shared knowledge between the two, or the instructor may reference a particular point the student made in a posting or assignment. One instructor shared the story of how one of her former students was an avid fisherman. Whenever she addressed messages to him, she inquired about fishing conditions. By doing so, she indicated that she was writing the message specifically to that student.

A second form of personalization is sharing personal experiences to add context to the course content. For example, an educational leadership instructor recounted how she frequently shares stories about serving as an expert witness to a number of attorneys and courts. By sharing her personal experiences, she was able to provide additional perspectives regarding how educational laws may be tested or applied in the court system. A nursing instructor indicated she frequently shares the mistakes she made as a new nurse. By sharing her own experiences (e.g., mistakes), she adds perspective to the course content and ideally prevents student nurses from making the same mistakes. And finally, as a number of other
instructors indicated, sharing personal experiences seems to break down the distance that may exist between instructors and students. For example:

I try to share a lot about my life and how things are for me. Like for example, we are having a snowstorm right now. If I was teaching face-to-face, I might share ‘Oh, wow, look it’s snowing outside and I’m glad I’m inside working on this.’ So to sort of give them that little glimpse into my stuff, my life, my world... I think that helps break down a bit of that distance where they feel that we are in something together.

In another example:

I bring stories into my classes, things that I do with my kids or in my other classes, I bring in stories of how I’ve gotten into horrible fights with my wife. I think that little bit of personal revelation, and as an instructor when I make myself vulnerable by sharing these personal stories, I think it communicates a pretty strong sense of warmth to the students rather than just making it so academic and stuffy and theoretical. And I think things like that really, really help. They contribute to that sort of that humanness that reaches through, you know, the circuits in the network to make it much more interesting than just a faceless person and some text that you see in a course site.

Encouraging students. Encouraging students appeared as a code 30 times in nine different interviews. This instructor behavior refers to the act of providing supportive, motivational statements or praise to students in order to strengthen or build their determination, hopefulness, or confidence; and thereby increasing the likelihood that students will complete activities, assignments, or even the course. Based on instructor comments, encouragement can further be broken down into three types of activities. The most common type of encouragement appears to be providing supportive feedback to students (e.g., “That was a great observation”, “I really liked what you had to say...” or “I know you can do this”). The second most common type of encouragement appears to be providing guidance and direction or “coaching” (e.g., “telling them what they did right first and then saying you might want to change this”). The third form of encouragement is closely related to coaching but comes in the form of soliciting information (e.g., tell me what you are thinking so I can give you
some recommendations/advice). Generally speaking, instructors’ purpose in using encouraging
statements to students is to reinforce the notion that students can successfully complete their
tasks and assignments. As one instructor shared:

[Encouragement is] letting [students] know what they have to say is important; building
their confidence, diminishing their errors, definitely telling them what they did right and
then what they might want to change... instead of having that big like “I know and you
don’t know” thing. It is also offering them additional information like, you know, so and
so; you might want to look at this link or something like that so they feel like they are
getting personalized attention.

As another instructor noted, providing encouragement to the individual student also has the
benefit of solidifying “the whole group.”

Timeliness. *Timeliness* refers to instructors responding to students in an appropriate,
suitable amount of time. In other words, a timely response is well timed. This code occurred 41
times in eleven different interviews. This behavior appears to be an indirect communicative act
in that, although it may involve messages, the behavior has more to do with response times.

“Responding quickly, whether it is by email, whether by responding to the discussion board, or
posting an announcement, that makes an impression on students. They feel like you are there
for them. You are in tune with them. They don't have to wait on stuff” is how one instructor
described being timely in her responses to students. “The online learner feels disconnected the
longer they have to wait for a response.” A number of instructors indicated that they set
timeframes for when students should expect responses to questions or messages:

[Students] need to know that they can get a hold of you within their sense of urgency
time, because when they reach out it’s because they really need to know something
right then. So response time is huge as far as them feeling that there is someone behind
the screen. For myself I set this timeframe within six hours. As long as it’s not in the
middle of the night, you are usually going to get a response within an hour.
Setting expectations. Instructors reported that one of the first communication acts in a new course is *setting expectations*. This code occurred 51 times in eleven different interviews. Setting expectations refers to defining the anticipated behaviors and characteristics of both the instructor and students as they relate to student interaction, submitting assignments, etc. In some cases, setting expectations referred to how frequently and by when students were expected to interact on discussion boards, and in other cases, setting expectations referred to the quality and brevity of student responses. For example, in the first reference, instructors may define expectations for when students post original discussion board messages (e.g., by Tuesday, 11:59 PM) and by when they should reply to fellow students’ postings (e.g., by Friday, 11:59 PM). In the latter reference, instructors may set expectations or requirements for the length or quality of original discussion board posts (two paragraphs addressing a specific topic or provocation, written in APA format with one citation) and replies to other students (e.g., at least one paragraph; more comprehensive than ‘I agree’ or ‘I like your post.’). Setting expectations can also refers to defining the limits and boundaries of acceptable student behaviors (e.g., scholarly responses, academic writing, etc.).

Casual language. The most widely reported instructor immediacy behavior was *casual language*. Casual language refers to the quality or tone of the instructor’s written words. Casual language can be further described as narrative, informal, or conversational. Instructors reported that formal course content such as lectures or presentations tended to be more academic and scholarly in style, whereas less formal communication with students with students (via email or announcements) or while interacting with them on discussion boards was less formal and frequently more intentionally informal or conversational.
I really strive hard to make sure that the language I use in my responses and my announcements and everything is very conversational. So that as [students] are reading it, they feel like I’m talking with them, not down to them.

In another example:

I really try to add voice in my messaging, in my text messaging, my emailing messaging so that they can hear a friendly person saying this to them [students].

To a lesser extent, the use of casual language can also include to the use of emoticons, emojis, or other textual portrayals of mood or facial expressions in the form of icons to represent nonverbal aspects of language.

Phase 2 Results

The purpose of Phase 2 of this study was to clarify and expand the checklist of immediacy-producing behaviors identified in Phase 1 and to provide further evidence to support any preliminary answers to research question 1. During Phase 2, I proposed performing directed content analysis of text-based, asynchronous communication (discussion boards and announcements) that occur in online classrooms to determine the number of occurrences of those behaviors reported by instructors in Phase 1. The completion of Phase 2 was not feasible.

I recruited participants via social and professional networks. While initially, a number of faculty members expressed interest in participating in the research, their institutions were hesitant to allow a researcher unassociated with that particular college or university access to online courses out of concern for violating FERPA rules and regulations. Frequently the institution did not have an awareness of policies and regulations regarding access to data in online courses. Instructors were willing to participate, but institutions were unaware of the ramifications or the process of allowing an outside researcher access to historical data.
I established that this research had been approved by an institutional review board. Further, since the focus of this analysis was on “public” instructor communication posted in discussion forums, in classroom announcements and in other published documents such as syllabi and course description documents and not on student interactions, the risk to students was negligible. By the time institution approval had been secured, instructors had left for summer break and were not available. As a result, no data was available for analysis in Phase 2. Although this data set was sought as further evidence in support of findings from Phase 1, other validity methods performed in Phase 1 and in Phase 3 – content validity, external content expert, etc. – sufficiently compensate for the effect of not conducting Phase 2.

Phase 3 Results

The purpose of Phase 3 was to confirm and augment the findings from Phase 1 and to increase trustworthiness and credibility for the results. Using the checklist of instructor-reported behaviors identified in Phase 1, I created an original baseline assessment of student perceptions of said behaviors. In the first section of the student questionnaire, respondents (N = 10) were asked to indicate whether they observed a specific instructor behavior being demonstrated in their most recently completed online course. Students confirmed observing all behaviors. One hundred % of students reported observing instructors repeating contacts with students over time, offering praise and support, clarifying content, and responding frequently to students. The least observed behaviors were allowing students to address the instructor by his or her first name (56%), using humor (33%), and using casual language (22%).

For the purpose of validity, I set a target random sample size of 250 respondents to achieve a confidence interval of 4.53 at a 95% confidence level. However, based on the time of
the academic year that data was collected, the response rate (N=10) was substantially lower.

Although not statistically significant, the evidence presented provides anecdotal support for the findings from Phase 1.

Table 3

*Student Observation of Instructor Behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Not Observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The instructor showed appreciation or gratitude for a student's question or contribution.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The instructor was willing to message or chat (via email or discussion boards) with students.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The instructor asked students if they had questions about the content or needed additional information.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The instructor addressed students by their first (or chosen) name.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The instructor established and communicated goals, policies, and procedures for the course.</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The instructor confirmed that he/she received and/or read a message or discussion board posting.</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The instructor was approachable, that is, he or she was easy to &quot;talk&quot; to or deal with.</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The instructor attempted to clarify course content by responding to questions or inquiries from students about the content.</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The instructor defined expectations for student behaviors (e.g., course interaction, submitting assignments, etc.).</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The instructor responded to or interacted with students frequently.</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The instructor modeled behaviors for students (e.g., how to respond to discussion board posts, how to write academically, etc.).</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The instructor was accessible and easy to reach when students had questions.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The instructor communicated in a way that was informal, casual, or conversational.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The instructor solicited questions and/or concerns from students about course assignments and activities.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. When the instructor responded to students via email or on discussion boards, etc., he or she directly addressed that particular student. In other words, the instructor personalized his or her messages to individual students.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The instructor replied quickly to student posts, inquiries or questions.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
In the second portion of the student questionnaire, subjects were asked to indicate the frequency with which the instructor in the class used each behavior presented. Frequency scores ranged from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost all the time*). Since the purpose of this phase was to clarify and expand the proposed checklist of immediacy-producing behaviors, I calculated simple, descriptive statistics for quantitative questions. In regards to the observed frequency of instructor behaviors, students indicated that the most repeatedly observed behaviors were clarifying content, using first names, modeling behaviors, acknowledging students, defining expectations, and communicating attentiveness. Students indicated that the behaviors with the lowest frequency were the use of humor and casual language. Had I achieved the desired response rate for this phase, I would have calculated Cronbach’s alpha.
(Cronbach, 1951) to assess the internal reliability of the measurement and to determine the extent to which all of the items of a test measured the immediacy variable.

Table 4

Questionnaire Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Min Score</th>
<th>Max Score</th>
<th>St. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of First Names</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Behaviors</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Students</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachable</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define Expectations</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalize</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Language</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final section of the questionnaire included an open-ended question that asked students to describe which instructor behaviors had the most impact on perceptions of the instructor as being open and friendly. Responding to this question was optional. Of the 14 behaviors included in the questionnaire, students indicated that the most influential behaviors included personalizing, responsiveness, encouragement (e.g., receiving feedback), use of casual language, and timeliness. Responsiveness and timeliness were mentioned multiple times in student comments.
Summary

This chapter presented the results of data analysis. Content analysis of transcribed interviews revealed 393 segments organized into 15 categories. These behaviors, all of which promote a sense of psychological closeness between instructors and students were described and presented in ascending order from the least frequently appearing to the most frequently appearing. Additionally, results from student questionnaires were described. Students confirmed observing all behaviors, thereby supporting the results from Phase 1. Finally, this chapter discussed the frequency with which students observed instructor behaviors.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter provides two discussions related to the present study. The first discussion establishes how this data is unique from existing literature and provides a synthesis and interpretation of data as it relates to Research Question 1; that is, what behaviors do online instructors convey to establish immediacy with their students. The subsequent discussion examines to what extent the behaviors identified by data analysis are similar to or different from historically known instructor immediacy behaviors. Additionally, the results are interpreted and justifications are provided as to why these immediacy producing behaviors are significant.

Synthesis and Interpretation

The concept of immediacy and, in particular, instructor immediacy is well researched and widely accepted as a leading predictor of effective teaching. However, the basic tenets of immediacy suggest that for immediacy to occur, individuals must have direct, face-to-face interaction. Based on the historic and widely accepted definitions of immediacy producing behaviors, one could argue that immediacy should not occur in environments where face-to-face interaction is limited or absent. This is not the case. Numerous recent studies (e.g., Baker, 2010; Bozkaya & Aydin, 2008; Carrell & Menzel, 2001; Conaway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005; Ni & Aust, 2008; O'Connor & Ross, 2004; Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2003) suggest that immediacy behaviors do occur in online environments and that the presence of immediacy yields more effective instruction as indicated by increased student satisfaction (Bozkaya & Ayden, 2008;
Johnson & Card, 2007; Ni & Aust, 2008), increased perceived learning (Ni & Aust, 2008), increased student achievement (Johnson & Card, 2007) and increased student participation (Kucuch, 2009). The present study further supports the notion that instructor immediacy behaviors do occur in online educational environments.

Although recent studies have addressed the occurrence of immediacy in online environments, most of these studies have used traditional measures of immediacy that were designed to test for immediacy in face-to-face environments. None of the studies have specifically focused on exploring or redefining the concept of immediacy for online environments. This research is different from earlier research in that the list of behaviors was identified by asking instructors what behaviors they intentionally and purposefully engaged in order to establish a sense of warmth and friendliness (i.e., immediacy) with their students. This difference in approach speaks to the intentions of the instructor as opposed to the perceptions of the student. The earliest and most widely accepted instructor immediacy scale (Gorham, 1988), which served as the foundation for later instructor immediacy scales, was established by asking students to describe their most effective teachers. These earlier scales were developed in order to encourage teachers to examine their behaviors with the goal of increasing immediacy and thereby increasing teaching effectiveness. This study can serve as the basis for evaluating effectiveness of instruction in online environments using a new standard of measurement of immediacy.

The first question addressed in this research was: What behaviors do instructors report engaging in online learning environments in order to establish psychological closeness with students considering the lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous
or verbal communication? Data analysis revealed 13 immediacy-producing behaviors. Consistent with the findings of O’Sullivan, Hunt, and Lippert (2004), these 13 verbally immediate behaviors included responding frequently to students, using humor, modeling behaviors, addressing students by name, initiating discussions, asking questions, disclosing personal information and stories, repeating contacts with students over time, offering praise and support, communicating attentiveness, and using casual language. Based on data analysis, this study validates earlier studies (e.g., Parker, 1999; Arbaugh, 2001; Comeaux, 1995). The behaviors indicate that instructors do convey immediate behaviors in online environments, even with a lack of nonverbal communication and limited or absent synchronous or verbal communication.

Interestingly, these behaviors appear to be forms of Moore’s (1996) dialog in that they promote social interaction and appear to overcome transactional distance. Further, the findings of this study support Baker’s (2008) assumption that “promoting interaction will lead to positive communication behaviors such as instructor immediacy in the online classroom.” Moreover, these 13 behaviors serve as a starting point for establishing a revised or updated measure of immediacy for online environments.

The second question addressed by this research was: To what extent are online behaviors congruent with or different from face-to-face immediacy-producing behaviors? Gorham (1988) initially proposed twenty verbal instructor immediacy items ranging from “encourages students to talk” to “is addressed by his or her first name.” When compared to the items identified in this study, there is some distinct overlap between the behaviors. Specifically,
using personal examples, using humor, and addressing students by name/being addressed by name appear to directly correlate to Gorham’s original items.

Two additional behaviors from this study, encouraging students and acknowledging students encompass two of Gorham’s original factors (providing feedback and praising students) although the behaviors as described in this study are more comprehensive. For example, when acknowledging students, the instructor shows appreciation or expresses gratitude for a student’s question or contribution as opposed to simply providing feedback to students. In a second example, when encouraging students, rather than simply praising students, the instructor provides supportive, motivational statements to students in order to strengthen or build their determination, hopefulness, or confidence.

Of the remaining behaviors identified in this data analysis, there is little or no evidence of overlap with Gorham’s other immediacy items, which may be a result of the nature of asynchronous forms of online learning (e.g., discussion boards, announcements, assignment feedback via gradebook, etc.). For example, calling on students, asking how students feel, and encouraging students to talk are oral, interaction behaviors that are more likely occur in synchronous or face-to-face settings. Because a majority of online learning is asynchronous in nature—at least 80% of the content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2010)—these types of interactions are less likely to occur.

The remaining seven behaviors identified in this research appear to be distinct from the original instructor immediacy items. These include modeling behaviors, defining expectations, responding frequently to students, monitoring course activity, being responsive to students, responding in a timely manner, encouraging students, showing empathy and using casual
language. These immediacy producing behaviors appear to be a manifestation of Moore’s (1996) concept of *dialog*, and reflect activities that overcome transactional distance. For example, because the majority of interaction occurs via text-based messages rather than the spoken word, there is a greater responsibility on the instructor to clarify content, model behaviors and define expectations. These behaviors further support Moore’s notion that increasing interaction and dialog further decrease transaction distance. In a face-to-face setting, students are more likely to ask questions directly of the instructor. In an online course, as Parker (1999) suggests, the immediate instructor plays a more active role by serving as provocateur and facilitator.

It is a widely accepted notion that online courses run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as opposed to the traditional, classroom-based course where the class has a definitive start and end time. Whereas in traditional, face-to-face courses, the instructor is in physical proximity to students, the instructor of an online course, who may never see his or her students in person, must convey other behaviors to approximate that face-to-face behavior. Behaviors including responding frequently to students, monitoring course activity, being responsive to students, and responding to students in a timely manner serve the purpose of establishing an instructors’ presence in the course. Again, this data is representative of Moore’s (2006) transactional distance theory. These findings are also consistent with those of Arbaugh and Hwang (as cited in Baker, 2010, p. 18) who suggest that instructors establish presence in their online courses by developing consistent patterns of interaction, communicating their accessibility, and providing regular and substantive feedback, as well as moderating discussions effectively.
Limitations

Much of this research was qualitative in nature and the results may have been easily influenced by my personal biases and idiosyncrasies. This personal bias may call into question the validity of the results. However, in collecting data, I consciously attempted to avoid encouraging one outcome or answer over others.

Because this research focused on identifying immediacy producing behaviors in online environments that lacked nonverbal and oral communication, this research was limited to asynchronous communication in online classrooms via discussion boards, announcements, written feedback, etc. This research did not take into consideration technologies that are available in many distance learning platforms that allow for instant messaging, video chatting, or web conferencing. One would assume that with the introduction of these types of technologies, and thereby the re-introduction of synchronous communication and the spoken word, that instructor behaviors and student observations would change and more closely resemble many of the original immediacy behaviors.

As originally proposed, this study included further analysis to establish credibility and trustworthiness of the results. I proposed performing directed content analysis of text-based, asynchronous communication that occurred in online classrooms to identify and then tabulate the number of occurrences of those behaviors reported by instructors. This methodological approach would have allowed me to accumulate and compare the data collected in the analysis against the data from the Phase 1 analysis. As previously noted, this analysis did not occur due to confidentiality concerns, despite IRB approval of the data collection methods. Although this
data set was sought as supplementary evidence in support of findings from Phase 1, other validation methods performed in this study sufficiently compensate.

The student observations reported in this study are anecdotal. As originally proposed, I set a target random sample size of 250 respondents to achieve a confidence interval of 4.53 at a 95% confidence level. However, based on the time of the academic year that data was collected, the response rate was substantially lower (N=10). This small population serves as an example of the difficulties in collecting this type of data. Although not statistically significant, the evidence presented provides anecdotal support for the findings from Phase 1.
CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study should be replicated and extended. Although saturation of themes in this study occurred at approximately 17 interviews, additional faculty interviews should provide greater support for the 13 items identified in the study. Conducting additional interviews should also allow researchers to address traditional immediacy items such as the use of plural possessive pronouns (“Our” vs. “My” or “We” vs. “You”) that did not appear in the data. Addressing these additional immediacy items may be addressed by amending or expanding the interview protocol or by conducting directed content analysis of text-based, asynchronous communication (discussion boards and announcements). Additional student data should be collected as well to achieve statistical significance and validate the results. Perhaps partnering with faculty members who are willing to provide an incentive to students (e.g., extra credit for participating in a research study) will address the issue of achieving a statistically significant sample population.

Many scholars argue that communication behaviors are effective only if the recipient or target of the behavior perceives it as such. For example, a common argument is that an instructor is not immediate unless students perceive the instructor to be so. As noted, this research asked instructors to report what behaviors they purposively conveyed to increase perceptions of immediacy. Asking a larger population of students to indicate whether the behaviors identified in this study increase perceived immediacy should address these types of critiques and complement the results of this study. This type of study may also serve to identify additional perceived instructor immediacy behaviors in online environments.
This research study establishes the groundwork for the development of a new measure to test for instructor immediacy in online environments. The development of a conceptually sound and psychometrically robust measure of instructional immediacy in online environments represents an important step to enable researchers to examine the extent to which immediacy theory can be applied to online educational contexts. To this end, the statements/descriptions of behaviors identified in this study should be assembled into a psychometric test of immediacy following established and validated procedures for measurement development. After test construction and validation procedures (Clark & Watson, 1995), future research should consist of an ex post facto research design to explore the factor structure of the measurement and to ascertain whether the conceptual model of online immediacy is supported.

In addition to supporting the immediacy model, data analysis also revealed several interesting phenomena worthy of additional exploration. For example, many of the instructors interviewed indicated that they focused significant attention on the use of casual language. In comparison, although students confirmed observing instructors using casual language, they indicated that instructors' use of casual language was one of the least frequently observed behaviors. There may be several explanations for this observation. First, instructors indicated that course content tended to be more academic and scholarly in nature, whereas they attempted to use a more casual tone in their communications with students. Students may not have distinguished this difference. Second, students may tend to, on average, use more casual language with their peers, and therefore, even though the instructor is attempting to communicate in a casual way, students still perceive it as being more formal. Third, it is possible that casual language is what students expect. Therefore, the instructors' use of casual language
is not worthy of observation to students. Other behaviors where instructors indicated they focused significant attention on but students indicated a low observation score included the use of humor and showing empathy. This difference in scores may reflect a difference in perceptions. Therefore future research should address how differences in perceptions of immediacy between instructors and students compare to one another.

In another line of thought, several of the behaviors identified through data analysis manifested in several distinct forms, even though all have a common outcome. For example, clarification—the act of making course content more clear, intelligible and free from ambiguity—manifested in three formats: responding to questions or inquiries from students; performing communicative acts such as previewing topics or assignments, intentionally using simple language, providing samples and relevant examples; and asking students if they understand content or assignments. In another example, showing empathy manifested as responding to a specific situation (e.g., the death of a family member) or as adopting a general perspective towards students (e.g., considering or recalling what it was like to be a student). In this example, the first manifestation appears to be state-based; that is, based on the situation, the instructor responded to the immediate needs of the student. In the second manifestation, the instructor generally attempted to consider student perspectives in how he or she developed or delivered information to students. This appears to reflect the state of the instructor. Future research should examine more closely state- versus trait-based immediacy behaviors of instructors. This type of research may be key to determining whether instructors are prepared to become online instructors.
A final line of inquiry should focus on how instructors adapt their immediacy behaviors to address differences in student experiences and expectations. During interviews, several instructors indicated that, as a matter of practice, they treated students differently according to their class rank, the level of the academic program, and the students’ exposure to online learning. For example, if a student population consisted of first or second year students, if the class was an introductory class, or if the majority of students were new to online learning, the instructor adopted a much more prescriptive approach to how they conveyed immediacy producing behaviors: more modeling, more acknowledgement, more monitoring, etc. However, if students were upper classmen, were in graduate programs, or had completed a number of online courses, then, according to instructors, there was less need for the instructor to be prescriptive. Future research should explore how instructors adapt their behaviors to meet the needs of their specific group and class of students.

Conclusion

Instructor Immediacy is important. Prior research clearly demonstrates this point. Equally important, higher education is changing. More and more, students are transitioning from traditional face-to-face or brick and mortar environments to online environments. This trend will continue to require instructors to modify their teaching methods.

At the same time, colleges and universities are recognizing that non-traditional, working students make up an even greater percentage of their overall student population. As the cost of higher education continues to increase, and as the Internet and the Web continues to break geographic boundaries, meaning that online students have greater academic choice, colleges and universities are recognizing that they must compete for the online student. Ultimately,
learning is a human endeavor and requires a human touch. To win over online and non-traditional students, we must focus on that human touch, which is immediacy. By training instructors to be mindful of immediacy producing behaviors, then not only will we improve instruction, we will also increase the potential for gaining an advantage in a highly competitive academic environment. First however, the research questions we ask and the research we conduct should keep pace with changes in the academic and technological world in order to meet the needs of our current students, as well as our future students.
APPENDIX A

MAJOR CATEGORIES OF ONLINE INSTRUCTIONAL IMMEDIACY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Categories</th>
<th>Associated Concepts</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>To make content (assignments, requests, lessons) clear or intelligible and free from ambiguity; minimizing confusion. Adding clarity can manifest in the (1) form of responding to questions or inquiries from students (state), or manifest as an (2) intentional acts by the instructor (trait) such as previewing topics, intentionally using simple language, etc. Clarification may also manifest through the (3) act of asking students if they have questions or need additional information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>rate of occurrence of instructors responding to or interacting with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Reacting or replying quickly or favorably to student inquiries and questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement. When used appropriately, humor can lighten a mood or present the instructor in a more human light. However, most instructors use humor sparingly and cautiously as it can have an opposite effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Behaviors</td>
<td>Deliberately displaying desired behavior by the instructor to students who then may learn that behavior and mimic or carry it on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of First Names</td>
<td>Show awareness that something such as a message has been noticed; Show appreciation or express gratitude for a student’s question or contribution. To a lesser extent, acknowledge an error in the course or materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging Students</td>
<td>Show awareness that something such as a message has been noticed; Show appreciation or express gratitude for a student’s question or contribution. To a lesser extent, acknowledge an error in the course or materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Observing and checking the progress or quality of student activity over the duration of a course; Being attentive to student activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approachable *</td>
<td>Easy to talk to or deal with; able to be reached; accessible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalize</td>
<td>To respond to a student in a way that shows it belongs to a particular person; to change or write to or from a particular person. Intentionally sharing or disclosing personal information about oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing Empathy</td>
<td>Attempting to intellectually identify with students’ experiences, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. Instructors may be empathetic in responding to students (state) or may attempt to be empathetic in the way they design and craft direction or instructional messages to students (trait).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Providing support or praise to students in order to strengthen or build determination, hopefulness, or confidence; Actions on the part of the instructor that reassure or that makes students more likely to complete an activity or develop a state or view. Encouragement can further be broken down into (1) direct</td>
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communication with students, (2) feedback, (3) coaching, that is, providing guidance and direction, and (4) soliciting information.

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Timeliness</strong></th>
<th>Appropriate, suitable amount of time in responding to students; well-timed.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expectations</strong></td>
<td>Defining anticipated behaviors and characteristics as they relate to student interaction, submitting assignments, etc. Expectations also refers to defining the limits and boundaries of acceptable student behaviors. This also refers to the instructor being mindful of his or her own behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Casual Language</strong></td>
<td>The quality of a person’s written words; narrative, informal, casual, conversational, use of emoticons to represent nonverbal aspects of language; at same time, very conscientious of language so as to avoid misunderstanding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Approachable excluded from list of codes. After review behavior was reclassified as a manifestation of the immediacy construct.
1. How do you define interaction in the online classroom?

2. What types of interactions between you and your students occur in your online classroom?

3. Transactional distance in distance learning (online instruction) is defined as the psychological separation between the teacher and student that can result in communication gaps and misunderstandings. What techniques or behaviors do you use to overcome transactional distance in your online classroom?

4. How do you overcome psychological separation in your online classroom?

5. Instructor immediacy is defined as instructor behaviors that increase psychological closeness between instructors and students. What behaviors come to mind when you think of instructor immediacy in the online classroom?

6. How do you convey a sense of warmth, friendliness, or openness to students in your online classrooms?

7. How do you convey a sense of warmth, friendliness, or openness to students in your written, text-based communication (within discussion postings, announcements, and written letter/documents)?

8. Based on your experiences teaching online courses, what behaviors do you employ that you think increase immediacy between you and your students in the online classroom?

9. Based on your experiences teaching online courses, what behaviors do you think contribute to a sense of closeness between you and your students? What are examples?
APPENDIX C

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE
1. The instructor confirmed that he/she received and/or read a message or discussion board posting.
2. The instructor showed appreciation or gratitude for a student’s question or contribution.
3. The instructor was willing to message or chat (via email or discussion boards) with students.
4. The instructor was accessible and easy to reach when students had questions.
5. The instructor was approachable, that is, he or she was easy to "talk" to or deal with.
6. The instructor communicated in a way that was informal, casual, or conversational.
7. The instructor used emoticons and similar textual portrayals ("LOL", bold text, etc.) to represent nonverbal aspects of language or emotions.
8. The instructor attempted to clarify course content by responding to questions or inquiries from students about the content.
9. The instructor attempted to minimize confusion by previewing course topics, assignments, etc.
10. The instructor asked students if they had questions about the content or needed additional information.
11. The instructor tried to identify with students’ experiences, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, either in the way he/she responded to questions or in the way he/she wrote course content or instructions.
12. The instructor supported and/or reassured students by giving feedback on assignments, discussion postings, etc.
13. The instructor coached students by providing guidance and direction on assignments and course activities.
14. The instructor solicited questions and/or concerns from students about course assignments and activities.
15. The instructor defined expectations for student behaviors (e.g., course interaction, submitting assignments, etc.).
16. The instructor addressed students by their first (or chosen) name.

17. The instructor allowed students to use his or her first (or chosen) name.

18. The instructor responded to or interacted with students frequently.

19. The instructor used humor when delivering content or interacting with students.

20. The instructor modeled behaviors for students (e.g., how to respond to discussion board posts, how to write academically, etc.).

21. The instructor monitored classroom behaviors and/or checked the progress or quality of student activity over the duration of the course.

22. When the instructor responded to students via email or on discussion boards, etc., he or she directly addressed that particular student. In other words, the instructor personalized his or her messages to individual students.

23. The instructor shared or disclosed information about his or herself to students, especially when it related to course content.

24. The instructor established and communicated goals, policies, and procedures for the course.

25. The instructor replied quickly to student posts, inquiries or questions.

26. The instructor was timely in his or her responses to students.
REFERENCES


84


