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Sarah Ginsberg's contribution to this volume explores critical lessons that Sarah learned while teaching using a hybrid model in an introductory special education class. Sarah began the project with an interest in how students perceive hybrid teaching models (part in-class and part online). Given significant movement within the academy toward online and hybrid models, Sarah's insights into how students view this type of learning are important for all of us to examine. Students may not have embraced this model of education as much as they are purported to have done; they identify many of the same challenges (including lack of personal connection) that faculty members do.

What stands out in this chapter is the discussion Sarah engaged in with her students about reflection. As future teachers, Sarah's students no doubt benefited from her example of how teachers need to pay attention to what is happening in their classes, making mid-course corrections as needed. In actively reflecting on issues of big picture versus little picture learning with her students, Sarah brought students into the teaching and learning conversation.

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This year I had the opportunity to participate in a yearlong fellowship in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL) guided by Dr. Jeffrey Bernstein, a past Carnegie Scholar in the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) Program. It was the perfect opportunity to conduct a study of student satisfaction with hybrid electronic classrooms. I designed a qualitative study and planned to ask the students to write reflective essays at the beginning of the semester about anticipations they had for learning in a hybrid class (part of the class conducted in-person and part conducted online). I would then ask them to write a second, reflective essay – guided by some specific, open-ended questions – at the end of the term to gain insights into their perspectives and satisfaction with learning in this format.

I began to create a conceptual framework based on current literature regarding effective classroom communication from traditional classrooms and social presence from distance learning environments. Social presence is the feeling of community that a learner experiences in an online environment, and is key to learner satisfaction in fully online courses (Gunawardena 1995; Gunawardena and Zittle 1997). The framework consisted of two questions:

- What is the value of social presence in a hybrid electronic classroom where the learning community meets in person for some portion of the class?
- How do the two different formats of online and in-person learning interact and affect student satisfaction with the learning experience?

I was interested in how students feel about learning when they have opportunities to access the materials, the instructor, and their peers in both environments. I had few preconceived notions about what I would find. In our faculty seminar, my colleagues hypothesized that students may feel that the two formats create either a "value-added" experience where they find benefits in each format or they may feel that one format detracts from the other.

After conducting the literature review on aspects of learner satisfaction with online or distance learning courses, it was time for me to design my own course. I felt that the literature had given me good ideas of where and how to begin. Unfortunately, there was relatively little information about course development for hybrid format courses. Most useful were books and articles about the design of distance learning courses. I consulted *The Power of eLearning: The Essential Guide for Teaching in the Digital Age* (Waterhouse 2005) for guidance on issues to consider as I began to design the course. Several studies indicated that social presence in distance learning contexts was directly associated with increased student learning and greater satisfaction with the learning experience (Gunawardena and Zittle 1997; Rovai 2002; Wise, Chang, Duffy and Del Valle 2004). The timely responses to messages, style of online communication – including casual conversation and appropriate message length – and group size were all noted in the literature to be important facets for building social presence. These articles were extremely helpful in developing my sense of how communication would need to appear in this context in order to achieve learner satisfaction.

Using these resources, along with assistance from a very helpful member of the university's Online Course Development team, I designed the basic framework of this introductory course that acquaints future teachers with the key concepts of special education. I want students in this class to be prepared to think about many of their future students as having unique learning needs, whether or not they have been classified as needing special education. Because this was a survey course, each week generally represented a new chapter in the textbook and a new topic. On day one of each week, the students were directed to read a chapter and then complete any of the three review activities created by the publisher that were available online on my course's page. Options available to students included a flash-card program and a crossword puzzle, which would allow them to review key terms, concepts and definitions, as well as a practice test. These review activities were entirely optional and were not graded. The students were instructed to complete the reading and review by the fourth day of the week.

On the fourth, fifth and sixth days of the week, they were to participate in a threaded discussion in response to a question that I posted. The question for each chapter asked them to take the information that they had read and apply it to a potential real-life learning scenario. I formed the 4-5 person threaded discussion groups by reviewing the class list at the beginning of the semester and noting all students' GPA's. I then created groups that were stratified by GPA such that each group had students with high, middle, and low GPA's; stratification was used to increase group heterogeneity (Barkley, Cross and Major 2005). On the seventh day of the week, we met as a class to discuss the topic of the week. In the classroom time, we reviewed any areas of confusion, I highlighted for them any areas that I felt were particularly important or might have been confusing, and then they participated in collaborative or hands-on learning activities. These activities varied from week to week and included disability simulations, videotaped case studies, role-playing, and brainstorming. A brief quiz was given in class every four weeks.

As the semester began, the students started their learning and I started mine. I had already learned so much from the literature and from my online course development specialist that I went into the first day feeling fairly confident. I did not know all there was to know, but I felt I had done my homework and created a nice framework for the students' learning. I was ready to sit back, teach the course, and collect my data. I was unprepared for how much learning I was about to experience.

In my first week, I had two major realizations. The first was that despite the assumptions we faculty make about our younger students being technologically sophisticated, they do not always live up to these expectations. Many students expressed anxieties about how to use an unfamiliar platform such as Eastern Michigan University's eCompanion. I spent quite a bit of time in the first two weeks providing direction, support, and reassurance for them to feel comfortable with the online component of the class. Before the semester began I had reservations about my own ability to learn the eCompanion system, but it had not occurred to me that they would experience the same apprehension.

The second revelation was regarding their pleasure, or displeasure, about the format of this class. I learned from talking to them that many students had registered for my section of this course, of which there are about eight sections from which to choose, based solely on the convenience of the in-class meeting time posted in the course catalog. The course catalog listed the initials "HLE" after the course, indicating that it was a hybrid format, but the students seemed to have disregarded those letters when registering. When they came to the first day of class and I introduced the format, a few were dismayed, even angry.

In listening to my colleagues, past students, and reviewing the literature, it had never occurred to me that any students would view a hybrid class as less than a positive arrangement. In the first group of data, in which students were asked to write about their expectations for their learning in this context, I heard a great deal of frustration. Students commented that they felt there was potential to benefit from "freedom" by working independently outside of class, but that they were concerned about losing the personal connection that takes place in the classroom. One student summed it up when she said,

> I think that the hybrid format will allow the students to have more freedom to work on assignments anywhere outside of class. I also think that the hybrid format will take away the closeness of interacting personally with my classmates.

As the semester moved forward, I learned another big lesson. I had taught this class twice a year for the past six years. I had been teaching it as my senior colleagues had demonstrated to me, partially because the students seemed to benefit from it and partially because the course was a bit outside of my realm of expertise. I therefore trusted others who were more expert in this area to inform me of the appropriate focus of the course. However, as the semester moved forward, I noted a very unusual dichotomy emerging in students' work. The students' participation in the weekly threaded discussions was outstanding. They demonstrated understanding of key issues related

to the week's topic. They made connections to their own lives and experiences. They commented on each other's postings, offering other perspectives, adding their own thoughts. They took the material one step further and addressed how it would affect their roles as educators in the future. I was extremely impressed by the quality of the discussions from 95% of the class members. In the classroom, the quality of discussion was comparable to the threaded discussions. Though the rate of participation was lower than online, with perhaps 20-25% of the class highly engaged and actively participating on any given day, it was higher than many other classes I have had. The quality of the participation suggested that the students generally were learning the central concepts associated with each week's topic.

In contrast to this, students' performance on the quizzes was unsatisfactory. I had redesigned my quizzes from past semesters to align them more with the text, as I was no longer providing the lectures upon which past quizzes primarily had been based. The quizzes that I administered for the first half of the semester used short answer and multiple-choice questions to assess their understanding and recall of terminology. I was puzzled by the distinction between what I referred to as the students' exceptional "big picture" thinking established in the threaded discussions and the limited recall of the "small picture" textbook items assessed in the quizzes.

Half way through the term, I began to question what was happening. I discussed my observations with the scholarship of teaching and learning faculty development group. I explained that my students clearly had a grasp of the important issues and were able to apply them to real-life situations, but missed some of the more nitty-gritty details that I had taught in the past and expected them to get from the text. "Does it matter if they get the small picture if they get the big picture?" asked Jeff Bernstein. Well, I had never really thought of that. I began to wrestle with that question. I discussed it with some of my colleagues who had joined the department after I had and who had more expertise in this area. The answer to Jeff's question from a number of colleagues was clearly "No".

At this point, I was stumped. I was pleased because, of course, one of the many reasons to conduct SOTL research is to inform our

own teaching practices and though this was not what I had set out to learn, I had an unexpected epiphany of sorts while researching hybrid learning. Now I was confronted with what to do with this information. Many good researchers know that the answer to this question is that you do not change the design of a program currently under study. However, this is the scholarship of teaching and learning. Isn't the point to learn about learning? Isn't the point to improve my teaching? After agonizing and reflecting for days, I concluded that I needed to discuss this situation with my students. After all, they were all going to be educators soon. I reasoned that this was a chance to talk about reflection in teaching with them. They had a final project coming due soon that required them to demonstrate reflection on their own work and on fictional students' learning. Why not, I reasoned, use my reflections as a starting place to talk about what teacher reflections do for us as educators and to model a reflective moment for them? One of my senior colleagues warned me of the impending disastrous backlash this could cause from my students in my course evaluations. I hesitated, but decided to move forward with my plan.

The next class meeting I shared with my students that we would be placing the scheduled topic for that day on the back burner as I had something I wanted to talk with them about. They all snapped to attention at this first divergence from the schedule in eight weeks of class. I began the discussion by explaining what teacher reflections may encompass. I then led a brief brainstorming session with the whole class regarding what value or role teacher reflections may play in any teacher's classroom (see Schön 1983). The students rose to the occasion and responded with the level of thoughtfulness and insights I had hoped for based on their performance in their discussions. They were lively in their contributions.

I then transitioned the discussion from the abstract classroom to talking with them about our classroom. I shared my specific reflections on my teaching and their learning "big picture" and "small picture" concepts. It was briefly quiet. "Uh-oh," I thought, "my colleague who warned me of the potential disastrousness of this discussion was right." I looked at my students silently staring at me, mouths slightly agape. I told them that I was bringing this up because this was an

opportunity for me to get their feedback, to learn what they thought, and to discuss as a group how to proceed with the rest of the semester. I reminded them that this was their class, too. I looked around. I waited out the awkward silence. Finally, one of my more vocal students raised her hand and said, "I think it is really cool that you are willing to talk about what is best for us with US!" That opened the floodgates. My class returned to their usual level of participation, sharing their thoughts.

The conversation with my class was very gratifying. My students were eager to discuss the role of reflection in teaching. They were willing to be honest and open when sharing their insights into what they found to be useful and supportive to their learning, and what was not. They shared that it was difficult for them to see the value in the small details as they read the text, but that the connections between the threaded discussion and classroom activity topics was obvious. This was motivating for them because they knew that this information would be critical to them when they became teachers. The students also talked openly about their frustrations in other classes where a professor held the view that students could either accept his/her teaching methods or could go find a different section of the class. Perhaps most importantly, they shared how this discussion might influence their view of reflection and open communication with their own students in the future.

In this dialogue, I gained the insights into my students' learning that I had been seeking. While that had been my primary mission, I also found that I had one of those elusive "teachable moments" in which I could teach the students not only what teacher reflection is, but also model it for them. When the students spontaneously took the discussion to the next level of thinking with the application to their future classrooms, this reinforced the value of our reflective conversation. Because of this exchange, I decided to align the quizzes more closely with the "big picture" content. It was clear in our conversation that this was an important learning objective for them and for me. This may have been one of my most gratifying teaching experiences ever.

As the semester ended, I collected the last portion of data through the written reflective essays that were posted and completed

anonymously. The essays were again guided by open-ended questions asking the students to think about specific aspects of their learning experiences. I asked them to tell me what they found satisfying about the online and classroom portions of the class. I also asked them to reflect specifically on the communication between themselves and their peers in each context. The students' comments regarding classroom communication issues were intriguing. It was clear that for the most part, the students felt connected to the other people with whom they sat in small groups in the classroom, but did not feel at all connected to those students who were in their threaded discussion groups. Despite the fact that this was a relatively small class of 21 students, the majority did not appear to seek out the opportunity in the classroom to sit with or even talk with those students who were in their threaded discussion groups. One student commented, "I actually found it odd, that I partook in discussions online, but never really spoke to any of the individuals in person." This suggests to me that for some students, the value of small groups in two different contexts may create a dichotomy that they could not find a way to bridge. While some students identified the importance of the small groups in the online setting in a manner consistent with the social presence literature, more identified the importance of the classroom small groups. Few commented on their effort to connect in person with the people that they were in online groups with. One student did state, "I found myself sitting and talking more with those of my online group, but in class I liked having groups!"

A second theme emerged in my preliminary review of the second essay responses that I could never have anticipated when I began this study. These comments were reflections on our reflective conversation. None of the questions that I posed in this second essay was specifically about the content of the class. They were focused on the process of learning in each context and the communication that occurred in each. It was clear, however, that this one hour class discussion had an impact on them, as did my resulting decision to modify the quizzes. In response to a question about how having two contexts of learning may have influenced their learning, a student replied,

In class, we tended to cover the finer details of what we were learning. Online was more about the "big picture" ideas behind what we were learning. Having both of these separated was helpful to me, because I found the bigger picture ideas required a much different way of thinking than in learning smaller, more technical details of the topics we covered.

Though I began this semester planning to learn more about SOTL, I learned far more. To be sure, I learned some of the ins and outs of using technology as a pedagogical tool. I became more comfortable and confident in my ability to use the technology effectively and I was able to help my students become secure users as well. I learned that many needed my help before they would be able to be comfortable learning in a hybrid format.

I learned that there might be times when focusing on the big picture may be just as valuable as focusing on small details. It is clearly not the case for every class, but the opportunity to see the course content through the lens of a new pedagogy allowed me to rethink the material in a way that I would probably never have done without the format change. The change in course design facilitated this reflection and allowed me to look at my teaching with fresh eyes. This was very reinvigorating, particularly for a course that I have taught for so many years.

Finally, I learned that the trust I instinctively had in my students was well founded. In *Teaching as Community Property,* Lee Shulman (2004, p. 40) describes that in teaching we "close the classroom door and experience pedagogical solitude." In this influential work, he calls for teaching to move from a private to a public experience. In having this scholarship of teaching and learning conversation in my classroom, I made my own learning open and allowed my students to become part of my teaching-learning community. In doing so, I decreased my pedagogical solitude.

I was right to do what some of my colleagues thought was risky. While I have not yet received my instructor evaluations, I have no reason to suspect that my evaluations will suffer as a result of engaging in

this dialogue with the students. A preliminary review of the final data collected as the course was ending indicated that the students were pleased by the opportunity to have this discussion. Sharing with the students what I was learning and that I was learning from them began a dialogue that added to my insights. In our conversation, I felt that my thoughts were valuable. I felt that they received my own learning enthusiastically and with appreciation. In the end, I received from my students what I think my students are looking for from me. Perhaps their ability, and mine, to give and receive in this class was what created such a mutually gratifying learning experience for us all.

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