SENSE OF COMMUNITY ONLINE: SELF-REGULATED LEARNING AND AVOIDING THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

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Abstract

This project addresses how developing online students' self-regulated learning skills and applying the concept of the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968)—part of the game theory associated with transactional analysis (Berne, 1961)—can be used by post secondary instructors teaching online to build a sense of community (Rovai, 2002a) and decrease students' dependence on instructors. The project begins with an extensive overview of sense of community, highlighting the significant role online instructors have in online community formation. A detailed discussion on how fostering online students' self-regulatory learning behaviours can contribute to their sense of community and encourage their community building efforts is presented. Utilizing experiences as an online instructor, the drama triangle and its applicability to online instruction is analyzed. Experiences as an online instructor are utilized to illustrate how drama triangle interactions in the online environment can stall sense of community formation. In addition, this project provides online instructors with specific online community-building strategies that focus on developing self-regulated learning skills and strategies for avoiding drama triangle interactions.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family and friends, whose love and support have encouraged me every step of the way. You are each a part of all I have accomplished along this journey:

To my parents, John and Wilma, thank you for loving me through this, letting me live with you, feeding me, hugging me, and believing in me. I have been blessed with the best parents.

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Copyright Statement

The material included in this project is subject to copyright. Permission of the author or the author's supervisor (Professor Dawn McBride) should be sought prior to implementation of any of the material. For permission please email the author's supervisor at dawn.mcbride@uleth.ca. The reader may use ideas from the project providing they are referenced in text as: (Gerlock, 2012). The suggested format for citations on the reference list or bibliography is:

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My project provides readers with an introduction to online learning, the

dimensions of the online environment, and the instructional challenge of helping students

manage the flexibility of online learning. In response to this challenge, I propose

instructors can help students find online learning success by fostering sense of

community, which can be accomplished by encouraging self-regulated learning and by

avoiding unhealthy interactions based on transactional analysis game theory.

The intent of the first chapter is to provide an overview of the importance of

preparing online instructors to navigate the community-building challenges posed by

online instruction. The chapter includes a rationale, a statement of personal interest, and

a glossary of terms. The rationale addresses the instructional challenge of minimizing the

isolation students feel without compromising the benefits of flexibility and introduces my

stance that establishing sense of community among students is one effective approach

online instructors could implement. The statement of personal interest serves as a

platform for equipping online instructors with ways to establish sense of community by

helping students develop self-regulated learning skills and by using a transactional

analysis approach to enhance online instruction. The glossary of terms provides readers

with the necessary definitions used throughout the project. An overview of the project is

also included in this chapter.

Rationale

Within online learning research, online learning has been shown to provide a

flexible venue for students to attain academic goals (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). While

flexibility of asynchronous learning allows students to direct their own learning,

asynchronous learning has also been associated with student isolation (Fisher & Baird, 2005; Rovai, 2002a). From an instructional standpoint, helping students to manage the flexibility of online learning poses a relational challenge of providing support without fostering overdependence. In response to this challenge, I propose that instructors can help students manage the flexibility of online learning by fostering sense of community, which can be accomplished by encouraging self-regulated learning and by avoiding transactions that promote rescuing, victim, or persecutor behaviours. This project provides online instructors with the strategies to do so.

Statement of Personal Interest

My interest in developing a project that will help instructors become better acquainted with online instruction stemmed from my personal experiences as a classroom teacher (I hold a B.A./B.Ed.) and as an instructor for an online orientation course for new graduate students entering a three-year Master of Counselling program. Having taught in both settings, I have experienced the challenge of applying traditional classroom instruction approaches within the online environment. While my teaching experience had equipped me with necessary organizational skills for teaching online, I was unprepared for the relational challenges of online instruction. The online environment lacks many reliable elements of communication such as facial expressions, tones, and body language (Artino, 2008), making it difficult to assess and anticipate student needs. I also noticed that the lack of face-to-face affect in the online environment posed barriers for establishing group cohesion among online learners.

As such, I observed that online students who struggled to connect with others seemed to require extra support from me. I struggled to find the proper balance of

offering support to minimize the anxiety of new students, while simultaneously encouraging the necessary independence that online learners ultimately need for success. Through this experience, I found that increasing sense of community helped students manage the challenges of online learning (OL). I helped establish sense of community by fostering self-regulated learning skills and engaging in online communication informed by transactional analysis theory (Berne, 1961).

My interest in transactional analysis grew during a Master's level ethics course when I was introduced to the concept of the drama triangle to give insight into unethical behaviour (D. McBride, personal communication, July 23, 2009; see also Karpman, 1968). As I became more familiar with transactional analysis, I learned of its applicability within education (Barrow, 2007). Since transactional analysis provides a common language for understanding communication patterns, and is focused on process rather than outcome, it has been proposed as a viable educational approach (Barrow, 2007). As an online instructor, utilizing a transactional analysis approach in communicating with students helped me to establish a climate of support without fostering overdependence by avoiding drama triangle interactions. I see value in sharing my knowledge with other online instructors because I have personally and professionally benefitted from knowledge sharing by my colleagues. This project and proposed article (Appendix A) are intended to add to the body of knowledge pertaining to online instruction.

My aim to effectively establish students' sense of community without fostering overdependence is a challenge that other online instructors have also faced (Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009). Using a case-study approach to identify participants'

perceptions of building online community, Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, and Lee (2007) found that many instructors reported they lacked the skills for fostering sense of community among students. Surprisingly, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive academic information devoted to equipping online instructors with skills for fostering sense of community online, revealing the need for knowledge sharing among online instructors. In response to this need, this project outlines how online instructors can establish sense of community by fostering self-regulated learning skills and avoiding the drama triangle.

Overview of the Project

This project consists of two parts. Part one contains four chapters, while part two, the applied element of the project, is a proposed manuscript that shall be submitted to an academic journal (Appendix A). In this section I outline the main focus of the remaining chapters of part one of this project.

Chapter 2 details the methods used for research on this topic and provides readers with a statement of ethical conduct as it relates to Appendix A (a manuscript to be submitted to a journal). Chapter 3 provides readers with an introduction to OL and the dimensions of the online environment. Next, an extensive overview of sense of community is presented. Using research and personal narrative, I propose that instructors can establish sense of community by helping students develop self-regulated learning skills and by avoiding drama triangle interactions (a pattern of behaviour that will be described in Chapter 3). I conclude Chapter 3 with a section on instructional strategies for fostering sense of community. Chapter 4 provides a succinct summary of the project. The strengths and limitations of the project are also discussed, and areas of future research are proposed to encourage future knowledge sharing. Finally, Appendix A is a

proposed journal manuscript synthesizing the content in this project. The manuscript shall be submitted to an academic journal upon the project being completed so the information in this project may be shared with a wider audience.

Glossary of Terms for Transactional Analysis

This section lists and defines the key terms in transactional analysis that will be used throughout this project. The focus of the transactional analysis portion of this project is on the concept of the drama triangle.

Drama Triangle: A psychological model, from transactional analysis game theory, used to help analyze the interplay of three interpersonal roles: persecutor, rescuer, or victim (Karpman, 1968).

Persecutor: The Drama Triangle role played by the person who is belittling or attacking another person (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Rescuer: The Drama Triangle role played by the person who offers help based on the belief that others cannot help themselves (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Transactional Analysis: Developed by Eric Berne (1961), transactional analysis is an integrated theory of personality that helps to explain how people are psychologically organized, and how they express personality through behaviour (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Transactional analysis also offers a theory of psychopathology, as it provides a framework for understanding how childhood patterns are replayed in adult life (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Victim: The drama triangle role played by the person who is receiving the criticism of a persecutor or the help of a rescuer (Stewart & Joines, 1987).

Chapter Summary

The intent of this first chapter was to provide a rationale for designing a project aimed at equipping online instructors with skills for establishing sense of community by promoting self-regulated learning and avoiding the drama triangle. The statement of personal interest provided a personal account of the instructional challenges of fostering sense of community in an online environment and explained the relevancy of transactional analysis within this project. As readers encounter key terms related to the transactional analysis concept of the drama triangle, the glossary will serve as a convenient at-a-glance resource.

Evaluating current online instruction and promoting knowledge sharing among colleagues will provide further insight for equipping online instructors with necessary skills and strategies for navigating the relational challenges of online instruction. This project is an important contribution, as I have not encountered any materials that specifically address establishing sense of community by fostering self-regulated learning skills and avoiding drama triangle interactions.

Chapter 2: Methods

This chapter outlines the research process undertaken in order to create this project and the proposed manuscript (Appendix A). Research presented in this project focused on salient issues related to online instruction, and on effective strategies for online instruction and course design guided by the transactional analysis concept of the drama triangle. Following the description of my research process, I outline my ethical stance as the author of this project.

Research Focus

For the purposes of this project, I focused on OL issues that pertained to issues associated with the online community. For the empirical research used in the OL introduction, sense of community, and self-regulated learning sections, search limits were narrowed to studies published from 2002 to 2011. Given the ever-changing nature of technology, I chose to present current research on sense of community and self-regulated learning to maintain practical relevance. Some research published prior to 2002 was also used to help create a context for the concepts introduced in this project.

For the transactional analysis focus, the drama triangle was presented with a bias toward presenting information related to educational settings. Books and peer-reviewed journal articles were used to gain information. No search limits were placed on location or year of publication of the transactional analysis material. I also drew upon my own experience as an online instructor to create an informative, applied narrative in a number of sections within this project. I address the limitations of this approach in the last chapter and in an upcoming section I address the ethical nuances involved in narrative reporting.

Research Process

For the research-based portion of this project, academic journal articles were located using databases such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, and ProQuest. A variety of search terms were used that included but were not limited to online learning, e-learning, sense of community, isolation, asynchronous discussions, and self-regulated learning. In the search preferences, the year of publication was limited to 2002 or later in order to provide instructional strategies based on current research. Research on the growth of OL was limited to 2008 in order to provide readers with the most current explanation of OL trends.

For the overview of transactional analysis and education, books and journals were read that were recommended by colleagues who were knowledgeable about transactional analysis. Google Scholar and ProQuest were searched with no year limit and using key terms such as transactional analysis, drama triangle, education, teaching, and instruction.

Ethical Stance

During the creation of this project, I adhered to the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000). Since this project did not involve human subjects or data collection, I did not require ethical approval from the University of Lethbridge. I also followed the writing standards outlined in the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association, 2010).

The practical applications and course structuring suggestions proposed in Chapter 3 were based on a combination of research and personal experience. For the personal narrative portions within this project, I ensured that only general information about how I

perceived events were used in order to protect the privacy of any individuals who may have been linked to the events I described.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an account of the research focus and the method for obtaining sources including search terms and database were presented. An explanation of my ethical stance with regards to this project was also provided.

In Chapter 3 an introduction to OL and the dimensions of the online environment are presented. Next, the asynchronous nature of OL is further examined in terms of its flexibility and its potential for leading to student isolation. The instructional challenge of preparing students for managing flexibility is established. In response to this challenge, I propose that instructors can help students manage the flexibility of OL by fostering sense of community, and that this can be done by encouraging the self-regulated learning behaviours that contribute to online community building and avoiding drama triangle encounters. Chapter 3 concludes with a figure that includes a condensed version of the instructional strategies proposed throughout the chapter (see Figure 1).

Chapter 3: Managing the Online Environment by Fostering Sense of Community

The intent of this chapter is to provide readers with an understanding of how instructors can prepare students to manage the flexibility of OL by fostering sense of community. The chapter includes three sections. The first section provides an introduction to OL, highlighting that OL provides flexibility but may lead to student isolation. The second section focuses on equipping instructors with knowledge and strategies for establishing students' sense of community by focusing on two areas: developing self-regulated learning skills and avoiding drama triangle interactions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the strategies proposed in this chapter that instructors may want to review when teaching an online course.

Introduction to Online Learning

In the following sections OL is defined and the dimensions of the online environment are introduced. Growth trends for OL are also presented. The discussion narrows to a focus on how OL provides students with flexibility, but may lead to student isolation. The terms OL, e-learning, and web-based learning have been used interchangeably in the literature (Smart & Cappel, 2006), and will be used as such in this project. Johnson, Hornik, and Salas (2008) defined OL as "training or educational initiatives which provide learning material in online repositories, where course interaction and communication and course delivery are technology mediated" (p. 357). Similar definitions have been expanded to include mobile and wireless learning applications (Wagner, Hassanein, & Head, 2008). The format of OL can take a variety of forms depending on the type of online environment chosen.

Dimensions of the online learning environment. Wagner et al. (2008) categorized e-learning dimensions by synchronicity, location, independence, and mode. Synchronous learning has been understood as learning that occurs in real time, whereas asynchronous learning can occur at any time (Wagner et al., 2008). Wagner et al. further explained these dimensions, stating students could engage in OL in the same location as peers (e.g., computer-based learning in a classroom setting) or in isolation (e.g., in the privacy of a student's home), e-learning could be collaborative or independent, and e-learning could be used as the primary mode of course delivery, or could be used to supplement face-to-face instruction.

The practical applications proposed in this chapter are geared toward an online program that relies on asynchronous learning modes. As such, the dimension of synchronicity is given extra focus. Next, a brief description of asynchronous learning networks (ALNs) is provided.

Asynchronous learning networks. An ALN has been defined as an online space where students access coursework, interact with instructors, and interact with one another, all in the student's own time frame (Coppola, Hiltz, & Rotter, 2002). The theoretical arguments for the use of ALNs presented in the literature have been predominantly based on social constructivist views on learning (Du et al., 2002). Du, Zhang, Olinzock, and Adams (2002) explained, from a social constructivist perspective, ALNs create a unique venue for students to publicize their level of knowledge construction and to receive social feedback about how their learning compares to others. This process has been theorized to create a collaborative cycle of knowledge sharing and comparison that evokes

meaningful knowledge construction (Du et al., 2002). The increased use of ALNs is discussed below.

      Growth of online learning. In a national OL report in the United States, Allen and Seaman (2011) presented merged nation-wide survey data that had been collected over a period of nine years. Data collected from 4,523 higher education institutions revealed the number of students taking at least one online course has increased from 9.6% in 2002 to 31.3% in 2010, the growth rate for online enrolment has continued to exceed the overall growth of higher education enrolment, and 65% of higher education institutions consider OL as a crucial factor in their long-term plans (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Power and Vaughan (2010) asserted that Canada's growth as a knowledge-based society has increased the need for postsecondary education, and that OL may help meet this need.

      Despite the increase in use of OL and the flexibility it offers learners, there are also challenges associated with OL such as student isolation. Next, a brief discussion on how ALNs provide online learners with the benefit of flexibility as well as the potential to feel isolated is presented.

      Flexibility and isolation. In considering the benefits that the flexibility of OL provides, students appear to value the access and convenience of OL, often citing the advantages of the removal of the geographical and time barriers face-to-face learning may pose (Braun, 2008; Edmonds, 2010). The flexibility of OL also allows students to maintain their lifestyle choices, such as working full time or staying at home with their children, while accomplishing academic goals (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). In spite of

the benefits flexibility provides online learners, isolation appears to be a potential concern associated with OL.

Within the literature, the autonomous nature of the OL environment and its contribution to student isolation has been addressed (Fisher & Baird, 2005; Rovai, 2002a). One way OL researchers have conceptualized student isolation in OL has been to apply Moore's transactional distance theory (Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009). This theory postulated that the physical separation between learner and instructor can contribute to psychological and communication gaps and that this type of space creates the potential for miscommunication, called *transactional distance*. Based on this observation, Moore (as cited in Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009) theorized that high levels of structure combined with low levels of dialogue led to greater transactional distance. For example, a module-based online course would provide a student with a high level of structure, but if the student encountered challenges (e.g., comprehension or technical difficulties) with completing the module, the lack of instructor and peer presence could contribute to transactional distance, as the student would not be able to gain immediate clarification. Under such circumstances, a student may decide that the cost of isolation in online learning outweighs the benefit of flexibility and drop the online course.

The problem of student isolation is addressed in the literature, as student attrition rates remain markedly higher in online programs than face-to-face learning environments (Patterson & McFadden, 2009). Since retention and satisfaction rates have been shown to improve when online learners have a sense of community (Ali & Leeds, 2009; Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, & Lopez, 2011), fostering sense of community appears to be an effective method for buffering student isolation in asynchronous learning.

Summary. Although the flexibility of asynchronous learning allows students to pursue academic endeavours without being confined by place or time, students may not be prepared to deal with the isolation autonomous learning can entail. From an instructional standpoint, taking a proactive approach by fostering online community may help students avoid the isolation sometimes associated with the flexibility of OL.

In this next section, sense of community is examined. Specifically, research on how social presence and teaching presence contribute to the social and academic bonds formed in an online environment is presented. Next, a combination of personal narrative and research is used to create a context for examining how developing students' self-regulated learning skills and how avoiding drama triangle interactions with students can help online instructors build students' sense of community.

Establishing Online Community

In this section, my intention is to help instructors recognize the paradoxical nature of OL by highlighting that the very quality that attracts students to OL, flexibility, is the same quality that may cause students to stumble. It is my stance that instructors can prepare students to manage the flexibility of OL more effectively by establishing a sense of community among students. Using personal narrative as a context for examining the research on sense of community, I will show that instructors can establish sense of community among students in two ways: by fostering students' self-regulated learning skills and by avoiding drama triangle interactions with students. My stance is based on two years of experience as an online instructor for a Master of Counselling orientation program, working as a classroom teacher for eight years, studying as a full-time student in an intensive, two-year blended-online program, and the research I have reviewed on

OL. The final section of this chapter is the cornerstone of this project, as it serves to complete the overall project goal: to equip instructors with practical guidelines for managing the online environment.

Sense of community. The definition for *sense of community* has evolved over the years, making it difficult to provide a version that has been agreed upon in the literature (Dawson, 2006). In considering the many dimensions of the term, Dawson (2006) surmised that sense of community is developed when people share a common environment or interest.

Applying research on the concept of community to the virtual learning community, Rovai (2002a) proposed that "classroom community can be constitutively defined in terms of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectation and goals" (p. 4). *Spirit* was described as the feelings of connectedness within the group. For example, an online student experiencing spirit may feel as though they know their peers in spite of never meeting face to face. *Trust* was referred to as a combination of the credibility and benevolence students offer one another (Rovai, 2002b). For example, a student may gain credibility with online community members by sharing new information that benefits the group or may inspire benevolence by encouraging group members with affirming statements. Rovai (2002a) asserted that that these elements create an open environment where the learning process can occur in safety. *Interaction* was presented as communication between learners (Rovai, 2002a). Since interaction within the ALN is written, interaction within the online community appears to be influenced by the frequency of students' writing and their ability to effectively present the intended quality and tone. Finally, *commonality of expectations and goals* referred to

the shared goal of the learning group to meet educational needs through participation (Rovai, 2002a). For example, an online learner could invest in the collective learning process by promoting peer support to build group safety, offering knowledge to promote group discovery, and providing evaluation to promote group motivation.

Thinking of community in terms of dimensions has also guided the development of instruments, such as Rovai's (2002b) Classroom Community scale, for measuring sense of community. The Classroom Community scale consists of 20 self-report items, such as "I feel connected to others in this course" (Rovai, 2002b, p. 205), that are scored to measure students' feelings of connectedness and learning. Items on the connectedness subscale are used to measure students' feelings of cohesion, community spirit, trust, and interdependence (Rovai, 2002b). Items on the learning subscale are used to measure the degree to which students feel that community-learning goals are met (Rovai, 2002b). Participants respond to these items using a five-point Likert scale response selection of "strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree" (Rovai, 2002b, p. 202).

In summary, examining sense of community in terms of more specific dimensions such as trust, spirit, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals is important from an instructional standpoint (Rovai, 2002a). These dimensions enable instructors to realize there are multiple ways that sense of community can be established within their OL classroom. For example, an instructor without knowledge of these dimensions may emphasize one aspect of community over the others (i.e., promote interaction without fostering trust) without recognizing the importance of fostering all of the community dimensions. In addition, considering how sense of community can be measured adds further credence to the stance that fostering community requires a multidimensional

approach, as the instrument itself measures the collective feeling of community in terms of smaller dimensions.

Next, a brief discussion on how students and instructors influence the dimensions of community is presented. The intention of this upcoming section is to provide readers with an overview of the research that informed the development of the instructional strategies presented later in this chapter.

Presence and sense of community. Within the research on sense of community, many studies have focused on identifying how social presence and teaching presence influence online community formation. In the following sections, these two concepts will be expanded upon. Specifically, social presence is defined, and the salient social presence factors of communication, self-presentation, and interpretation are explained and linked to sense of community. Thereafter, teaching presence is also defined, and the teaching presence factors of instructional design and discussion facilitation are explained and linked with sense of community (Shea, Swan, Li, & Pickett, 2005).

Social presence. *Social presence* has been defined as, "The ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010, p. 32). Since interaction within the online environment lacks nonverbal cues that enhance face-to-face communication, applying the concept of social presence within an online context has contributed to our understanding of the factors that may build students' sense of community online (Rourke, Andersen, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). Based on a review of the literature, Rovai (2002a) proposed

that as social presence increases so does sense of community. These concepts and their relationships are presented next.

Communication and social presence. Using Rovai's (2002b) Classroom Community scale to quantify survey results of 464 online student participants, Dawson (2006) found that students' frequency of online communication was positively correlated with students' sense of community. Shen, Nuankhieo, Huang, Amelung, and Laffe (2008) implemented a partial use of Rovai's (2002b) Classroom Community scale (i.e., items related to connectedness) and also confirmed that high frequency interaction online positively contributed to students' sense of community. Based on these two studies, it appears that online interaction between students is essential for building sense of community (Dawson, 2006; Shen et al., 2008). Rovai (2002a) would support this conclusion, but he also noted that a high quality and quantity of student interaction is needed.

Haythornthwaite (as cited in Hrastinski, 2008) also addressed the quality of student interaction by postulating that the establishment and nourishment of sense of community required three types of communication: content-related, planning of tasks, and social support. A study by So and Brush (2008) affirmed Haythornthwaite's assertion, as data from student surveys and face-to-face interviews revealed that emotional bonding through collaborative learning tasks contributed to students' sense of social presence. These opportunities seemed to provide students with ways to share knowledge and skills, collectively accomplish tasks, and offer emotional support to one another. The significance of online students' perceptions of the emotional tone and quality of peer responses in relation to their perception of sense of community was also

evident in Kehrwald's (2008) study, in which qualitative data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions showed that participants noticed the emotional tone and quality of peer OL responses. The cumulative effect of these OL interactions over time contributed to students' sense of another's social presence (Kehrwald, 2008). Kehrwald's (2008) and So and Brush's (2008) studies offer support to Rovai's (2002a) stance that online interaction requires both substantial frequency and high quality to effectively foster sense of community.

Self-presentation and social presence. In a survey of 125 online students' perceptions of tasks that contributed to their sense of community, quantitative data revealed that 88% of participants thought *making oneself known* (i.e., providing a personal summary of oneself) was important or very important to create a sense of community (Cameron, Morgan, Williams, & Kostelecky, 2009). The idea of making oneself known appears to mirror Rovai's (2002a) notions of spirit and trust. Since students are unable to verify a peer's identity within online environment to the same degree that they can in a face-to-face setting, the ability to present personal identity through writing appears to help online students feel as though they know one another (i.e., spirit) and that the personalities being projected are genuine and trustworthy (i.e., trust).

Kehrwald's (2008) qualitative study on e-learners' sense of social presence also addressed the significance of self-presentation in the online environment, as online learners reported that social presence increased when group members' personalities were evident in online responses. For example, a student may reveal a personality trait by expressing a sense of black humour or an intense compassion for helping the homeless. On the other hand, "it is possible for an individual to be 'present' and indeed active

without being observable" (Kehrwald, 2010, p. 44). For example, if within the discussion forum a student uses a formal writing style, avoids disclosing personal information, and minimally interacts with others, Kehrwald (2010) would assert that the student is 'present' but not 'observable' due to the lack of personal self-presentation.

Identifying the importance of self-presentation within the online environment has also led to further examination of how this can be done. In Swan and Shih's (2005) study on the development of social presence, survey results from 51 online graduate students revealed that the students with the highest levels of perceived social presence projected their social presence through self-disclosure. Furthermore, Yildiz (2009) found high social presence occurred when OL students believed their peers' postings (e.g., discussion forum postings and emails) were encouraging and personal (e.g., greetings and use of names).

The work cited so far appears to suggest that students participating within an OL community can project personality that seems to reproduce typical face-to-face communication. For example, using self-disclosure (e.g., disclosing a situation that occurred on a family holiday to make a course content-related point) and using words of encouragement to communicate the affective responses that cannot be perceived via asynchronous communication may demonstrate personality in an observable way.

Self-presentation appears to be an important skill for building sense of community because it relates to Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions of interaction, trust, and spirit. Self-disclosure implies that interaction is occurring, and it appears to contribute to trust by fostering open communication (Swan & Shih, 2005). Furthermore, projecting personal qualities into communication (i.e., using greetings) and self-disclosing

information may foster the community dimension of spirit (Rovai, 2002a), as these communication techniques provide an opportunity for e-learners to connect on a personal level.

Interpretation and social presence. To continue presenting how social presence factors contribute to students' sense of community, consideration for student interpretation within the online environment appears to have important instructional implications. Kehrwald (2008) surmised that once social presence is established (through self-presentation), it is increased and maintained through consistent interaction. The quality of this interaction is an important variable for instructors to consider because research has found that if misinterpretation occurs, social presence can be jeopardized. For example, Yildiz's (2009) qualitative study on social presence and asynchronous communication revealed that participants found written communication difficult to interpret because lack of tone and body language in the online environment created potential misunderstandings. However, social presence can be preserved, as Yildiz's participants observed that interpretation of postings grew less difficult as their knowledge of one another increased. Kehrwald (2008) concluded that the relational aspect of online communication that is established over time contributes to how postings are interpreted.

Another concern that instructors need to be cognizant of when working to increase sense of community is the impact of nonresponses within the discussion forum. This was evident in Stodel, Thompson, and MacDonald's (2006) qualitative findings on student interpretations of online communication. Specifically, a lack of responses from peers contributed to a sense of isolation (Stodel et al., 2006). In such a circumstance, a

student lacking a response may feel rejected by others in the group (personally or academically), and as a result may find difficulty participating with confidence.

Interpretation of online posts appears to be a significant factor for instructors who are seeking to build online community. Based on the studies reviewed in this section, interpretation of posts can help maintain sense of community (Kehrwald, 2008; Yildiz, 2009) or pose barriers when misunderstandings occur (Stodel et al., 2006). Kehrwald (2008) concluded that helping students learn to be online learners could help minimize the potential for misunderstanding that occurs online.

In this section an introduction to of social presence along with current research on salient social presence factors were presented in order to highlight the complexity of establishing social presence. Presenting the research on how communication and self-presentation contributes to social presence may equip online instructors with knowledge for helping students learn to build and maintain online personas that positively impact sense of community. Furthermore, recognizing how interpretation can maintain or pose barriers for the establishment of sense of community may provide online instructors with insights for minimizing and repairing misunderstandings. In the next section, a discussion on teaching presence is presented, with the intention of highlighting how an online instructor's organizational and interaction choices set the tone of the online environment.

Teaching presence. *Teaching presence* has been defined as, "The design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 5). Within online education, teaching presence has

been highlighted as a mechanism for minimizing transactional distance between students and instructors (Arbaugh & Hwang, 2006). Shea et al. (2005) conceptualized teaching presence as a combination of instructional design and directed facilitation in order to describe how online instructors project presence in the way they structure a course and in the way they participate. In the following sections, research on how the teaching presence factors of instructional design and directed facilitation contribute to students' sense of community is presented. Reviewing teaching presence factors is important because the instructional strategies proposed later in this chapter require the use of teaching presence.

Instructional design and teaching presence. Instructional design includes instructional activities such as the creation of curriculum and course materials, instructor insights, and the management of course work timelines (Anderson et al., 2001). Shea, Li, and Pickett (2006) gave examples of instructional design and organization qualities and noted, "Clear communication of time parameters, due dates, and deadlines contribute to online learning community as do clear course goals, course topics, and instructions on how to effectively and appropriately participate in the course" (p. 185).

The hypothesis that teaching presence increases sense of community ratings from students was confirmed in a study involving 2,036 online students (Shea et al., 2005). That is, participants who rated instructional design as effective were more likely to report high levels of sense of community as measured by Rovai's (2000b) Classroom Community scale. Additional studies support this finding. For example, a study of 1,067 online students across 32 colleges in the United States showed that for every unit increase measured on the instructional design and organization element of the Teaching Presence

scale, the Classroom Community scale increased by 0.31 (Shea et al., 2006). These two studies appear to suggest that instructors can foster Rovai's (2002a) community dimension of commonality of expectations and goals by structuring the ALN in an organized manner and by clearly communicating course expectations (Shea et al., 2005; Shea et al., 2006).

Directed facilitation and teaching presence. Shea et al. (2005) described directed facilitation as instructional activities such as promoting student interaction, providing clarification, offering expertise, and guiding student learning. For example, directed facilitation that contributes to online students' sense of community may include emailing students who are not participating, using encouragement to create an online environment conducive to open communication, and affirming student understanding demonstrated in postings (Shea et al., 2006).

In a study on e-learners' perceptions of instructors' actions, Deenan, Darabi, and Smith (2007) highlighted that discussion facilitation contributed to teacher presence. Data drawn from 170 online student surveys revealed that students related instructor responsiveness (e.g., answering emails and responding to student postings) with online presence, which may suggest that the level of responsiveness online instructors display through directed facilitation impacts the development of sense of community.

Research on the influence of discussion facilitation in the online environment appears to confirm that discussion facilitation nourishes students' sense of community. For example, empirical research from the study by Shea et al. (2006) on teaching presence in an online environment revealed that for every unit increase measured on the discussion facilitation element of the Teaching Presence scale, sense of community as

measured by the Classroom Community scale increased by 0.83. Shea et al. (2006) concluded that students' sense of community is related to an instructor's ability to guide online discussion.

The studies on directed facilitation seem to suggest that students feel more connected when instructors project a receptive instructional presence, and instructors can demonstrate receptiveness by actively mediating online discourse (Deenan et al., 2007; Shea et al., 2006). Hence, facilitating discussion may enhance students' feelings of spirit and trust, thereby encouraging interaction.

Summary. In this overview of sense of community, Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions were described in order to provide readers with a context for examining how social presence and teaching presence relate to students' sense of community in an online environment. A discussion on social presence revealed that instructors may benefit from having a deeper understanding of what developing social presence entails, in order to help online students effectively project an online identity. An overview of teaching presence helped establish that instructors can contribute to students' sense of community by structuring a learning environment conducive for community development and by engaging in online discussion with support and instruction.

The intention of this section was to present readers with knowledge about what sense of community is. The next section addresses what can be done to establish sense of community; the section begins with the suggestion that instructors can help establish sense of community by fostering students' self-regulated learning skills.

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning is a broad topic, and providing an extensive overview of self-regulated learning research is beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, a brief overview of self-regulated learning is provided, and the self-regulation factors of self-efficacy, participation, and evaluation are linked to Rovai's (2002a) dimensions of community. Personal narrative based on experiential knowledge of online instruction is used to provide a context for examining sense of community research and self-regulated learning skills; strategies for fostering self-regulated learning that contribute to sense of community are also presented.

It is my stipulation that instructors can help students experience community by fostering self-regulated learning skills within their students. Each of Rovai's (2002a) community components (spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals) will be linked to self-regulated learning to offer support to my identified stance. To begin, the definition of self-regulation is presented.

Zimmerman (as cited in Yuksetlturk & Bulut, 2007) defined self-regulated learning as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals" (p. 79). Zimmerman distinguished between self-regulation process (i.e., self-efficacy) and strategies for engaging in the process. This distinction may have significance for instructors who are seeking to establish sense of community because fostering self-regulation appears to involve helping students gain confidence to engage in community-building behaviours, as well as helping students to maintain these behaviours. In response to these aspects of self-regulated learning, self-

efficacy, participation, and evaluation are presented in relation to Rovai's (2002a) dimensions of community.

      Self-efficacy and sense of community. Within education, self-efficacy can be understood as the belief a student has about his or her ability to accomplish a learning task (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010). From an instructional standpoint, fostering students' self-efficacy in an OL environment may be important for building OL students' confidence in interacting with their peers. In the following sections, self-efficacy and its links to the community dimensions of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals (Rovai, 2002a) are discussed in greater detail so as to illustrate the importance of fostering self-efficacy in the online environment.

      Self-efficacy and spirit. As an online instructor, I observed that in order for students to experience spirit (i.e., connection) they first must believe they could do so. In my role as an instructor, I noticed that when students did not know one another, they seemed to alleviate feelings of isolation by connecting with me. Granted, some students were able to connect with peers more easily than others, so I found it important to keep track of students who were only interacting with me as a way to track who needed more prompting to connect with peers and who needed to be affirmed for taking initiative to build sense of community.

      I believe instructors have an instrumental role in building a sense of community in the online environment. To foster this mandate I started to build a strong teaching presence by scheduling 15-minute phone calls during Week 1 of the course, with each new online student to welcome them, ensure their technology was working properly, and answer any questions they had about the course. I also made myself present online by

responding to emails and ALN posts within 24 hours (with email response time often

being much quicker). My actions supported the previously mentioned work of Deenan et

al. (2007), who found that meeting students' interpersonal communication needs

promoted a strong teaching presence and the work of Shea et al. (2006) who found that

students' sense of community increased with the degree of teaching presence they

perceived. While I used my teaching presence as a mechanism for connecting with

students, I also used it to orchestrate connection among students.

To accomplish guided peer interaction, I modelled self-presentation by posting a

picture of myself with a short personal biography and required students to do the same.

In addition, I created a space within the ALN for social discourse entitled "Course Coffee

Room." Within that forum, I introduced myself and asked students to create their own

introduction and to respond to others introductions with questions. By creating a space

for introductions, students were given the opportunity to begin establishing an online

persona. As well, by modelling these actions, students who were less inclined to connect

with others were given a structured opportunity to bond with peers on a personal level,

increasing the chance of having a successful experience of connecting with online peers.

My efforts to support peer interaction among the online students aligned with the

previously mentioned research findings that online students who interact and who are

able to make themselves known to others (self-presentation) are more likely to experience

sense of community (Cameron et al., 2009; Shen et al., 2008; Yildiz, 2009).

Self-efficacy and trust. In response to Rovai's (2002a) assertion that trust is

established through benevolent interaction and the perception that classmates have

credibility, I found that I could initiate a community of benevolence by highlighting

commonalities among the class. During the initial phone calls, many of the students

admitted that they were nervous to begin graduate school and were uncertain about OL;

some students wondered if they were alone in their anxiety. These reactions were not

surprising since the online environment lacks nonverbal cues that enhance face-to-face

communication (Rourke et al., 2001), which could easily invite a person to believe they

are alone in their struggle.

To break this cycle and promote self-efficacy for establishing trust among class

members, I encouraged self-disclosure, which supported Steinweg, Trujillo, Jeffs, and

Warren's (2006) conclusion that self-disclosure can foster trust and, ultimately, social

presence. To accomplish this task, I encouraged self-disclosure by posting a discussion

topic in the ALN that required students to reflect on how they felt about entering an

online graduate program. I contributed by sharing some highs and lows of my

experiences as an online graduate student. Gradually, many students admitted feeling

nervous, which provided a common ground for students to relate to one another on an

emotional level.

I also carefully monitored the discussion to ensure respect and to recognize

participation as a way to build safety and trust in the forum. This extra work of managing

a feeling forum, in which I participated, allowed the students to relate to my experiences,

and hopefully to the experiences of others, providing a safe space for open

communication and trust to flourish.

Self-efficacy and interaction. The most observable area in which students

seemed to lack self-efficacy was with regards to interaction in the discussion forum. In

the first week of the orientation course I noticed that interaction was low and lacking

warmth. This was to be expected since posting was a new task, and students had never met one another. To incite more interaction between students I posted an exemplar of a quality posting, which would be supported by Shea et al. (2006) who found that directed facilitation (i.e., direct instruction in the discussion forum) could positively influence students' sense of community.

Gradually, by Week 3, I noticed self-initiated student OL interaction increased. This increased student interaction provided me with opportunities to facilitate discussion by confirming students' understanding of the material, commending well-written posts with a comment of encouragement, using interlinking comments to connect student ideas (e.g., "I noticed this other student had a similar thought"), and by using questions to encourage further discussion (e.g., "You mentioned that these studies conflicted; in what way?"). This type of OL instructor feedback would be supported by Artino (2008), who recommended providing student feedback as an empirically researched strategy for fostering self-efficacy, and by Shea et al. (2006), whose empirical data showed that discussion facilitation was related to students' sense of community. Striking a balance between setting standards (e.g., providing an exemplar, and encouraging critical thinking) and offering support (e.g., using encouragement) appeared to create a learning environment that provided guidance for posting and providing feedback, which appeared to support students' self-efficacy for interaction and, ultimately, create sense of community (Rovai, 2002a).

Self-efficacy and commonality of expectations and goals. In order to foster self-efficacy for commonality of expectations and goals, I focused on creating a well-structured ALN. This need was confirmed when I learned, from the initial phone calls to

students, that some were concerned about finding information in the ALN. Structuring

the ALN in an organized and consistent manner appeared to provide navigational ease.

My attention to organization aligned with findings from Anderson et al. (2001) and Shea

et al. (2006), as both of their studies showed correlations between course design and

organization, and teaching presence.

I organized the ALN by creating a series of forums such as Course

Announcements, Course Resources, and Questions and Answers. As an example, the

course syllabus and timeline could be found in the Course Resources forum. Furthermore,

in the Course Announcements forum, I created a discussion topic called "Discussion

Forum Expectations," in which I described the difference between academic and social

posting. Providing this level of structure appeared to influence the online community in

positive ways, as these forums provided a way for me to address the entire class and

allowed for students to publicize their questions. In addition to these forums, I created a

Course Coffee Room forum, in which students could connect on a social level (e.g.,

announce a new job).

When students emailed questions, I encouraged them to post the question in the

Questions and Answers forum in order to encourage a habit of sharing questions with the

group. Additionally, when students accidently posted in a wrong forum (e.g., posted a

social question in the Questions and Answers forum rather than the Course Coffee Room

forum), I would email the student to let them know I was moving their post to the proper

forum, making sure the tone of my email was supportive. I shied away from correcting

mistakes publicly to set a tone of safety for the learning process. Structuring the ALN in

a way that encouraged students to seek clarification publicly, and showing sensitivity by

offering private guidance when errors occurred, appeared to foster self-efficacy for commonality of expectations and goals, as learning goals were evident, and the learning process was met with patience and understanding.

Summary. Instructional efforts to connect personally with students and to structure peer interaction may help students bridge the gap between planning to interact with peers and engaging in peer interaction. Furthermore, OL instructors can set the social and academic tone of the online environment through structuring and facilitating discussion. While increased teaching presence may initially require extra work on the instructor's part, modelling social presence and consistently reinforcing desired student behaviours and interactions may serve to establish an OL environment that encourages open communication and, ultimately, sense of community. To further expand on how fostering OL students' self-regulatory behaviours could contribute to sense of community, participation is discussed next.

Participation and sense of community. Fostering the self-regulatory skill of participation is important within OL because the development of sense of community in an online environment requires observable participation from students and instructors (Kehrwald, 2008). Hrastinski (2009) defined online learner participation as "a process of learning by taking part and maintaining relations with others. It is a complex process comprising doing, communicating, thinking, feeling and belonging, which occurs both online and offline" (p. 80). For the sake of consistency, instructional strategies for fostering the self-regulatory skill of participation and its links to the community dimensions of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals (Rovai, 2002a) will be expanded upon.

Participation and spirit.   Studies presented in the Sense of Community section of this chapter appear to suggest spirit (i.e., connection) could be developed in an OL environment by fostering participatory behaviours such as interaction (Rovai, 2002a), and the frequency and quality of interaction is correlated with sense of community (Dawson, 2006; Shen et al., 2008). As an online instructor, I noticed the frequency of interaction varied from student to student (some were more inclined to participate than others), and interaction increased as students learned more about one another. In response to these observations, I used course structuring and discussion facilitation to balance the frequency of participation and to encourage students who interacted less than their peers. Each of these topics will be expanded upon next.

In terms of course structuring, I followed discussion forum guidelines (McBride & Shepard, 2010) that required students to create initial responses to discussion forum questions and to respond to at least two peers per question. Once the foundation for interaction was laid, I used open questions to evoke more responses from students and to model how asking questions could move a discussion forward.

I found that acknowledging students' posts, particularly within the first few weeks of the course, was an important aspect of fostering a sense of connectedness among students. As previously noted, qualitative data from Stodel et al.'s (2006) study revealed that lack of responses from peers contributed to student isolation. To buffer isolation from lack of peer responses, I tracked student posts and responded to those who had not received peer attention. For those students who did not receive peer responses, I aimed to link discussion by quoting parts of their posts with another student's post, posing a question that would encourage both students to respond. Intentionally linking student

posts appeared to provide opportunities for students to recognize their common ideas, fostering a sense of connection between students.

Participation and trust. Fostering respectful participation may help create trust within the OL environment by providing students with an opportunity to discover it is emotionally safe to participate. This can be accomplished by establishing a climate of encouragement and knowledge sharing among students (Kehrwald, 2008; So & Brush, 2008). Specifically, infusing asynchronous dialogue with supportive comments and providing opportunities for collaborative learning may help establish benevolence and knowledge sharing.

In order to encourage supportive comments among students, I initiated benevolence through my own posts. Recognizing posts with affirmations (e.g., "I appreciated how you applied a cultural lens to this issue") seemed to remind students that their posts positively contributed to the learning environment and appeared to set a tone of generous peer affirmation. Cameron et al. (2009) also highlighted the importance of demonstrating how to encourage peers and found that sense of community was enhanced as OL students discovered etiquette (e.g., congratulating peers on their positive contributions).

In addition to fostering encouragement, I also designed an activity that required students to collaborate with a partner and post a response within the discussion forum as a team. This provided students with an opportunity to share knowledge and attain credibility. So and Brush (2008) supported collaborative work in an OL environment and reported that collectively accomplishing tasks contributed to participants' sense of

knowing one another in the online environment. As Rovai (2002a) noted, building trust requires encouragement and credibility.

Modelling encouragement and using collaborative learning activities to incite social support seemed to establish a safe learning environment within my five-week orientation course. As well, collaboration provided an opportunity for students to project credibility as they shared knowledge and to gain a sense of their peers' credibility by receiving knowledge. Overall, encouraging students to participate in supportive and collaborative ways appeared to create an OL environment characterized by trust.

Participation and interaction. Another way that I helped students self-regulate participation in a way that built sense of community was by drawing attention to the value of quality interaction. Hranstinski (2009) supported this approach and pointed out that sense of community is nourished by interactions that are related to course content as well those that provide social support. At the beginning of the orientation course I noticed that posts tended to be formal, repetitive, and formulaic. For example, students tended to use certain phrases such as, "your post resonated with me", repetitively and tended to ascribe to a certain way of posting (e.g., comparing and contrasting points within the course readings). In response to this observation, I used course structuring and discussion facilitation to encourage variation. For example, posting different types of questions (e.g., questions that required personal reflection or application) gave students the opportunity to display emotional tone, and challenged them to abandon phases and styles they relied on.

Encouraging personal investment in knowledge sharing also appeared to enhance the quality of OL interaction because students were presenting knowledge they had

personally chosen. For example, I encouraged students to seek academic sources outside of suggested course readings, which seemed to generate fresh discussion and demonstrate personal investment in the knowledge being brought to the group.

Some of the other ways I fostered self-presentation skills that have been highlighted in the sense of community literature included using greetings and student names in my responses (Yildiz, 2009) and using a conversational style in my responses to students (Steinweg et al., 2006). Overall, varying the discussion seemed to encourage students to display more personality as they participated, which has been identified as an important sense of community factor in OL studies (Steinweg et al., 2006; Yildiz, 2009).

In addition to encouraging quality interaction in the OL environment, I also sought to help OL students recognize the value of forming social ties. For example, I encouraged students to read an article by Drouin (2008) on how OL students' perceived sense of community influences achievement, retention, and satisfaction, and to discuss and debate the importance of community in the OL environment. Making sense of community a topic of discussion seemed to help students recognize the importance of sense of community in OL. To add to sense of community awareness, I posted a personal reflection in the discussion forum, explaining my own process of bonding with my cohort. As participants in Anderssen's (2010) study pointed out, recognition for the value of peer support in the online environment grows over time.

Overall, I agree with Anderssen's (2010) findings; there is considerable value in helping OL students recognize that sense of community is a worthwhile goal to strive for. Helping students see the value of participation and of sense of community appeared to add further support to the instructional strategies for fostering OL students' self-regulated

participatory behaviours. Thus, promoting self-regulated quality interaction and appreciation for sense of community seemed to help establish Rovai's (2002a) community dimension of interaction.

Participation and commonality of expectations and goals. The last online community variable to be examined that instructors could help establish by fostering self-regulated participation is commonality of expectations and goals (i.e., learning). In a study on self-regulatory behaviours and the online environment, Tseng and Kuo (2010) observed that online learners experience a process of establishing social ties, forming identity in relation to the group, and sharing knowledge in order to benefit the group. Tseng and Kuo's (2010) observation is important because it illustrates the shift that students undergo as they begin to recognize that knowledge sharing benefits both the individual and the group.

This shift was most evident in the way students changed their posting habits. Initially, I noticed that some students chose to post responses later in the week. I saw late posting as problematic because even though students were able to meet the minimum grading criteria for the discussion forum when they posted late, doing so required little engagement in the discussion. Likewise, posting late meant that they were less likely to receive peer responses, and that the responses they sent peers were unlikely to be read, and thus unlikely to benefit the community. At this point, it appeared as though some students were simply posting as necessary without realizing the learning benefits they could receive from peer feedback, and how they could contribute to the learning of others.

In order to help students realize how participation can benefit the entire class, I tracked the frequency of posts the students made to be proactive and encourage more

participation. For example, I sent friendly worded emails to students who habitually posted late, encouraging them to post early and reminding them that their contributions to the class mattered. My efforts were intentional, as I wanted to establish a learning climate that encouraged students to self-regulate their engagement with one another, rather than supporting a learning climate in which simply posting the minimum was acceptable. While it required some extra instructional effort to track posts and send emails, fostering participation that engaged the entire class appeared to establish a climate of learning (i.e., commonality of expectations and goals) in which individuals gained as well as contributed.

Summary.   In this section, addressing online student participation in relation to the community dimensions of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals (Rovai, 2002a) served to highlight the significant role online instructors have in fostering participation that builds sense of community. In particular, the extent to which students participate and the quality of their responses to peers can be influenced with course structuring and discussion facilitation. These instructional influences can be used to encourage student engagement over nominal interaction by raising sense of community awareness and fostering self-regulated participation with instructional and peer accountability. Overall, helping OL students realize the value of exchanging minimal participation for true engagement seems to coincide with increased community and learning synergy within the OL environment. In the next section, fostering the self-regulatory skill of self-evaluation is discussed in relation to Rovai's (2002a) dimensions of community.

Self-evaluation and sense of community. Self-evaluation, the self-reflective thoughts about personal performance that influence future behaviour (Zimmerman, 1990), is the last self-regulatory skill that will be discussed in relation to how instructors can foster sense of community. Self-evaluation is pertinent to OL because, unlike face-to-face settings in which instructors can make physical observations (e.g., facial expressions and body language) about student engagement and understanding, online students must demonstrate their understanding in observable ways (Song & Hill, 2007), such as writing a personal reflection. Thus, helping students develop a habit of self-reflection appears to be important for monitoring and reporting desired behaviours (e.g., participation and quality interaction) within the ALN that can be observed and assessed.

While I offered several instructional strategies for fostering the self-regulatory skills of self-efficacy and participation and their links to Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions in the previous sections, in this section I specifically focus on one self-evaluation activity, detailing its link to spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals. Focusing on one strategy makes sense for this section because the self-evaluation activity I assigned encompassed all of the community dimensions. Unlike the self-efficacy and participation sections, I will begin this section with a brief description of the instructional strategy, followed by its links to Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions.

The self-evaluation activity I assigned required students to reflect on several aspects of their online performance every two weeks. This activity required students to keep track of how often they posted and to whom they had responded. They did this by recording the number of posts they had contributed in the discussion forum throughout a

given week, as well the names of any students they had not responded to in that week; this was a realistic expectation since there were less than 20 students in the class. The intention of tracking the quantity of posts and the peers they had not responded to was to help students ensure they had met the minimum of required posts (i.e., three academic responses per discussion forum question and at least one encouraging response to a peer) and to encourage students to respond to every classmate throughout the course.

The self-evaluation activity also required students to reflect on the type and the quality of their interaction. Within the discussion forum, students were required to create supportive comments as well as academic responses (McBride & Shepard, 2010). As such, the self-evaluation activity required students to record the number of encouraging responses they posted, reflect on one academic post they thought went well, and reflect on one post that could be improved upon. Students were also required to create a paragraph on how their contributions in the discussion forum had benefitted their peers, with the intention of creating awareness about their own knowledge sharing ability. In the next sections, this self-evaluation activity is linked to the community dimensions of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals.

Self-evaluation and spirit. The self-evaluation activity I assigned online students seemed to motivate self-monitoring behaviour for connecting with others. Building upon the observation that increased interaction fosters spirit (Dawson, 2006; Shen et al., 2008), the self-evaluation activity appeared to help students maintain a high level of interaction by requiring students to demonstrate awareness of their own posting trends. A description of how the self-evaluation activity helped increase awareness for establishing spirit (i.e., connectedness) among online students is described in the following paragraphs.

After students had completed a collaborative activity, I noticed that they tended to respond to peers they had collaborated with more often than other classmates. I was not entirely surprised by this dynamic. Collaboration has been shown to enhance sense of community (Kehrwald, 2008; So & Brush, 2008); therefore, it made sense that students were more comfortable responding to peers they had collaborated with because they had likely formed social ties during the collaboration process. However, from an instructional standpoint I saw value in fostering inclusivity within the large group so all students would feel included and gain the full spectrum of insight that could be obtained from interacting with multiple students rather than a select few.

The self-evaluation activity was intended to help students become more aware of their posting trends and to encourage whole-group connectivity. Specifically, the attempt to foster greater awareness was accomplished by requiring students to monitor and to report on the extent to which they had participated (i.e., number of posts in a week) and to list the peers they had not yet responded to. From an instructional standpoint, the self-evaluation activity provided a concrete demonstration of student awareness as evidenced in written responses. For example, students knew if they were meeting the number of minimum required posts because they were required to count them. As well, students also appeared to apply this awareness to their posting behaviours in the ALN. For example, after the first self-evaluation activity was submitted, it seemed as though students were interacting with peers they had not responded to in the previous week.

As such, the self-evaluation activity appeared to foster self-regulation for self-evaluation by encouraging self-monitoring behaviours. Additionally, this activity also appeared to provide students with accountability for meeting the required number of

posts to ensure that interaction was occurring and to motivate students to connect with every peer in the class. Thus, fostering self-evaluation seemed to contribute to students' sense of spirit within the online environment.

Evaluation and trust. Fostering a climate of self-evaluation also appeared to build trust (i.e., benevolent communication and credibility) within the OL community. By tracking their academic and supportive comments, online students seemed to gain a greater awareness of how their own level of interaction and encouragement compared with those of their peers. This in turn, seemed to foster trust because peer comparison seemed to help students recognize the importance of offering support and maintaining credibility.

I observed evidence of peer comparison after the first self-evaluation activity was submitted. A student who was travelling one week prefaced her late post with an apology. She acknowledged her classmates were much further ahead of her in terms of posting and apologized for joining the discussion late. Her comment appeared to display awareness of how her participation in the discussion forum compared to others, and how posting late might be perceived negatively. The notion that self-evaluation involves peer comparison was noted in Chen, Stocker, Wang, Chung, and Chen's (2009) qualitative study, in which online nursing students reported evaluating their own participation by reflecting on the performance of peers. The comparative aspect of the student's comment in my own example seemed to suggest she was evaluating her own performance in comparison to her peers, and she wanted to maintain credibility with them.

Furthermore, the responses she received from peers were encouraging. For example, students thanked her for her explanation and commended her on well-written

posts in spite of travel. The explanation provided by the student who was travelling, and

the subsequent encouragement she received seemed to demonstrate Cameron et al.'s

(2009) description of supportive relationships, which included peer acknowledgement

and support for how personal schedules and academic workload impact group dynamics.

In Cameron et al.'s (2009) study, online students working on collaborative projects

reported that supportive relationships contributed to their sense of trust. Based on the

observations I presented, I would add that fostering self-evaluation can help students

become aware of their performance in comparison to peers and that this heightened

awareness can positively contribute to the formation of supportive relationships, as

Cameron et al. (2009) described, which in turn can build trust within the OL environment.

Self-evaluation and interaction. Thus far, I have explained how fostering self-

evaluation appeared to help online students develop Rovai's (2002a) community

dimensions of spirit and trust. The self-evaluation assignment also seemed to support

online students as they developed habits of engaging in quality interaction. In the Sense

of Community section of this chapter, qualitative data from student surveys showed that

the quality of online interaction influenced sense of community (Kehrwald, 2008), which

seems to suggest that helping students develop effective online communication could

help establish online community. While I have already proposed instructional strategies

for fostering quality interaction in the participation section of this project, adding the

instructional strategy of self-evaluation is important for examining how online instructors

can help students monitor and improve their interaction.

Engaging in self-evaluation seemed to contribute to the growth of quality

interaction from week to week. For example, at the beginning of the orientation course

students seemed to reiterate the same points as peers in their initial posts, and the discussion thread had a tendency to become a superficial display of group consensus. However, after students completed the first self-evaluation activity, they seemed to display more critical thinking in their posts, such as probing for deeper discussion when common themes emerged rather than simply agreeing with one another.

Since the self-evaluation activity required students to reflect on their best post and on a post that required improvement, it appeared that the self-reflection process helped students identify when they displayed high quality interaction and what they could do to improve future posts. Zimmerman (1990) would support my assertion, as he noted that self-reflection involves appraisal of one's performance, followed by adjustment of skills for future tasks. As online students interacted, reflected on interaction, and adjusted aspects of communication to improve the quality of interaction, the collective effort toward quality participation seemed to create a group standard that students sought to meet or surpass. Thus, fostering self-reflection through self-evaluation may help set a community standard for quality interaction by engaging online students in the process of improving their own communication skills from week to week.

Self-evaluation and commonality of expectations and goals. The commonality of expectations and goals (i.e., learning) is the last of Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions that self-evaluation seemed to enhance. Rovai (2002a) asserted that learning involves a transformational process occurring on an individual level (knowledge acquisition) as well as a group level (knowledge sharing and appraisal). In this last section, I further expand upon how self-evaluation provided students with an opportunity

to reflect on the value of sense of community in the learning process, which appeared to foster appreciation for the relevancy of establishing social ties in the online environment.

In the final self-evaluation activity, I asked students to reflect on how their participation had changed from the beginning of the course until the end. The reflective feedback seemed to suggest students gained appreciation for collective knowledge construction throughout the course, and group cohesion positively influenced learning. For example, students reflected on themes such as the value of seeing how peers posted, the way peer support helped diminish the anxiety they felt about posting, and how the development of social ties helped motivate quality interaction. These comments seemed to reflect Andersson's (2010) findings that experienced online graduate students saw greater value in peer support than novice e-learners. By engaging in the final self-evaluation activity, students appeared to demonstrate appreciation for and awareness of the relationship between sense of community and learning, which may suggest that self-evaluation fosters awareness for how individual participation contributes to Rovai's (2002a) community dimension of commonality of expectations and goals (i.e., learning).

Summary. In summary, fostering OL students' self-regulated learning skills appeared to help establish sense of community by building the community dimensions of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals (Rovai, 2002a). With regards to fostering self-regulatory beliefs such as self-efficacy, OL instructors may find that personally connecting with OL students can encourage self-regulation by building confidence among novice e-learners to initiate peer interaction and open communication. Once peer interaction has been initiated and emotional safety for participation has been established, OL instructors may find that encouraging OL students to recognize the value

of sense of community motivates self-regulation for quality interaction within the OL
environment. Furthermore, providing OL students with opportunities for self-reflection
has the potential to promote greater awareness for community goals among OL students,
further establishing appreciation for peer contributions to the learning process.

While I have given considerable attention to how instructional strategies for
fostering self-regulated learning may help OL students experience sense of community,
this next section focuses on equipping OL instructors with communication tools for
avoiding instructor–student interactions that potentially interrupt sense of community
formation. Specifically, applying Karpman's (2008) transactional analysis concept of the
drama triangle to the OL environment may help OL instructors seeking to build students'
sense of community avoid victim, persecutor, and rescuer interactions that can pose
relational barriers within the OL environment.

The intent of the next section is to support my assertion that online instructors can
build sense of community by avoiding drama triangle interactions with students. First, a
brief description of transactional analysis and the concept of the drama triangle will be
explained and then discussed in terms of its applicability to OL and sense of community.
Next, instructional strategies for avoiding the drama triangle to foster sense of
community will be proposed. It is important to note that I could not find any published
articles on the drama triangle and its applicability to OL. Therefore, examples drawn
from research on how drama triangle awareness has been used in other settings to
improve interpersonal communication are paired with OL instructional examples to
illustrate how drama triangle awareness can benefit the OL community.

The Drama Triangle

Transactional analysis theory is based on communication and analyzing transactions. Transactional analysis has an extensive history of being applied to education or schools, business, and counselling (Barrow, 2007; Stewart & Joines, 1987). Transactional analysis theory appears to align well with OL instruction because the asynchronous nature of online interactions provides opportunities for instructors to analyze online communication before responding and transactional analysis provides tools for analyzing communication.

Steve Karpman (1968) introduced the drama triangle to explain how people cycle, sometimes unconsciously, through the roles of persecutor, victim, and rescuer when encountering interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict or when they are inauthentic in communicating their thoughts, feelings, or needs. Karpman postulated that drama requires a victim, and that drama is perpetuated when players switch roles or bring in other players to fill roles.

Within education, the drama triangle has been used to help maximize understanding between instructors and students (Barrow, 2007). It is my stance that applying the concept of the drama triangle to OL environments will benefit OL instructors and students as well. Specifically, I propose that drama triangle interactions within the OL environment pose barriers for the development of students' sense of community. To support this assertion, the three drama triangle roles are presented by providing a description of each role, how to extricate oneself from the drama triangle when in each role, and how to avoid becoming part of the drama triangle when encountering each role. Following the drama triangle role sections, examples based on

my experiences as an online instructor are included in order to clarify how instructors can avoid drama triangle interactions and how doing so benefits the growth of the OL community.

Victim. Based on Burgess's (2005) description of her own enactment of drama triangle roles as a parent, the victim role is often characterized by helplessness. An individual acting as a victim may discount personal responsibility by blaming others for problems and by disengaging from problem-solving behaviour (Burgess, 2005; McKimm & Forrest, 2010). The victim may feel a false sense of worthlessness, discounting personal strengths that could be used to problem solve (Burgess, 2005; McKimm & Forrest, 2010). For example, a student may pessimistically conclude that failure is inevitable and that there is no use in exerting more effort toward success (McKimm & Forrest, 2010). Quite often, a victim will look to a rescuer to fix the problem (McKimm & Forrest, 2010).

Using fictional scenarios that could occur between supervisors and trainees, McKimm and Forrest (2010) described that an individual could leave the victim role by de-personalizing the problem (i.e., moving from "I am a problem" to "I have a problem") and by re-engaging in the problem-solving process. Stepping out of the victim role requires personal action to solve the problem and the avoidance of interactions that perpetuate victim behaviour (e.g., seeking a rescuer to solve the problem). For example, an OL student who feels overwhelmed by the amount of required reading outlined in the course syllabus could create a time management plan rather than email the instructor to lament over the amount of work that is required for the course.

Based on their fictional scenarios, McKimm and Forrest (2010) suggested that when encountering a victim, one can avoid the drama triangle by acknowledging the problem, providing encouragement and helpful information, and believing that the person immersed in the victim role is capable of solving the problem. For example, an online instructor can demonstrate a nurturing attitude toward a student who feels overwhelmed by acknowledging that the academic writing process can be gruelling and by reminding the student of past academic success and problem-solving capabilities. McKimm and Forrest (2010) asserted perpetuating victim–rescuer encounters could reinforce the victim's feelings of helplessness, and an attempt to rescue a victim will often result in a switch of roles in which the victim persecutes the rescuer for not solving the problem properly (McKimm & Forrest, 2010). The role of persecutor is explained next.

Persecutor. Burgess's (2005) description of herself in a persecutor role was characterized by criticism. An individual acting as a persecutor will tend to discount the abilities of others and inflate his or her own personal positive contributions to a situation (Barrow, 2007; McKimm & Forrest, 2010). Burgess (2005) explained that the persecutor role involves feelings of resentment for having to solve a problem and blame toward the victim for not being capable of solving a problem. For example, a student may share in a public forum that the instructor is not providing enough assistance and that the people who do not know how to post properly are slowing down the conversations making it boring to post. The communication style of a persecutor tends to express superiority and may be aggressive, judgmental, or self-entitled (Burgess, 2005; McKimm & Forrest, 2010).

When in the persecutor role, an individual could leave the drama triangle by identifying feelings such as hurt, injustice, frustration, or anger and by finding ways to express these feelings without discounting and abusing others (Burgess, 2005). For example, an online instructor who is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of emails students are sending asking for help or seeking clarification could acknowledge the lack of professional boundaries that have been set and plan to exercise more balance. Stepping out of the persecutor role requires the ability to recognize the effects negative feelings have on oneself and others and a willingness to exercise compassion for the experiences of others (McKimm & Forrest, 2010).

An individual encountering persecution can avoid a drama triangle interaction by stopping the conversation (McKimm & Forrest, 2010). For example, if a student emailed an instructor launching complaints about the amount of work required in the course, the instructor could acknowledge the student's frustration and state the fact that the work will still need to be accomplished in order to gain credit for the class. Building on this same example, another way to disengage from a drama triangle interaction with a persecutor is to use compassion in order to seek clarity (McKimm & Forrest, 2010). Instead of stating what student will need to do in order to gain credit for the course, the instructor could probe for more information about why the student is feeling so overwhelmed with the intention of supporting the student to solve the problem instead of criticize. Under these circumstances, the instructor may benefit from recognizing the difference between supporting and rescuing. The role of rescuer is explained next.

Rescuer. Rescuers tend to overextend themselves out of pity for others (Burgess, 2005). An individual acting as a rescuer tends to discount the strengths and abilities of

others by assuming responsibility for the problems of others (Burgess, 2005; McKimm & Forrest, 2010). For example, if a student posted false information in the discussion forum, an instructor might rescue the student by posting correct information, instead of inviting the student to review the post for accuracy. McKimm and Forrest (2010) described the communication style of a rescuer as controlling (i.e., advice giving) or expectant (i.e., "I know what is best"), and Burgess (2005) noted that the rescuer is prone to shift to the role of victim when overextended (i.e., expressing feelings of being taken advantage of). Building on the discussion forum posting example above, a perpetual pattern of fixing problems instead of encouraging students to make necessary corrections may result in students' overdependence on the instructor. This, in turn, could cause the online instructor to feel overwhelmed by the students' demands for support, which may move the instructor from rescuer into victim position and the student from victim into persecutor. As Karpman (1968) noted, role switching perpetuates drama, whereas leaving the drama triangle interrupts the cycle of drama.

When in the rescuer role, an individual can leave the drama triangle by recognizing that people are capable of solving their own problems, by separating personal self-worth from helping others and by setting personal boundaries (McKimm & Forrest, 2010). Burgess (2005) suggested that stepping out of the rescuer role requires awareness that people cannot be changed, but can only change themselves, as well as a shift from rescuing behaviour to nurturing behaviour (i.e., acknowledging a person's struggle without giving advice). From an online instructional standpoint, avoiding the role of rescuer provides an opportunity for students to recognize their own potential to succeed and solve problems. Instead of correcting a student's inaccurate post, an OL instructor

could post a question to encourage reflective thinking, such as, "I noticed that you and John have a difference of opinion on that point. How did you each come to your conclusions? Please cite research to support your answers". Although posting reflective questions requires more creative effort on the OL instructor's part, it has the advantage of establishing a learning environment that encourages personal growth rather than overdependence. Support for this empowering stance aligns well with Barrow's (2007) assertion that taking on drama triangle roles compromises both the learner's and teacher's potential for creativity and vulnerability.

This section introduced how drama triangle interactions could impair interpersonal communication, with a focus on the OL environment. Next I present an applied discussion on how avoiding drama triangle interactions could help online instructors foster sense of community.

My Drama Triangle Encounters

As an online instructor who has stepped into all three of the drama triangle roles at times, I have found drama triangle interactions tended to impede my community-building efforts, and avoiding the drama triangle helped to maintain sense of community, even foster it. To illustrate this position, I shall use a personal narrative to present my drama triangle encounters and the strategies I used to avoid them. The examples provided are based on real events; I have changed certain details to protect student privacy.

Rescuer. As an online instructor, I found it challenging to support students effectively without fostering overdependence on me. At the beginning of the online course, I recognized the need for increased support because the students did not know

one another and the OL environment lacked the immediacy a face-to-face classroom could provide. As such, I observed that students were hesitant to interact with one another and would email me with their questions rather than post them in the open Question and Answer discussion forum. Some examples of the problems students emailed me with included technical difficulties, questions about learning activities, and questions about timelines. I recognized that some students were likely to feel anxiety given the unfamiliarity of the learning venue and may have felt less distress contacting me by email than making their questions public in an open forum.

When students were emailing structure-type questions (e.g., technical issues, course syllabus issues, timelines), I avoided perpetuating a rescuer–victim interaction and did not provide the student with the answer. Instead, I explained where the answer could be found within the ALN system, so the next time the student had a question he or she would be more prepared to seek answers independently. During the second week of instruction students typically became more familiar navigating the ALN, so, to decrease their dependence on me and to help empower their problem-solving capabilities, I started directing students to seek answers on their own. My scaffolding-type action (Artino, 2008) aligned with McKimm and Forrest's (2010) assertion that spotting the potential for drama triangle interactions could help people avoid engaging in them. By avoiding the role of the rescuer I was able to make effective use of teaching presence by being available, encouraging, and empowering, rather than being perceived as a "fixer."

The previous example also demonstrated how teaching presence includes offering intense course structuring. I organized information within the ALN in a consistent manner and provided clear course guidelines (i.e., course syllabus, timeline, lesson plans,

and rubrics). This may have fostered students' self-efficacy by providing them with an opportunity to gain confidence in navigating the ALN. Providing this information also contributed to Rovai's (2002a) dimension of community, commonality of goals and expectations, by encouraging a group expectation of problem-solving behaviour.

While avoiding rescuing fostered self-efficacy and sense of community, it was not always received well by students. As I did not provide the rescuing behaviour some students hoped for, I encountered persecution.

Persecutor. Students can become discouraged with instructor feedback that encourages them to engage in some reflective thought to improve their performance. For example, when students express, in the forums, criticism about my instructional feedback, or question my assessment methods, my emotional response propels me to step into the victim role by feeling personally attacked, or step into the persecutor role by reprimanding the student for questioning my decisions. I have trained myself not to react to my emotional impulses and instead to focus on course structuring to help me respond to students' frustrations. For example, in response to student complaints I usually send an email acknowledging the student's frustration with the feedback and direct the student to review the grading rubric.

I do not engage in the emotional element other than to acknowledge the frustration. Of relevance, I find when persecutor-like attacks are communicated to me via email it provides me with time to pause, reflect on the situation, and avoid the drama triangle. Thus, if a student does publically accuse me of being unfair, I ask this person, in the post, to email me directly with concerns.

I have learned to avoid the persecutor role by exercising compassion and offering more clarity to reduce the tendency for students to overgeneralize. For example, within the follow-up email to a student who is frustrated with me, I may provide even more feedback on how I thought the student's work could be improved, and I will affirm the student's abilities for graduate learning. I aim to avoid the victim role by concluding the email with a firm assertion that the grade was final, and I would only be willing to answer specific questions about how the student could improve in the future.

When I avoid the drama triangle I aim to foster Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions of spirit and trust. In these examples, had I taken on the role of a persecutor I may have ruptured the student–instructor relationship, posing a barrier to fostering spirit. By exercising compassion, I was able to foster benevolent interaction (i.e., trust). Despite these efforts, I can still fall into the victim role when I teach.

Victim. In my first year of teaching online, I found online instruction to be challenging for several reasons. First, I was unprepared for the amount of student emails I received at the start of the course. Since students could email at any time of the day, I found myself answering an overwhelming amount of emails, often repeating the same information to a variety of students. I also spent countless hours online facilitating discussions and tracking posts because the anxiety from the online students seemed so high I felt I had to take immediate action to reduce their distress. In response to these aspects of online instruction it was easy to step into the role of the victim by attributing my feelings to the nature of the OL environment, complaining to others about the intensity of my job, and accepting that the time demands of online instruction could not be managed.

However, since I was aware of the drama triangle and its dangers, I recognized I could leave the drama triangle by acknowledging that I was feeling overwhelmed by the time demands and by exercising problem-solving skills. I took immediate action to reduce the high volume of emails I received by asking students, in a friendly manner, to post questions in the relevant Question and Answer discussion forum. As a result, my inbox became more manageable, and questions could be answered on a group basis (once) rather than individually (multiple times). Furthermore, using the forum increased peer interaction as students began to answer one another's questions when possible. The benefits were twofold: my workload decreased and students were able to build sense of community through collaborative problem solving.

I further avoided the victim role by creating a time management plan that limited the time I spent online, and I made time for self-care activities. I used this insight to further foster sense of community by addressing time management in course announcements forum. I created a discussion forum topic called "Time Management and Self-Care," made the first post on the importance of setting personal limits and engaging in self-care, and encouraged students to make a time management plan. I then invited students to share ideas and strategies. Most of the students posted appreciation for addressing the challenges of managing time, and several students shared tips for saving time and engaging in self-care.

The actions I took to avoid the victim role fostered sense of community in several ways. Using the ALN more efficiently fostered Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions of spirit, trust, and interaction as collaborative problem solving provided students with a shared experience, an opportunity to build credibility through knowledge sharing, and a

chance to increase their frequency of interaction. By engaging in problem solving, I was equipped with an insight that benefitted students. Acknowledging the challenges of time management and self-care demonstrated supportive teaching presence and encouraged self-disclosure. Self-disclosure provided students with an opportunity to relate on an emotional level.

Summary. Exploring the concept of the drama triangle and its applicability to OL illustrated the significant role OL instructors have in establishing and maintaining interactions with students that can contribute to sense of community formation. Specifically, applying knowledge of the drama triangle roles (i.e., victim, rescuer, and persecutor) within OL may help instructors engage in communication patterns that foster student independence while simultaneously fostering student connection. Strategies discussed were related to Rovai's (2002) dimensions of sense of community in order to establish how avoiding the drama triangle fosters sense of community.

Instructional Strategies for Fostering Sense of Community

This section provides a summary of instructional strategies for fostering sense of community. This summary, presented in Figure 1, has been organized into a user-friendly list to serve as a quick reference for OL instructors.

Instructional Strategy	Examples
Provide Clear Guidelines	Ensuring that students have clear instructions about course requirements, discussion forum requirements, timelines, assignment details, and expectations may help minimize anxiety and may encourage SOC formation by providing the OL community with a common set of goals and expectations. For example, OL instructors could post a reading schedule and lessons ahead of time so that students can proactively plan to manage time.
Structure the ALN	Structuring the ALN in an organized way and managing it in a consistent way may help establish a predictable OL environment. For example, creating themed forums such as "Course Announcements" and "Course Resources," as well as promoting the use of these forums by consistently posting relevant information to these forums may help OL students develop self-efficacy for navigating the ALN. Additionally, providing predictable structure demonstrates teaching presence, which has been shown to help foster SOC.
Manage Teaching Presence by Scaffolding Support	An OL instructor could manage teaching presence by initially providing supports that are eventually removed as students gain familiarity with the ALN. For example, the OL instructor could answer students' emailed questions about discussion forum expectations rather than direct them to consult the course syllabus in the first week, but by the third week the instructor would respond to emailed questions about discussion forum expectations by directing students to consult the resource containing the answer (e.g., the course syllabus).
Model Social Presence	An OL instructor could help students learn online social cues by modeling behaviours that communicate social presence, such as using a conversational style in discussion forum posts and using encouragement to foster open communication.
Foster Self-presentation	Encouraging OL students to develop online personas may help encourage social bonding. For example, OL instructors could encourage self-disclosure by creating discussion topics that require personal reflection in order to help OL students display observable aspects of their personalities. Additionally, having OL students create profiles by posting a picture and writing a brief personal biography may help OL students feel more connected to peers they have never met face to face.
Foster Awareness	Fostering appreciation for the value of SOC may help students recognize their need for social connection. For example, an OL instructor could provide students with an article that showcases the benefits of SOC in OL, such as Drouin's (2008) article on the relationship between OL students' perception of SOC and satisfaction, achievement, and retention. The instructor could then create a discussion forum question asking students to personally reflect on their own perceptions of SOC.
Promote Collaboration	Creating opportunities for collaboration may help OL students establish social ties, gain credibility with peers, and promote knowledge sharing. For example, an OL instructor could create a paired-response activity in which students discuss a forum topic with a partner and post a co-created response.

Instructional Strategy	Examples
Encourage Leadership	Providing students with opportunities to facilitate a discussion in the ALN may foster quality participation by encouraging students to reflect on their own leadership performance. For example, an OL instructor could assign a partnered activity requiring OL students to present on a relevant topic and facilitate the discussion forum. Encouraging students to contribute outside sources of information promotes knowledge sharing, which may help OL students establish credibility with peers.
Provide Exemplars	Providing students with exemplars can promote self-efficacy and increase interaction. For example, posting a sample discussion forum response for novice e-learners in the first week of a course may encourage participation because the exemplar would provide them with the opportunity to privately compare their post with the sample before posting publicly.
Promote Self-Evaluation	Providing clear rubrics and assigning self-reflection activities may help students monitor the quality of their work by generating awareness of how their interactions are influencing the online community. For example, an OL instructor could assign a self-reflection activity every two weeks, requiring OL students to track the quality and quantity of their posts.
Encourage Goal Setting	One way OL instructors could promote social bonding is to make the attainment of SOC a goal. Supporting the attainment of SOC as a goal could be done by encouraging students to respond to different peers each week in the discussion forum and to keep track of peers they have not yet responded to.
Provide Timely Feedback	OL instructors may find that providing feedback in a timely manner can foster OL student motivation. For example, posting responses to students throughout the week could generate increased interaction because the OL instructor's strong presence in the ALN may provide OL students with accountability to participate. Instructors who work in OL environments can also demonstrate teaching presence by responding to students' emails and questions in the ALN within 24 hours, which may help students feel supported and connected.
Avoid Being a Rescuer	Recognizing that students are capable of solving their own problems can help OL instructors avoid rescuing behaviours that foster students' overdependence on the OL instructor. For instance, by increasing nurturing behaviour, supplying necessary information, and avoiding solving problems, an OL instructor can communicate support without becoming a "problem fixer."
Avoid Being a Persecutor	When faced with interpersonal conflict, taking on the persecutor role has the potential to rupture instructor–student relationships. Instructors who work in OL environments can avoid stepping into the persecutor role by increasing nurturing behaviour and affirming students' abilities. Instructors can also avoid persecutor interactions with students by inquiring about what the student needs (e.g., extra support or more thorough feedback).

Instructional Strategy	Examples
Avoid Being a Victim	OL instructors may find that acknowledging how the demands of online instruction can be overwhelming at times can help students avoid stepping into the victim role. This awareness may help OL instructors step out of the victim role by using problem solving to manage time. Shifting from expert to facilitator, setting personal limits (e.g., setting office hours), and engaging in self-care can also help the OL instructor avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Figure 1. Instructional strategies for fostering sense of community.

Note. SOC = sense of community; OL = online learning; ALN = asynchronous learning network.

Chapter Summary

Since the focus of this project is to equip OL instructors with strategies for fostering sense of community in asynchronous learning, the chapter began with an introduction to OL and an explanation of ALNs, providing readers with a context for the strategies presented later in the chapter. Based on the description of ALNs, the paradoxical nature of the OL environment was highlighted; it was observed that though OL is often chosen for its flexibility, the flexibility of OL is difficult to manage. Specifically, student isolation was noted as a potential pitfall to the flexibility of OL in order to establish a platform for the author's stance that OL instructors can help students manage the flexibility of OL by establishing sense of community, which could be established by fostering students' self-regulated learning skills and by avoiding drama triangle interactions.

In the second section of this chapter, an extensive overview of sense of community and related research revealed that OL instructors have a significant role in sense of community formation. Studies seemed to suggest that modelling and encouraging social presence, as well as effectively managing teaching presence, could contribute to students' sense of community, highlighting the importance of instructor

participation for fostering students' sense of community. Research also appeared to

suggest developing sense of community in the OL environment requires consideration for

a variety of complex and interrelated factors that can build or detract from an OL

student's perception of sense of community. Having knowledge of these factors may

benefit OL instructors who see value in fostering OL students' sense of community by

providing OL instructors with greater awareness about what sense of community

development entails.

    Reviewing the link between fostering self-regulated learning skills and sense of

community formation served to support my stance that the way OL instructors engage

students within the OL environment could foster confidence, interaction, and self-

evaluation skills. Relating these self-regulatory skills to a variety of sense of community

factors highlighted the relevancy of promoting self-regulated learning for sense of

community formation by illustrating that students' social connection is enhanced by their

self-regulatory behaviour.

    While reviewing how the sense of community benefits of fostering students self-

regulatory behaviour could enhance sense of community, taking a closer look at how

drama triangle interactions could impair development of sense of community added yet

another dimension for OL instructors to consider. Using personal narrative, potential

relational ruptures that can occur in the OL environment were presented in order to

demonstrate how drama triangle interactions can interrupt sense of community formation

and how avoiding drama triangle interactions contribute to the development of

community in the OL environment. Personal narrative was also used as a way of

bridging the gap between awareness and practice, as examples for avoiding drama

triangle interactions in the OL environment illustrated specific strategies for how OL instructors can avoid the roles of rescuer, victim, and persecutor.

In the last section of this chapter, a summary of instructional strategies for fostering sense of community was provided as a way of culminating the practical applications presented throughout the chapter. This summary was organized into a user-friendly list to serve as a quick reference for OL instructors. This list of instructional strategies for fostering self-regulated learning and avoiding the drama triangle was an important section because it served as a concrete tool that satisfied the overall goal of this project: to equip OL instructors with strategies for establishing sense of community.

In the next chapter, a synopsis of the project is presented. The synopsis includes an explanation of this project's strengths and limitations as well as suggestions for future areas of research pertaining to approaches based on transactional analysis for OL instructional strategies and course structuring. The second part of this project, the article (Appendix A) and author instructions for submitting to the journal *College Teaching* (Appendix B) follows Chapter 4. The article has been narrowed to focus on how drama triangle awareness can help OL instructors foster sense of community in order to introduce the applicability of this concept to online teaching.

Chapter 4: Synopsis

This chapter provides a summary of this project and examines its strengths and limitations. Areas of future research are also proposed. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection on the development of this project.

The intent of this project was to equip OL instructors with strategies for supporting e-learners to manage the flexibility of OL. I proposed that instructors could help students find OL success by fostering sense of community and that this could be accomplished by encouraging self-regulated learning and by avoiding drama triangle interactions. In examining how encouraging self-regulated learning skills can positively contribute to sense of community and how drama triangle interactions can detract from sense of community, I illustrated a variety of approaches that OL instructors could use to help students feel connected in the OL environment.

Project Summary

Sense of community has been defined as the feeling of connectedness that people experience in a common environment (Dawson, 2008; Drouin, 2008). Developing sense of community appears to be of value for OL students by providing social and learning benefits (Drouin, 2008; Rovai, 2002a; So & Brush, 2008). However, sense of community formation also appears to be a complex process that is affected by OL student and OL instructor behaviours (Kehrwald, 2008; Shen et al., 2008; Yildiz, 2009), which may make it difficult for OL instructors to discern best practices for establishing sense of community. As such, this project may help bridge the gap between what OL instructors know about sense of community formation and what they can specifically do to establish it within the OL environment.

The OL instructional approaches in this project were focused on helping instructors encourage students to develop self-regulated learning skills and to avoid drama triangle interactions with students. Examining how students' self-regulatory behaviours can promote sense of community helped illustrate the relevance of considering OL instructional strategies for fostering students' self-efficacy, participation, and self-evaluation. Additionally, consideration for how drama triangle interactions in the OL environment can stall sense of community formation served to highlight that effectively managing communication may further enhance sense of community formation.

This project has some noteworthy strengths that may contribute to the body of knowledge on OL instruction. However, this project also has several limitations, and recognizing these limitations is a necessary for disclosing the gaps that future research could fill.

Project Strengths

It is hoped that this project offers many benefits to the OL community, particularly instructors who teach online. The practical nature of this project, the experiential knowledge of the author, and the contribution to education and transactional analysis resources are some of the main benefits that will be addressed next.

Practical. This project is well structured, providing a user-friendly read. The detailed table of contents provides a structured overview of the entire project. Outlines at the start of each chapter and ample headings, as well as summary and transition statements served to assist the reader in navigating the extensive amount of information presented in this project.

Further, research sources and examples were used to specifically illustrate how the research pertained to online instruction. For instance, the extensive overview of sense of community (see Chapter 3) was enhanced with examples to which OL instructors may be able to relate, increasing the potential for knowledge transfer. Having a clear understanding of the factors that influence sense of community could help online instructors manage the OL environment with more intentionality.

Experiential knowledge. As the author of this project, my experiences as a classroom teacher, an online learner, and an online instructor have equipped me with a unique perspective for creating strategies that foster online students' sense of community. Utilizing this multidimensional perspective while developing the strategies for fostering sense of community may benefit online instructors because the proposed strategies were developed from my own online instructional success and may benefit students because the proposed strategies also stemmed from observations of how to foster sense of community from an online learner's perspective. Furthermore, experience as a classroom teacher provided me with a context for comparing online and face-to-face instruction, serving as a filter for recognizing strategies suited for OL.

Contribution to the literature. There are currently no published articles on the drama triangle and online instruction; therefore, a significant strength of this project is that it stands as a unique educational resource and contributes to the transactional analysis literature. Introducing the concept of the drama triangle to online instruction and introducing instructional strategies for avoiding it may influence future research into how transactional analysis can benefit online education and may encourage further interest in the practical applications of transactional analysis to online instruction.

Project Limitations

Despite these project strengths, there are also several limitations that are important to consider. The limitations addressed include the subjective nature of the research process, the limited research presented in Chapter 3, the lack of generalizability, and the lack of empirical research to verify the assumptions within this project.

Personal interpretation. Personal interpretation significantly influenced the research process by, for example, creating bias recall. I sought research that would support my hypotheses that instructors could help students manage the flexibility of OL by fostering students' sense of community. I also looked for literature that would illustrate instructors could foster sense of community by helping students develop self-regulated learning skills and by avoiding drama triangle interactions. As well, I used personal reflection to fill in research gaps. As such, the research process was highly subjective.

Lack of research. The second limitation to consider is that the research presented within this project reflects the scarce amount of empirical research on each topic within this project. For example, the research used to link topics (i.e., linking sense of community with self-regulated learning and the drama triangle) cannot be empirically validated, as there is a lack of research studying this connection. Further, I am not an expert on any of the topics within this project, so I have proposed a tentative hypothesis that is based on critical thinking and personal experience that needs further study.

Generalizability. The project also lacked generalizability. The observations I made with regards to online instruction have not been verified as reliable, as these observations are from my own experiences. It was not the scope of this project to

investigate how other OL instructors' experiences compared to my own. Furthermore, the proposed strategies have not been measured with a valid or reliable tool for measuring classroom community, such as the Classroom Community scale (Rovai, 2002b). Finally, there is no empirical research on how avoiding the drama triangle can help online instructors establish students' sense of community. While this project may have contributed a new perspective within OL literature, the lack of empirical research limits the generalizability and credibility of the observations and strategies that I have proposed in this project.

Areas of Future Research

The growth trends of OL presented in Chapter 3 appear to suggest that OL will continue to gain popularity. Thus, the research on OL will most likely continue to grow, making several aspects of this project valuable for future research.

One of the limitations discussed in this project is the lack of empirical research linking sense of community with developing self-regulated learning skills and avoiding drama triangle interactions. Since the instructional strategies for fostering sense of community presented in this project have not been tested, research on the validity and reliability of the strategies could provide an important contribution to online instruction research. Empirical studies could focus on measuring how the proposed strategies of this project (found at the end of Chapter 3) influence online learners' sense of community.

This could be accomplished by conducting a comparison study on OL students' perceived sense of community in courses in which the recommended strategies are used and the courses in which they are not. A pre-post study design might entail the use of surveys to measure students' perceived sense of community at the start and end of the

same courses. A follow-up study could investigate what the students and instructors believe contributed to the change (or lack of change) associated with feeling a sense of community during the course. Results could, for example, be compared to determine whether or not the instructional strategies influenced students' sense of community.

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of research on how transactional analysis could be applied within OL. Therefore, future research could focus on measuring how drama triangle interactions influence students' sense of community. For example, researchers could collect discussion forum transcripts and email interactions, code the content for themes relating to drama triangle roles, and analyze the content against sense of community themes in order to gain a sense of the impact drama triangle interactions have on sense of community development in the online community.

From an instructional training standpoint, it may also be useful to know if equipping OL instructors with drama triangle knowledge improves their ability to foster sense of community. Comparing levels of sense of community in OL courses in which instructors have drama triangle knowledge to those in which OL instructors are unfamiliar with the drama triangle could help clarify the usefulness of applying this knowledge in OL instruction, thereby informing training and practice of OL instruction.

On the subject of training for OL instruction, future research might examine how equipping new OL instructors with strategies for fostering sense of community, such as those proposed in Chapter 3, could prepare them for the challenges of OL instruction. It would be useful to know if new OL instructors find these strategies helpful and applicable, as identifying best practices for preparing new OL instructors for teaching

online may benefit the OL community. Future consideration for how these instructional strategies could enhance an OL orientation program may also be of value.

Since learning online appears to be a skill that is developed over time (Kehrwald, 2008), the strategies proposed in this project may be well suited for an orientation program. Research could analyze the efficacy of using these strategies in an OL orientation program, as compared with other orientation programs, and whether these strategies helped new OL students establish sense of community. Sense of community could be measured using Rovai's (2002b) Classroom Community scale, revealing comparative data on the level of sense of community across orientation programs.

Closing Remarks

When I began my Master of Counselling program, I was unaware of the role sense of community would play in supporting my academic endeavours. I have been profoundly shaped by the support of my online cohort, and, as a result, I saw tremendous value in encouraging OL students to make sense of community a priority. However, the first time I taught online, I felt ill equipped to help students feel connected without fostering overdependence. Researching the factors that contribute to sense of community added a new perspective, as I reflected on my experiences as an OL student and OL instructor. After reviewing sense of community literature for this project, I was better able to identify why my online cohort connected as well as we did, affirming some of the strategies I had tried as an OL instructor. Reviewing studies on sense of community also helped me to clarify areas of strength and weakness in my OL instructional style.

Once equipped with new insights on sense of community formation, I was faced with the challenge of articulating my ideas for OL instruction for this project.

Concluding that the successful aspects of my OL instructional experiences related to encouraging students' self-regulated learning skills and avoiding drama triangle interactions was an organic process. This process involved a rigorous shaping of experiential knowledge that could be woven into a viable explanation of how self-regulated learning and the drama triangle related to OL students' sense of community. It was a process that inspired me to teach with greater intentionality and to interact with mindfulness.

This concludes Part I of this project. Part II of this project takes the form of a manuscript, to be submitted for publication, that focuses on equipping instructors with instructional strategies for establishing students' sense of community by avoiding the drama triangle.

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Appendix A

Building Sense of Community by Avoiding the Drama Triangle

PREAMBLE

Purpose

The following is the applied element of my Master of Counselling project. It is a manuscript for the journal *College Teaching* (see Appendix B), which will be submitted to the editor of the journal by June 30, 2012, after the University of Lethbridge has approved of the project. The first author of the article will be Jennifer Gerlock, and the second author will be my project supervisor, Dawn McBride.

The purpose of this manuscript is to contribute a unique resource for online instructors seeking to build students' sense of community in the online environment by illustrating how knowledge of the drama triangle (Karpman 1968) can foster online community. Prior to reviewing this article, reading Chapters 1 through 4 of this project is strongly recommended in order to appreciate the complexity of community building online.

Journal's Instructions to All Authors

Appendix B contains the guidelines for preparing and submitting a manuscript to the journal *College Teaching*.

Format and Reference Style Requirement

The manuscript is prepared in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (University of Chicago Press 2010), as per the *College Teaching* journal's specifications.

Copyright Statement

The material included in this draft manuscript is subject to copyright and permission of the author or the author's supervisor (Professor Dawn McBride) should be sought prior to use. For permission please email the author's supervisor at dawn.mcbride@uleth.ca. The reader may use ideas from this project and draft manuscript providing they are referenced as:

TITLE PAGE

Article Title: Building Sense of Community by Avoiding the Drama Triangle

Journal Name: *College Teaching*

The full name and details of the corresponding author:
(Will be inserted when the manuscript is submitted for publication)

The full names and details of all co-authors of the paper:
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ABSTRACT

This article addresses how the concept of the drama triangle (Karpman 1968)—part of the game theory associated with transactional analysis (Berne 1961)—can be used by post secondary instructors teaching online to build a sense of community (Rovai 2002a) and decrease students' dependence on instructors. The article begins with a brief overview of sense of community, followed by a detailed discussion on the drama triangle and its applicability to online instruction. Experiences as an online instructor are utilized to illustrate how drama triangle interactions in the online environment can stall sense of community formation. In addition, this article provides online instructors with specific strategies for recognizing and avoiding instructor-student interactions that promote the rescuing, victim, and persecutor behaviours that detract from sense of community formation.

Building Sense of Community by Avoiding the Drama Triangle

The purpose of this article is to help online instructors establish sense of community without fostering overdependence. This article addresses how online instructors seeking to establish and nourish students' sense of community can do so by avoiding instructor–student interactions that promote rescuing-, victim-, or persecutor-type transactions.

To provide a context for the topics in this article, the popularity of online learning is established, followed by a brief introduction to sense of community within a virtual world. Thereafter, a detailed discussion on the drama triangle and its applicability to online instruction is introduced. Personal narrative is used in order to clarify how instructors can avoid drama triangle interactions, and how doing so benefits the growth of the online learning community.

THE NATURE OF ONLINE LEARNING

The need for quality online instruction appears to be on the rise as online learning continues to grow in popularity. In the United States, Allen and Seaman's (2011) nation-wide study, which surveyed 4,523 institutions, reported the percentage of students taking at least one online university course has increased from 9.6% in 2002 to 31.3% in 2010. Allen and Seaman (2011) also noted the growth rate for online enrolment has continued to exceed the overall growth of higher education enrolment, and 65% of higher education institutions consider online learning to be a crucial factor in their long-term plans.

One of the most significant attractions to online learning is the inherent flexibility of using an asynchronous learning network. An asynchronous learning network provides an online space where students can access coursework and interact with instructors and

peers, all in the student's own time frame (Coppola, Hiltz, and Rotter 2002). Students appear to value the access and convenience of online learning, often citing the advantages of the removal of the geographical and time barriers face-to-face learning may pose (Braun 2008; Edmonds 2010). The flexibility of online learning also allows students to maintain their lifestyle choices, such as working full time or staying at home with their children, while accomplishing academic goals (Yukselturk and Bulut 2007). In spite of the benefits flexibility provides online learners, isolation appears to be a potential concern associated with online learning.

Within the literature, the autonomous nature of the online learning environment and its contribution to student isolation has been addressed (Fisher and Baird 2005; Rovai 2002a). One way online learning researchers have conceptualized student isolation in online learning has been to apply Moore's transactional distance theory (Benson and Samarawickrema 2009). This theory postulated that the physical separation between learner and instructor can contribute to psychological and communication gaps and that this type of space creates the potential for miscommunication, called *transactional distance*. Based on this observation, Moore (1991) theorized that high levels of structure combined with low levels of dialogue led to greater transactional distance. For example, a module-based online course would provide a student with a high level of structure, but if the student encountered challenges (e.g., comprehension or technical difficulties) with completing the module, the lack of instructor and peer presence could contribute to transactional distance, as the student would not be able to gain immediate clarification. Under such circumstances, a student may decide that the cost of isolation in online learning outweighs the benefit of flexibility and drop the online course.

The problem of student isolation is addressed in the literature, as student attrition rates remain markedly higher in online programs than face-to-face learning environments (Patterson and McFadden 2009). Since retention and satisfaction rates have been shown to improve when online learners have a sense of community (Ali and Leeds 2009; Lee et al. 2011), fostering sense of community appears to be an effective method for buffering student isolation in asynchronous learning.

WHAT IS SENSE OF COMMUNITY?

Sense of community is developed when people share a common environment or interest (Dawson 2006). Applying research on the concept of community to the virtual learning community, Rovai proposed that "classroom community can be constitutively defined in terms of spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectation and goals" (2002a, 4). *Spirit* was described as the feelings of connectedness within the group. For example, an online student experiencing spirit may feel as though she know her peers in spite of never meeting face to face. *Trust* was referred to as a combination of the credibility and benevolence students offer one another (Rovai 2002b). For example, a student may gain credibility with online community members by sharing new information that benefits the group or may inspire benevolence by encouraging group members with affirming statements. Rovai (2002a) asserted that that these elements create an open environment in which the learning process can occur in safety. *Interaction* was presented as communication between learners (Rovai 2002a). Since interaction within the asynchronous learning network is written, interaction within the online community appears to be influenced by the frequency of students' writing and their ability to effectively present the intended quality and tone. Finally, *commonality of*

expectations and goals referred to the shared goal of the learning group to meet educational needs through participation (Rovai 2002a). For example, an online learner could invest in the collective learning process by promoting peer support to build group safety, offering knowledge to promote group discovery, and providing evaluation to promote group motivation.

Research on sense of community seems to suggest that both instructor and student behaviours influence online community communication dynamics (Arbaugh and Hwang 2006; Kehrwald 2010; Shea, Li, and Pickett 2006; Yildiz 2009). Given that asynchronous dialogue appears to be prone to misinterpretation (Stodel, Thompson, and MacDonald 2006), interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict seems inevitable. Taking a transactional analysis approach may help online instructors minimize the communication barriers that interrupt sense of community formation.

Transactional analysis is a theory based on communication and analyzing interactions between people (Berne 1961). Transactional analysis has an extensive history of being applied to education or schools, business, and counselling (Barrow 2007; Stewart and Joines 1987). Transactional analysis appears to align well with online learning instruction because the asynchronous nature of online interactions provides opportunities for instructors to analyze online communication before responding, and transactional analysis provides tools for analyzing communication. One such tool is the drama triangle (Karpman 1968).

THE DRAMA TRIANGLE

Steve Karpman (1968) introduced the drama triangle to explain how people cycle, sometimes unconsciously, through the roles of persecutor, victim, and rescuer when

encountering interpersonal or intrapersonal conflict, or when they are inauthentic in communicating their thoughts, feelings, or needs. Karpman postulated that drama requires a victim, and that drama is perpetuated when players switch roles or bring in other players to fufill roles.

The remainder of this article illustrates how drama triangle interactions may pose instructional barriers for developing sense of community online. In the following sections, the three drama triangle roles are presented by providing a description of each role, how to extricate oneself from the drama triangle when in each role, and how to avoid becoming part of the drama triangle when encountering each role. Following the drama triangle role sections, examples based on the first author's experiences as an online instructor are included in order to clarify how instructors can avoid drama triangle interactions, and how doing so benefits the growth of the online learning community.

Victim

Based on Burgess's (2005) description of her own enactment of drama triangle roles as a parent, the victim role is often characterized by helplessness. An individual acting as a victim may discount personal responsibility by blaming others for problems and by disengaging from problem-solving behaviour (Burgess 2005; McKimm and Forrest 2010). The victim may feel a false sense of worthlessness, discounting personal strengths that could be used to problem solve (Burgess 2005; McKimm and Forrest 2010). For example, a student may pessimistically conclude that failure is inevitable and that there is no use in exerting more effort toward success (McKimm and Forrest 2010). Quite often, a victim will look to a rescuer to fix the problem (McKimm and Forrest 2010).

McKimm and Forrest (2010) explained that an individual could leave the victim role by de-personalizing the problem (i.e., moving from "I am a problem" to "I have a problem") and by re-engaging in the problem-solving process. Stepping out of the victim role requires personal action to solve the problem and the avoidance of interactions that perpetuate victim behaviour (e.g., seeking a rescuer to solve the problem). For example, an online learning student who feels overwhelmed by the amount of required reading outlined in the course syllabus could create a time management plan rather than email the instructor to lament over the amount of work that is required for the course.

When encountering a victim, one can avoid the drama triangle by acknowledging the problem, providing encouragement and helpful information, and believing that the person immersed in the victim role is capable of solving the problem (McKimm and Forrest 2010). For example, an online instructor can demonstrate a nurturing attitude toward a student who feels overwhelmed by acknowledging that the academic writing process can be gruelling and by reminding the student of past academic success and problem-solving capabilities. McKimm and Forrest (2010) asserted perpetuating victim–rescuer encounters could reinforce the victim's feelings of helplessness, and an attempt to rescue a victim will often result in a switch of roles in which the victim persecutes the rescuer for not solving the problem properly (McKimm and Forrest 2010). The role of persecutor is explained next.

Persecutor

Burgess's (2005) description of herself in a persecutor role was characterized by criticism. An individual acting as a persecutor will tend to discount the abilities of others and inflate his or her own personal positive contributions to a situation (Barrow 2007;

McKimm and Forrest 2010). Burgess (2005) explained that the persecutor role involves feelings of resentment for having to solve a problem, as well as blame toward the victim for not being capable of solving a problem. For example, a student may share in a public forum that the instructor is not providing enough assistance and that the people who do not know how to post properly are slowing down the conversations making it boring to post. The communication style of a persecutor tends to express superiority and may be aggressive, judgmental, or self-entitled (Burgess 2005; McKimm and Forrest 2010).

When in the persecutor role, an individual could leave the drama triangle by identifying feelings such as hurt, injustice, frustration, or anger, and finding ways to express these feelings without discounting and abusing others (Burgess 2005). For example, an online instructor who is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of emails students are sending asking for help or seeking clarification could acknowledge the lack of professional boundaries that have been set and plan to exercise more balance. Stepping out of the persecutor role requires the ability to recognize the effects negative feelings have on oneself and others and a willingness to exercise compassion for the experiences of others (McKimm and Forrest 2010).

An individual encountering persecution can avoid a drama triangle interaction by stopping the conversation (McKimm and Forrest 2010). For example, if a student emailed an instructor launching complaints about the amount of work required in the course, the instructor could acknowledge the student's frustration and state the fact that the work will still need to be accomplished in order to gain credit for the class. Building on this same example, another way to disengage from a drama triangle interaction with a persecutor is to use compassion in order to seek clarity (McKimm and Forrest 2010). Instead of stating

what student will need to do in order to gain credit for the course, the instructor could probe for more information about why the student is feeling so overwhelmed with the intention of supporting the student to solve the problem instead of criticize. Under these circumstances, the instructor may benefit from recognizing the difference between supporting and rescuing; the role of rescuer is explained next.

Rescuer

Rescuers tend to overextend themselves out of pity for others (Burgess 2005). An individual acting as a rescuer tends to discount the strengths and abilities of others by assuming responsibility for the problems of others (Burgess 2005; McKimm and Forrest 2010). For example, if a student posted false information in the discussion forum, an instructor might rescue the student by posting correct information, instead of inviting the student to review the post for accuracy. McKimm and Forrest (2010) described the communication style of a rescuer as controlling (i.e., advice giving), or expectant (i.e., "I know what is best"), and Burgess (2005) noted that the rescuer is prone to shift to the role of victim when overextended (i.e., expressing feelings of being taken advantage of). Building on the discussion forum posting example above, a perpetual pattern of fixing problems instead of encouraging students to make necessary corrections may result in students' overdependence on the instructor. This, in turn, could cause the online instructor to feel overwhelmed by the students' demands for support, which may move the instructor from rescuer into victim position and the student from victim into persecutor. As Karpman (1968) noted, role switching perpetuates drama, whereas leaving the drama triangle interrupts the cycle of drama.

When in the rescuer role, an individual can leave the drama triangle by recognizing that people are capable of solving their own problems, by separating personal self-worth from helping others, and by setting personal boundaries (McKimm and Forrest 2010). Burgess (2005) suggested that stepping out of the rescuer role requires awareness that people cannot be changed, but can only change themselves, as well as a shift from rescuing behaviour to nurturing behaviour (i.e., acknowledging a person's struggle without giving advice). From an online instructional standpoint, avoiding the role of rescuer provides an opportunity for students to recognize their own potential to succeed and solve problems. Instead of correcting a student's inaccurate post, an online learning instructor could post a question to encourage reflective thinking, such as, "I noticed that you and John have a difference of opinion on that point; how did you each come to your conclusions? Please cite research to support your answers." Although posting reflective questions requires more creative effort on the online learning instructor's part, it has the advantage of establishing a learning environment that encourages personal growth rather than overdependence. Support for this empowering stance aligns well with Barrow's (2007) assertion that taking on drama triangle roles compromises both the learner's and teacher's potential for creativity and vulnerability.

This section introduced how drama triangle interactions could impair interpersonal communication, with a focus on the online learning environment. Next a discussion on how avoiding drama triangle interactions could help online instructors foster sense of community shall be presented.

DRAMA TRIANGLE ENCOUNTERS

As an online instructor who has stepped into all three of the drama triangle roles at times, I found drama triangle interactions tended to impede my community-building efforts, and avoiding the drama triangle helped to maintain sense of community, even foster it. To illustrate this position, the first author shall use a personal narrative to present her drama triangle encounters and the strategies she used to avoid them. The examples provided are based on real events; details have been changed to protect student privacy.

Rescuer

As an online instructor, I found it challenging to effectively support students without fostering overdependence on me. At the beginning of the online course, I recognized the need for increased support because the students did not know one another and the online learning environment lacked the immediacy a face-to-face classroom could provide. As such, I observed that students were hesitant to interact with one another and would email me with their questions rather than post them in the open Question and Answer forum. Some examples of the problems students emailed me with included technical difficulties, questions about learning activities, and questions about timelines. I recognized that some students were likely to feel anxiety given the unfamiliarity of the learning venue and may have felt less distress contacting me by email than making their questions public in an open forum.

When students were emailing structure-type questions (e.g., technical issues, course syllabus issues, timelines), I avoided perpetuating a rescuer–victim interaction and did not provide the student with the answer; instead, I explained where the answer could

be found within the asynchronous learning network system, so the next time the student had a question he or she would be more prepared to seek answers independently. During the second week of instruction students typically became more familiar navigating the asynchronous learning network, so to decrease their dependence on me and to help empower their problem-solving capabilities, I started directing students to seek answers on their own. My scaffolding-type action (Artino 2008) aligned with McKimm and Forrest's (2010) assertion that spotting the potential for drama triangle interactions could help people avoid engaging in them. By avoiding the role of the rescuer I was able to make effective use of teaching presence by being available, encouraging, and empowering, rather than being perceived as a "fixer."

The above example also demonstrated how teaching presence includes offering intense course structuring. I organized information within the asynchronous learning network in a consistent manner and provided clear course guidelines (i.e., course syllabus, timeline, lesson plans, and rubrics). This may have fostered students' self-efficacy by providing them with an opportunity to gain confidence in navigating the asynchronous learning network. Providing this information also contributed to Rovai's (2002a) dimension of community—the commonality of goals and expectations—by encouraging a group expectation of problem-solving behaviour.

While avoiding rescuing fostered self-efficacy and sense of community, it was not always received well by students. As I did not provide the rescuing behaviour some students hoped for, I encountered persecution.

Persecutor

Students can become discouraged with instructor feedback that encourages them to engage in some reflective thought to improve their performance. For example, when students express in the forums criticism about my instructional feedback, or question my assessment methods, my emotional response propels me to step into the victim role by feeling personally attacked, or step into the persecutor role by reprimanding the student for questioning my decisions. I have trained myself not to react to my emotional impulses and instead to focus on course structuring to help me respond to students' frustrations. For example, in response to student complaints I usually send an email acknowledging the student's frustration with the feedback and direct the student to review the grading rubric.

I do not engage in the emotional element other than to acknowledge the frustration. Of relevance, I find when persecutor-like attacks are communicated to me via email it provides me with time to pause, reflect on the situation, and avoid the drama triangle. Thus, if a student does publically accuse me of being unfair, I ask this person, in the post, to email me directly with concerns.

I have learned to avoid the persecutor role by exercising compassion and offering more clarity to reduce the tendency for students to overgeneralize. For example, within the follow-up email to a student who is frustrated with me, I may provide even more feedback on how I thought the student's work could be improved, and I will affirm the student's abilities for graduate learning. I aim to avoid the victim role by concluding the email with a firm assertion that the grade was final, and I would only be willing to answer specific questions about how the student could improve in the future.

When I avoid the drama triangle I aim to foster Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions of spirit and trust. In these examples, had I taken on the role of a persecutor I may have ruptured the student–instructor relationship, posing a barrier to fostering spirit. By exercising compassion, I was able to foster benevolent interaction (i.e., trust). Despite these efforts, I can still fall into the victim role when I teach.

Victim

In my first year of teaching online, I found online instruction to be challenging for several reasons. First, I was unprepared for the amount of student emails I received at the start of the course. Since students could email at any time of the day, I found myself answering an overwhelming amount of emails, often repeating the same information to a variety of students. I also spent countless hours online facilitating discussions and tracking posts because the anxiety from the online students seemed so high I felt I had to take immediate action to reduce their distress. In response to these aspects of online instruction it was easy to step into the role of the victim by attributing my feelings to the nature of the online learning environment, complaining to others about the intensity of my job, and accepting that the time demands of online instruction could not be managed. However, since I was aware of the drama triangle and its dangers (Karpman 1968), I recognized I could leave the drama triangle by acknowledging that I was feeling overwhelmed by the time demands and by exercising problem-solving skills. I took immediate action to reduce the high volume of emails I received by asking students, in a friendly manner, to post questions in the relevant Question and Answer forum. As a result, my inbox became more manageable and questions could be answered on a group basis (once) rather than individually (multiple times). Furthermore, using the forum increased

peer interaction as students began to answer one another's questions when possible. The benefits were twofold: my workload decreased and students were able to build sense of community through collaborative problem solving.

I further avoided the victim role by creating a time management plan that limited the time I spent online, and I made time for self-care activities. I used this insight to further foster sense of community by addressing time management in course announcements forum. I created a forum topic called "Time Management and Self-Care," made the first post on the importance of setting personal limits and engaging in self-care, and encouraged students to make a time management plan. I then invited students to share ideas and strategies. Most of the students posted appreciation for addressing the challenges of managing time, and several shared tips for saving time and engaging in self-care.

The actions I took to avoid the victim role fostered sense of community in several ways. Using the asynchronous learning network more efficiently fostered Rovai's (2002a) community dimensions of spirit, trust, and interaction as collaborative problem solving provided students with a shared experience, an opportunity to build credibility through knowledge sharing, and a chance to increase their frequency of interaction. By engaging in problem solving, I was equipped with an insight that benefitted students. Acknowledging the challenges of time management and self-care demonstrated supportive teaching presence and encouraged self-disclosure. Self-disclosure provided students with an opportunity to relate on an emotional level, promoting social bonding and sense of community.

CONCLUSION

The transactional analysis concept of the drama triangle has been introduced as a viable model for explaining the complex instructor–student interactions that pose barriers for establishing and maintaining online learning students' sense of community. However, a significant limitation to the article is the scarce amount of empirical research linking drama triangle interactions with decreased sense of community. The instructional suggestions for avoiding the drama triangle in online learning presented in this article have not been empirically validated. Thus, the tentative hypothesis that equipping online learning instructors with drama triangle knowledge could foster sense of community is based on critical thinking and personal experience and needs further study.

Introducing the concept of the drama triangle to online instruction and providing instructional strategies for avoiding it may incite future research into how transactional analysis can benefit online education, and it may also encourage further interest in the practical applications of transactional analysis to online instruction. Future research could focus measuring how drama triangle interactions influence students' sense of community. For example, researchers could collect discussion forum transcripts and email interactions, code the content for themes relating to drama triangle roles, and analyze the content against sense of community themes in order to gain a sense of the impact drama triangle interactions have on sense of community development in the online community.

From an instructional training standpoint, it may also be useful to know if equipping online learning instructors with drama triangle knowledge improves their ability to foster sense of community. Comparing levels of sense of community in online learning courses in which instructors have drama triangle knowledge to those in which

online learning instructors are unfamiliar with the drama triangle could help clarify the usefulness of applying this knowledge in online learning instruction, thereby informing training and practice of online learning instruction.

Thus applying drama triangle knowledge to online instruction is new idea that requires much more exploration in order to gain credibility as an effective approach for fostering sense of community online. While the drama triangle can be applied in a variety of settings, its use within the online learning environment may provide a fresh perspective on the instructional benefit of asynchronous dialogue, as it allows instructors to pause and analyze interactions before stepping into the drama triangle.

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Appendix B

Instructions for Authors from *College Teaching* Journal

This journal where the proposed manuscript (see Appendix A) will be sent to for review, has specific instructions that authors of manuscripts must follow. The following is a direct copy of the relevant sections taken from the source below:

Taylor & Francis Group. (2012). Journal details: College Training. Retrieved from www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=8756-7555&linktype=44

Aims and Scope:

College Teaching provides an interdisciplinary academic forum on issues in teaching and learning at the undergraduate or graduate level. The journal publishes three kinds of articles. Regular, full-length articles of up to 5000 words report scholarship on teaching methods, educational technologies, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and other instructional practices that have significance beyond a single discipline. Full-length articles also describe innovative courses and curricula, faculty development programs, and contemporary developments. Quick Fix articles, up to 500 words, present techniques for addressing common classroom problems. Commentaries, up to 1200 words, provide thoughtful reflections on teaching.

Submissions:

Full-length articles must build on previous research and other relevant literature. They must include critical evaluation or analysis, typically an analysis of systematically gathered evidence of student learning. When appropriate, regular articles should cite approval by an institutional review board (IRB) for research on human subjects. All

articles should have a unifying and discernable point (thesis). All articles should be timely and written in language that is engaging, lively, and direct. To be accessible to readers across academic disciplines, all articles should avoid excessive reliance on jargon.

College Teaching is a blind peer-reviewed journal. Each submitted manuscript is read by two members of the editorial board, with a total review time of three to four months. Accepted manuscripts are usually published within one year.

1. Manuscripts must be original and submitted exclusively to *College Teaching*. The journal cannot review or publish multiple or simultaneous submissions.

2. Authors should visit http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ct for submission information and access.

3. All manuscript files uploaded for submission must be blinded. Authors must upload a separate cover page containing all author names affiliations, and contact information.

4. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. (University of Chicago Press 2010), must be used as a style reference in preparation of manuscripts. References at the end of the manuscript should be unnumbered and listed alphabetically according to the author's last name, followed by the year of publication, as in "Kendall, M. 2009." A citation in the text should list author, date, and applicable page numbers, as in "(Kendall 2009, xx)."

5. Tables and figures should be prepared exactly or adapted as they are to appear in the journal. As an author, you are required to secure permission if you want to reproduce any figure, table, or extract from the text of another source. This applies to direct reproduction as well as "derivative reproduction" (where you have created a new figure or table which derives substantially from a copyrighted source).

6. Avoid explanatory notes whenever possible by incorporating their content into the text. For essential notes, identify them with consecutive superscripts and list them in a section titled NOTES at the end of the text.

7. The journal reserves the right to make editorial changes in style and format.

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