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SIT’s Low-Residency Master of Arts in TESOL Program: Principles and Practices in Online Teaching and Learning

Jaime Durham
SIT Graduate Institute

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SIT’s Low-Residency Master of Arts in TESOL Program:
Principles and Practices in Online Teaching and Learning

Jaime Durham

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in TESOL degree at SIT Graduate Institute,
Brattleboro, Vermont.

April 7, 2015

IPP Advisor: Elizabeth Tannenbaum
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Author name: Jaime Durham

Date: April 7, 2015
Abstract

Coursework in the revisioned Low-Residency Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages program at SIT Graduate Institute takes place primarily online. In this paper, the author examines the first two years of the program (which launched in 2013) from her experience as the program coordinator to illustrate how the MAT program’s foundational educational principles influence the program in the e-learning environment. The author uses the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework to give an overview analysis of the design and implementation of the online courses, to measure levels of social and cognitive presence among students, and to identify areas of potential improvement. Levels of student satisfaction are measured using a survey and student feedback compiled over the past two years. The research indicates a high level of student satisfaction with the program.
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Asynchronous Communication, Blended Learning, Communities of Practice,
Computer Mediated Communication, Electronic Learning, Higher Education, Online Courses,
Teacher Education
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I. Beginnings

The Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MAT) program at the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT launched a revisioned low-residency format of its degree in June of 2013. At the time, I had recently finished my coursework in the face-to-face version of the MAT program, and I had been hired as the program coordinator to help with the new low-residency format.

The MAT program began in 1969, and was the first master’s degree offered by SIT. SIT had been in existence since 1964, when it was established as the academic campus for the Experiment in International Living. The Experiment is the groundbreaking international educational exchange program founded in 1932 by Donald Watt that was designed to give participants the chance to learn about other cultures through the experience of living overseas with homestay families. The Experiment, and thus SIT and the MAT program are rooted in the educational principle of experiential learning, and are dedicated to promoting intercultural understanding, social justice, and world peace (World Learning, 2000).

The original MAT program evolved into two different versions. The program that I was enrolled in as a student is now known as the academic year MAT (AYMAT), because coursework takes place face-to-face over one academic year. The AYMAT program focuses on the training of pre-service teachers, or experienced teachers who need a master’s degree and can take a year off from teaching. Experiential learning is highlighted in the program with a two-month teaching practicum between the fall and spring semesters. Another version of the MAT program was developed in 1981 to train in-service teachers (World Learning, 2000, p. 55). The bulk of the coursework took place during two eight-week residencies over two summers – hence the program was referred to as the summer MAT program, or SMAT. During the first interim
year between the two summers, students earned six credits in their own teaching contexts in a supervised interim year teaching practicum. After the second summer residency, students finished the program by writing their master’s theses – referred to in the program as independent professional projects (IPPs).

The SMAT program ran for 30 years, but in its final years, enrollment numbers dwindled as the market for in-service language teacher training became more competitive. The sheer number of TESOL training programs offered by reputable institutions had increased, and so had the number of affordable options for potential students. It had also become evident that the eight-week summer residency was simply too long for language teachers to be away from their jobs. Feedback from potential students at international recruiting events and market trends in in-service teacher training indicated that in order to stay competitive, the program would have to markedly decrease the length of its summer residencies and shift to a more affordable and flexible format that allowed students to instead complete the bulk of their coursework online during the interim years. In response to these factors, the SMAT program welcomed its last cohort in 2011 and shifted its focus in a new direction for the 21st century.

Coursework in the new two-year MAT Low Residency (MATLR) program would take place primarily online, as opposed to the SMAT program, which took place primarily face-to-face. The two summer residencies would remain, so the program would still be blended (taking place partly online and partly face-to-face), but the duration of the residencies would be shortened. SIT conducted a survey among language teachers around the world to determine when and for how long they would potentially be available to attend a residency. The optimum length and time was determined to be three weeks in late summer.
The timeline was set: The MATLR program would begin in the summer with a seven-week online module, and then a short, three-week residency in VT, followed by two semesters of online coursework. During this time students would also gain six credits in a supervised, interim-year teaching practicum (IYTP). Students would return for a second residency the following summer, and then complete all of their coursework online (including their IPPs) by the following May. The first cohort began in June of 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MA TESOL Low Residency Degree Sequence (34 credits)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year One</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer:</strong> Coursework online followed by a three-week session on SIT’s campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sept–May:</strong> Coursework online and an Interim-Year Teaching Practicum at the student’s place of employment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year Two</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summer:</strong> Coursework online followed by a three-week session on SIT’s campus</td>
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<td><strong>Sept–Dec:</strong> Coursework online</td>
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As part of the founding team for the MATLR program, my role is to manage the administrative aspects of the program, and also, much more interestingly, to assist teachers in converting courses that they had traditionally taught face-to-face to a fully online format. It is in this work that I use my knowledge and experience as a former student of the program to help design courses that stay true to the educational principles of the MAT program. I believe, and will show in this IPP, that this transition to an e-learning environment is a fantastic opportunity
to design an exciting, new learning experience. My attitude is that the new program is not restricted by the online learning environment, but rather is offered great new potential by it.

In this IPP, I will primarily be examining the e-learning environment in the MATLR program. The two three-week face-to-face sessions as well as the supervised IYTP have a huge influence on the scope of the program, but how that influence plays out is not explored in depth in this paper. The role of the IYTP and the summer sessions is mentioned, but the major focus here will be on the online portion. Note that the terms e-learning, virtual learning, distance learning, and online learning are used interchangeably in this paper, and all indicate learning that takes place online via the Internet instead of face-to-face in a brick and mortar classroom.

I will first demonstrate how the educational principles of the MAT program offer a strong foundation for a shift to an online learning environment. I will then look at the program through the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, 2000), that views the online educational experience as the interaction between social, cognitive, and teaching presence. Through this framework I will detail our approach to the design and implementation of the online courses in the MATLR program. I will examine evidence from student feedback, a CoI research survey, and transcript analyses to explore student experience in the program. All of the students quoted and researched in this paper are those currently enrolled in the program: the students of the first cohort, who started in the summer of 2013 and refer to themselves as “The Pioneers,” and those in the second cohort that started in the summer of 2014. Through this comprehensive analysis of the program, I will identify potential areas for improvement and recommendations for the future. Finally, I will outline some areas for further research.
II. Educational Principles of the MAT program

The new low-residency format is an exciting direction for the MAT program, which is rooted in educational principles that, at first glance, may not seem compatible with characteristics of online learning. Upon closer examination, however, the opposite is found to be true. The MAT program is, in fact, well suited to the transition into online learning. The same educational principles that are found at the heart of the MAT program are those that are identified in current e-learning theory as the principles behind effective online higher education programs, as I will demonstrate below.

At the core of SIT’s educational philosophy is John Dewey’s idea that experience, inquiry, and community are integral parts of education. He believed that knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the experience of the individual and the individual’s making sense of that experience through reflection and through the lens of community. The “educational process has two sides – one psychological and one sociological – and … neither can be subordinated to the other, or neglected, without evil results following” (Dewey, 1987/2012). Learning in this view is a process based on experience that involves both private reflection, and social, collaborative inquiry. The MAT program is grounded in this philosophy that learning is best facilitated in an environment where experiential learning, reflective practice, and collaboration are at the core.

Experiential Learning

Dewey’s educational philosophy forms the guiding principles for experiential learning theory, which lies at the heart of the MAT program. Dewey and other educational theorists, in particular Lewin and Piaget, demonstrated the central role that experience plays in the learning
process (Kolb, 1984). In his 1984 book on experiential learning, David Kolb writes that the idea of learning through experience differs from “rationalist and other cognitive theories of learning that tend to give primary emphasis to acquisition, manipulation, and recall of abstract symbols, and from behavioral learning theories that deny any role for consciousness and subjective experience in the learning process” (p. 20). Experiential learning theory is a humanistic, learner-centered approach that places value on the experience of the individual in knowledge construction. Learning is defined in experiential learning theory as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). This process is illustrated by the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC), where learners move through a continuous cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

(Adapted from Kolb, 1984)
Students in the MAT program are explicitly and implicitly guided to use this cycle in their coursework – the ELC is a thread that underlies the entire program. Through the ELC, the MAT program places a heavy emphasis on the role of reflection in the learning process, and the idea that it is through reflection that experience becomes meaningful. As teachers themselves, students are introduced to the idea of reflective teaching that involves both reflection-in-action (during teaching) and reflection-on-action (after teaching) (Schön, 1983).

The MAT program also emphasizes the importance of context in teaching - it is the bubble that surrounds all else in determining teaching decisions. But in face-to-face teacher training programs, teachers are studying apart from any real context (the context must be imagined or remembered). Theory and practice are a step removed in this format. Teachers study theory that they then have to take away to a real context to put into practice. In an online teacher training program, teachers can stay in their teaching jobs while they are studying in the program – they don’t have to leave their contexts. The learning can be situated. This is the argument that Julian Edge and Sue Garton (2012) put forth in “Why Be an Online Learner in TESOL?” for why “being an online learner enables and facilitates professional development in ways that face-to-face programs simply cannot deliver” (p. 18). Theory and practice in the MATLR program, where the students are actually required to have teaching jobs to be admitted to the program, can be connected in an immediate way that is not possible in the AYMAT program.

The MAT program’s foundations in experiential learning make for a very smooth transition to the implementation of a program that takes full advantage of a situated learning environment. In the AYMAT program, experiences have to be created upon which students then reflect. But in the MATLR program, students are embedded in experience. In order to implement the ELC into the MATLR coursework, students and instructors simply have to mine the
experiences that students are already having in their own contexts. SIT as a whole recognizes that “the model upon which all of our programs are based is experiential education. In that regard, the use of distance-learning technology, including online learning, is an extremely good fit if that interactivity is at the heart of both” (World Learning, 2000, p. 14).

The MATLR program is an ideal environment for the implementation of experiential learning. It is a program where “the abstract ideas of academia,” can be translated into “the concrete practical realities” of the students’ lives (Kolb, 1984, p. 6). Kolb also points out that the model of experiential learning is appropriate for adult learners who, “demand that the relevance and application of ideas be demonstrated and tested against their own accumulated experience and wisdom” (Kolb, 1984, p. 6). This is particularly applicable to the learners in the MATLR program, where the average age is 35, up from 30 in the SMAT program and 27 in the AYMAT program.

An additional characteristic of distance learning that makes it a suitable environment for an educational program that emphasizes reflection is that communication among the students and teachers is primarily asynchronous and text-based. Students in an asynchronous distance-learning program have ample time for independent, critical thought and private reflection during discussions. In face-to-face group discussions, the conversation tends to move quickly, with little opportunity for individual reflection. In the AYMAT program this issue is addressed directly by acknowledging the value of silence in discussion and even giving the occasional reflective writing period mid-discussion, but this is still a reflective period that has to be created. In an asynchronous text-based environment, the space for reflection is constantly present - students have plenty of time to reflect in a discussion. Students in the MATLR program identify the
period for reflection as one of the advantages of asynchronous, text-based communication. The following quotes are from the first and the second cohorts of MATLR students:

- “The benefit of writing is the ability to think about what I want to say.”
- “Writing in the forums is different than speaking because you have time to think about what you want to write.”
- “[In writing] … I take the necessary time to process my ideas and interact with [the other students] before I jump into conclusions or I make a comment.”

Also, the online discussions themselves can be revisited for the sake of reflection. The permanent nature of the written word allows students to go back and reread their own and their peers’ posts as long as the forums are still accessible online. In the MATLR program, the courses, including all of the discussions and content, are available to the students for the duration of the program.

- “Overall I think our posts have a positive affect on my learning. I’m able to revisit conversations and think about them and reflect on them and what’s been said.”
- “One of the things I love about the online classes, is that I can read what my classmates say and can even print it out to go back to.”
- “Rereading someone's post in full kind of brings it, as well as any of the responses, miraculously back to life for me. There’s a kind of "timeless timeliness" to the online part of our experience that I really appreciate.”

The issue of time in asynchronous, text-based communication versus in face-to-face spoken communication is one that I will go back to in detail later on in this IPP. This brief description is to illustrate that the emphasis on reflection in the MAT program is facilitated by the communication medium in the online courses of the MATLR program.

The opportunity for learning through experience and reflection is enhanced in distance learning, where learners are embedded in their own contexts, and have ample space and time for
private reflection. As a teacher training program grounded in experiential learning theory, the MATLR program is in a position to take full advantage of the affordances (Van Lier, 2000), or opportunities, offered by the situated learning environment.

**Collaborative and Cohort-Based Learning**

Also at the core of the MAT program is the principle stemming from Dewey’s idea that learning is just as much sociological as it is psychological: that learning is best facilitated in a community of learners. The establishment of a community of learners in the MAT program is facilitated by its cohort-based nature, meaning that students move through the courses together along the same timeline. The approach to teaching and learning in the MAT program regards collaboration, the co-construction of knowledge, and the establishment of a community of learners as vital in the learning process. Students are frequently required to do pair and group work, and the experiences, ideas, and perceptions that students bring are regarded as valuable sources of learning. Learners are guided to become autonomous and to value each other as their best resources. Education in the MAT program is not viewed as a one-way information transfer of content and knowledge from the teacher to the student, where the instructor stands at the front of the class and lectures. The instructor instead facilitates the co-construction of knowledge, where ideas and knowledge are generated through the interaction of the students, the teacher, and the content.

The role of the interaction between students, teachers, and content in the learning process is represented in the MAT program by David Hawkins’ “I, Thou, It” framework (1967): “I” usually being the teacher, “Thou” usually being the student, and “It” being the content. I use the word “usually” here to demonstrate that the roles of “I” and “Thou” are not always fixed, since
in the MAT program student input is a valuable resource, and so students will often step into teaching roles in the classroom (e.g. by bringing knowledge or facilitating discussions).

![Diagram](image)

This “I, Thou, It” framework holds that each element needs the others in order for learning to occur in a classroom. Because interaction is at the core of the learning process, the importance of the relationships between the students, the teachers, and the content are heavily emphasized in the MAT program. The approach to teaching and learning is humanistic - “the teacher cares about and addresses the whole person: the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual sides of the learner” (World Learning, 2000, p. 64). In turn, students are expected to bring their emotional and spiritual selves (be socially present) as well as their intellectual selves (be cognitively present) to the classroom. This emphasis on the social presence as well as the cognitive presence of the learner makes the MAT program uniquely adapted to a transition to an e-learning environment where social presence has been demonstrated to be a strong predictor of
student satisfaction in computer-mediated learning (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). “Attention must be given to establishing and sustaining appropriate social presence if the full potential of e-learning is to be realized” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 29). Note that the concept of social presence in e-learning is generally defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as ‘real’ through the computer medium. A much fuller explanation and analysis of social presence in the MATLR program will follow.

Distance-learning, or e-learning technology has developed to a point where interaction between students, teachers, and content is easily facilitated in an online learning environment. An online educational program that emphasizes collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge takes advantage of the interactive capabilities offered by emerging technologies in computer-mediated-communication. These capabilities include both asynchronous modes of communication, where communication does not take place in real-time, such as in a discussion forum where participants post and respond at different times, and synchronous modes of communication, where communication is in real-time, for example via video-conferencing. In the MAT classrooms on campus, the importance of establishing a community of learners is physically represented by the layout of the chairs: they are usually arranged in a circle or a semi-circle. The online MATLR environment is also designed to facilitate student interaction - the most common task for the students is to participate in a discussion forum. It is because of the ability of e-learning technology to facilitate interaction that “revaluing the traditional ideal of a community of learners is at the heart of the e-learning transformation” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 21).

A final way that the cohort-based and collaborative learning approach of the MAT program is hugely beneficial in its new incarnation online is related to one of the biggest
problems of distance-learning programs – the high attrition rate. This is in part attributed to the feeling of isolation and resulting lack of motivation that online learners can feel in an online learning environment where there is little or no interaction or collaboration with other students or the instructor. This issue can be addressed in part by establishing and supporting a community of learners. “Collaboration and communities of practice reduce the sense of isolation and the feeling that students are ‘facing the world of learning alone’” (Nunan, 2012, p. xi).

Interaction among students is necessary for creating a community of learners and research indicates that it is an important factor in the success of online courses (Swan, 2001; Swan, 2002; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). For effective online learning to occur, these interactions need to be designed and focused by the instructor, which is a topic that I will address in detail in a later section. Here I would like to demonstrate simply that in comparing the MATLR online courses to other online courses or expectations of online learning, current students have reported that our courses, with their emphasis on collaboration and the co-construction of knowledge, have a relatively high level of interaction between students.

- “I have taken [online] courses at a community college. I felt very isolated and lost in the curriculum. Due to the workload and lack of support, I withdrew from the course.”

- “I took the first module of the [course from a well-known TESOL training program]. In contrast to the MA TESOL Low-Res program, there was very little interaction with fellow classmates.”

- “This is my first time taking an online course. I can describe my expectations before and how they differ from my experience so far. I imagined a lot of homework being assigned via email or message board. I imagined I would go off, read the book and write the paper or whatever, then email my professor my completed homework. I did not think I would have very much contact with the other students in the class unless I wanted there to be. The reality is, I converse a lot with my cohort and a lot of the homework depends on each other’s collaboration and feedback. Knowing my peers need me to respond to their posts prompts me to be a better student. It’s easy to blow off homework if the only person it affects is the student blowing it off. When you know other people depend on you to be a responsible student, you get a lot more work done, and it’s of much better quality. At least, that has been my experience.”
• “In other [online] courses I never worked so closely with my group as I did in this program. In other online courses we had course readings and assignments - even had to reply and communicate with group members but it always felt like I was responding to someone's ideas and not really to an actual living breathing soul of a person and their deepest dreams and ideas.”

• “I took short non-credit community college courses. They didn't have any forums. Interaction was limited.”

An approach to teaching that emphasizes collaboration, the co-construction of knowledge and the importance of the relationships between the instructors, students, and content is an excellent foundation for a successful e-learning environment. The MAT program is grounded in principles that can address the issue of high attrition in online learning. At the same time, the focus on collaboration in the program means that in its online incarnation, the MAT program can make use of the interactive capabilities offered by emerging technologies.

Modeling

Another characteristic of SIT and of the MAT program that gives it an advantage to functioning in an online learning environment is the structure and nature of the faculty and staff. The MAT faculty and staff model all of the educational principles outlined in the previous sections: they practice reflective inquiry for experiential learning, and are fundamentally collaborative in their process of designing and implementing the programs. Of particular importance is the fact that all of the faculty members who teach in the MATLR program are those that teach in the AYMAT program. This is unusual among distance-learning programs where faculty themselves are often not only distanced from their students but distanced from each other, and working from home as hired adjuncts.
The MATLR program functions, as the AYMAT program does, as a coherent whole. That is to say that the courses are designed together by the faculty to occur in a certain sequence for pedagogical reasons, and the courses’ relationships to each other are carefully considered. “We would stress that the program is a “total” program, a coherent whole. By this we mean several things: that we strive for educational and philosophical coherence, that we talk about and seek to implement broad overall goals as well as narrowly focused performance objectives, that we assess total impact, and look at qualitative change. We believe that…students should be able to make evaluative statements that are reflections on their overall experience in the program. In addition, every staff member is concerned and informed about every aspect of the program, and it is the total staff that conceives, designs, and modifies the program. Academic policies, are, whenever possible, established through a highly participatory, consensual process” (World Learning, 2000, pp. 55 -56).

Faculty and staff in the MAT program work together to engage in critical reflection about the programs and courses, utilizing the Experiential Learning Cycle for their own professional development and to determine programmatic improvements. The faculty and staff meet weekly to discuss student learning, engage in professional development opportunities and discuss any issues pertaining to the MAT programs. Because the faculty members are language teacher trainers in a program that emphasizes the role of collaboration in learning, they have a deep understanding of the art of communication, and are experienced and skilled at conducting productive meetings and sustaining positive working relationships where active listening and understanding responses are the norm. The collaborative and supportive environment in these meetings and between the MAT faculty and staff outside of the meetings is also sustained due to a commitment to the same humanistic principles that encourage strong relationships within the
classrooms – an understanding of the self as a whole person: emotional, spiritual, physical as well as intellectual. Faculty and staff are addressed by first name, among each other but also by the students. This is not to say that the program is unprofessional, but rather that it is a welcoming, collaborative and supportive environment where learning and teaching aren’t restricted by traditional hierarchical formalities. The frequency and effectiveness of regular program meetings and the overall environment of caring about each other and the students make for a program where students are not allowed to simply ‘fall through the cracks.’ Feedback from teachers to students and from students to teachers is ongoing. Students who may be perceived as having difficulties are discussed among the faculty, and every effort is made to ensure each individual’s success in the program. This is especially important in a distance-learning program where attrition rates, as mentioned previously, tend to be high.

In an online learning environment, “a collaborative culture around course design and development needs to be provided and supported. Technology staff and instructional designers should constantly engage in a dialogue about solving problems and making decisions regarding the design and teaching processes of online courses” (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). In the MATLR program, because of the working environment nurtured by the MAT faculty and staff, this is exactly what takes place.

In a critical analysis of the literature on the roles and competencies of online teachers from 1990 – 2010 (Baran et al., 2011), it was found that there are three dimensions that are lacking in current approaches to online teacher training and that need further exploration: empowering online teachers, promoting critical reflection, and integrating technology into pedagogical inquiry. Because of their collaborative nature and their familiarity with using the
Experiential Learning Cycle in their teaching practices, the MAT faculty members are in fact already demonstrating all three of these dimensions in their online teaching.

I would argue that the MAT faculty members are already empowered online teachers because they are skilled at making teaching decisions based upon reflection of their own experiences and collaboration with colleagues. “As teachers move from traditional to online classrooms, they face constant challenges of finding their teacher-self. While there is the tendency for online teachers to lean to their traditional teaching practices as reference points, the affordances and limitations of online environments will pose new challenges for them as they try to operate within their existing sets of beliefs and practices. Programs preparing faculty to teach online need to encourage them to critically reflect upon their past experiences, assumptions, and beliefs towards learning and teaching, question them, and transform their perspectives by engaging in critical reflection, pedagogical inquiry and problem-solving” (Baran et al., 2011, p. 435). The MAT faculty members are well equipped to deal with the shift to new online teaching personas, because they are engaged in the Experiential Learning Cycle in their own teaching practices, where transformation is constant. Also, because critical reflection is already a core practice among the MAT faculty, they are in a unique position to benefit the field of online pedagogy: “One of the threats to the growth of a distinct online pedagogy is the limited focus on reflection” (Baran et al., 2011, p. 432).

One example of how critical reflection is implemented in the MATLR program is a document that I create with the instructors for each of the courses titled, “Notes for Next Time.” These “notes” stem from meetings with the instructors where we engage in critical reflection based on feedback from the students and on our experiences implementing the courses to determine where improvements might be made in the future. Reflection takes place in-action
(while the course is running), and on-action (after the course has been completed). These “notes” are invaluable in re-designing the courses. Specific examples of how activities in the MATLR courses were redesigned from the first year to the second year based on reflection and student feedback are in a later section.

In the regular program meetings when the MATLR program is discussed, technology is naturally integrated into pedagogical inquiry, and not treated as a separate knowledge base. The MAT faculty members “consider the complex relationships between technologies, pedagogies, and the content in their online teaching context” (Baran et al., 2011, p. 433) at every step in the design and implementation of the courses in the MATLR program. In meetings with SIT’s educational technologist, the program coordinator, other Low-Residency programs offered by SIT, and each other, the MAT faculty members engage regularly in critical inquiry on the relationship between pedagogy and technology. Technology is never just used for technology’s sake. The role of technology in the learning objective is always considered. For example, in one assignment where students are asked to record themselves speaking and post their audio clips instead of writing in a forum, it is in order to help them reflect on the difference between speaking and writing.

The MATLR program is unusual among other distance-learning programs because the faculty members who teach in the MATLR program are the same as those who teach in the AYMAT program. The faculty and staff already have established successful processes that are hugely beneficial in designing and implementing an online learning program, namely, as detailed above, collaborative practice, critical reflection, empowered teaching, and integrating technology into pedagogical inquiry.
KASA or A+ASK

One final and vital piece of the foundation of the MAT program is the idea that developing intercultural competence, a focus of language teacher training, involves not only the development of knowledge and skills, but also the development of attitude and awareness. As mentioned previously, teacher choice is dependent on context, and in language teacher training the potential contexts where students may teach are widely varied (for example from teaching English for academic purposes to incoming Chinese freshman at a U.S. university, to teaching English for special purposes to airline stewardesses in Brazil, to teaching survival English to refugees). It is unrealistic to expect teacher trainers to prepare their students for every possible context, and so the MAT program uses a framework that provides the tools to succeed in any context. Traditional educational approaches emphasize the acquisition of knowledge (knowing about the subject) and skills (knowing how to put that knowledge into practice), but the MAT program also recognizes the important role that one’s attitude and level of awareness (of self and others) play in intercultural interaction and choice making in teaching.

A positive and open attitude in one’s approach to a new culture facilitates intercultural success. Indeed, attitude, with its strong link to motivation, can act to facilitate (or hinder) any kind of learning. “Learning is change. In order for learning to take place, there must be a willingness to examine and often risk one’s beliefs and patterns of action and thought” (MAT Program Statement, 1982, p. 8 as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 267). In the MAT program, students are often asked to reflect upon their own attitudes towards teaching, for example by describing their motivations behind their lesson plan choices or their opinions of newly presented teaching approaches.
At the heart of this four-piece framework is awareness. An awareness of oneself is emphasized in the MAT program by the constant underlying thread of reflective practice. Awareness increases with the growth of knowledge, skills, and attitude, but also enhances their development. As a personal example, once I gained the awareness (through reflection) that I valued a more traditional approach to education, with the instructor as lecturer and knowledge giver and the student as attentive knowledge receiver, I became aware of my resistance to learning through self-discovery, collaboration, and the co-construction of knowledge. This awareness made it possible for me to ‘let go’ (once I knew what I needed to let go of) so that I was able to adopt a more open attitude towards the approach to learning and teaching utilized in the MAT program, thus increasing my potential to develop knowledge and skills in language teaching through the program.

Students in the MAT program are repeatedly asked to reflect explicitly and implicitly upon the question, “Who am I as a teacher and who am I as a learner?” An awareness of oneself in this way increases the potential understanding of an awareness of others. Becoming aware of who one is as learner leads to an increased awareness that among one’s students there may be many different types of learners. “At its most simplistic level, I cannot make an informed choice unless I am aware that one exists. Awareness requires that I give attention to some aspect of my behavior or the situation I find myself in. Once I give that aspect my attention, I must also view it with detachment, with objectivity, for only then will I become aware of alternative ways of behaving or alternative ways of viewing the situation, and only then will I have a choice to make” (Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 266).

The combination of awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills is referred to in the MAT program as KASA, or sometimes, because of the emphasized importance on awareness, A+ASK.
The framework was originally developed by Alvino Fantini in the late 1970s and adopted and used by the MAT faculty beginning in the 1980s (A. Fantini, personal communication, February 5, 2015).

(Fantini, 2012)

This framework is an extremely useful way to think about how to become competent in any new teaching context – including an online one. The online learning environment is an entirely different context for the MAT faculty members, most of whom have previously only taught face-to-face. It could be argued that e-learning is a different culture, with its own norms, rules, and even language. The MAT program, with its foundational focus on what is necessary to become a successful teacher in a different culture or context, is again, well-equipped to a transition to an online learning environment. MAT faculty members can approach online teaching with the KASA framework to guide their development. I will make frequent reference to development in the four areas, most particularly of awareness in my analysis of the MATLR program to follow and in our potential areas for improvement.
III. Introduction to the Community of Inquiry (CoI)

Distance-learning or e-learning technology has developed to a point that it is generally accepted that a community of learners can be established and sustained in an asynchronous, online learning environment (Garton & Edge, 2012; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Khalsa, 2012; Nunan, 2012). Emerging technologies have made for an online environment that is rife with educational affordances for creating communities of learners. Collaborative computer-mediated learning is a reality. The next step in e-learning is to take full advantage of the affordances offered by technology and merge these affordances with higher-order learning pedagogy to design and facilitate a space where a community of learners are engaged in higher-order thinking, and thus become a community of inquiry.

Collaborative Constructivism and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

As outlined in the previous pages, the MAT program is deeply rooted in reflection, experience, and community. Dr. D. Randy Garrison, a retired professor from the University of Calgary who has done extensive research on higher education in the online learning environment, defines this approach to learning as “collaborative constructivist” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Garrison & Archer 2000; Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 2009): “Construction of meaning may result from individual critical reflection but ideas are generated and knowledge constructed through the collaborative and confirmatory process of sustained dialogue within a critical community of learners” (Garrison & Archer, 2000, p. 91). I would argue that the approach to learning in the MAT program can be summed up as collaborative constructivist.

The collaborative constructivist approach to learning is central to the framework that I will use to analyze the MATLR program, namely the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework.
The CoI framework was developed in the late 1990s during a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities funded project on text-based computer conferencing as a model to guide the research into online teaching and learning in higher education (https://coi.athabascau.ca/). It is based on the idea that knowledge construction in learning environments is dependent upon the construction of a community of inquiry. “An educational community of inquiry is a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding.” (CoI Model, https://coi.athabascau.ca/). The CoI framework identifies three elements that function multidimensionally and interdependently to create an educational experience: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The framework includes categories and indicators to define each of the presences and to acknowledge the capability of e-learning technology to “precipitate private reflection as well as public discourse within a community of learners,” while at the same time recognizing that “along with this technological capability is needed the wisdom to create purposeful yet creative learning experiences with the appropriate balance between reflection and discourse” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 23).
The element in the CoI framework that is most clearly associated with higher-order learning is cognitive presence. This is defined as “the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p.11). The framework measures cognitive presence using a practical inquiry model that is rooted in Dewey’s educational philosophy that learning is grounded in experience. This model thus shares similarities with the Experiential Learning Cycle and is a fitting one for the MATLR program. Levels of cognitive presence within the MATLR program will be measured using this model in a later section.

Social presence is defined as “the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people (i.e. their full personality), through the medium of communication being used” (Garrison, et al., 2000, p. 94). As stated earlier, social presence has been demonstrated to be a vital element of student satisfaction in online learning (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). Also, “cognitive presence…is more easily sustained when a significant degree of social presence has been established” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 95). In face-to-face interactions, social presence is enhanced with nonverbal cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, and physical proximity. In an asynchronous, text-based environment where nonverbal cues are absent, establishing and sustaining social presence can be a particular challenge, and is one that must be addressed directly by course designers and instructors. The CoI framework identifies a number of indicators to measure social presence in an online environment, and I will use these indicators to measure the level of social presence in the MATLR program in a later section.

The role of the teacher in this framework is to design and maintain an environment where an optimal level of cognitive and social presence is sustained to obtain the goal of higher-order
learning. Teaching presence is defined as “the design, facilitation and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 29). Teaching presence in an online learning environment involves a number of factors. Teachers must design and structure an environment where students can build a community to be both cognitively and socially present without feeling that technology is a barrier. All the while, teachers must work to keep students engaged to address the threat of the high-level of attrition among online learners. Also, and very importantly, “interactions need to have clearly defined parameters and be focused toward a specific direction, hence the need for teaching presence” (Swan et al., 2008, p. 3).

Through an application of the models, categories, and indicators of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence in the CoI framework, we can look at how the community of inquiry in the MATLR program is developed and sustained and how students experience collaborative-constructivist learning.

**Text-Based Communication**

The medium of communication in the online courses of the MATLR program is primarily asynchronous and text-based, so the differences between spoken and written communication are a key underlying factor to understanding how a community of inquiry can be established and sustained in an online, computer-mediated environment. Because the MAT program is a *language* teacher training program, the instructors have a strong understanding of the differing characteristics between speaking and writing, and students can be asked to reflect upon their own communication. Also, because the program is a blended learning program, with two, three-week residencies (one each summer during the two-year program), students have the opportunity to
interact face-to-face, and so can compare their own experiences in face-to-face and written discussions. As such, we can use the thoughts and opinions of the students in the MATLR program as a basis for identifying the key differences in the two modes of communication.

As one of the final activities in one of their first online courses, students are asked to compare their experience writing in the discussion forums to speaking in the classrooms on campus in order to become metacognitively aware of how communicating through these different mediums affects their learning. All the quotes that follow in this section are from this assignment in 2013 (cohort one) and in 2014 (cohort two). As mentioned in an earlier section (p. 14), one of the characteristics of asynchronous text-based communication that students recognize is that it gives them time to reflect before they write. This is identified as one of the advantages of text-based communication in a number of studies (Garrison et al., 2000; Meyer, 2003).

“…Text-based communication provides time for reflection. For this reason, written communication may actually be preferable to oral communication when the objective is higher order learning” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 90). Also, the permanent nature of the written word gives students a chance to reread and reflect upon what they and others have written. These and other characteristics identified by the students of spoken discussions versus written discussions are summed up in the following table. Note that these characteristics closely match what experts in the language teaching field identify as the contrasts between spoken language and written language (Van Lier as cited in Bailey, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Spoken Discussions</th>
<th>Characteristics of Written Discussions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech is more spontaneous.</td>
<td>There is time to think before writing: to plan, edit, revise, and make ideas clear in order to be understood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This type of discussion is better for learners who process information through speaking and listening.

The conversation flows with less structure and has many exchanges, all with prosody, stress, rhythm, and warmth. There is immediate feedback (including nonverbal cues for more emotional connectedness).

In a class discussion, everyone is there to listen, but not everyone gets equal time to speak. Certain personalities can dominate.

Speech is more temporary.

Speech happens quickly and ‘in the moment.’

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This type of discussion is better for learners who process information through writing and reading.

The conversation is more structured and there is much less back and forth (fewer exchanges). Feedback is delayed and communication can feel disjointed.

Online discussions are more democratic: everyone gets equal air space. Personalities get leveled out.

Written communication is more permanent (giving students the opportunity to reread if necessary).

Written communication is more time consuming.

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In general, students agreed that one of the greatest advantages of written communication was that it provided more time – time for editing in order to gain greater clarity of expression, time for reflection and deeper thinking, and the liberty to engage in the discussion when they had the time to do so.

- “As many of us have discussed before, the benefits of the online format have primarily two benefits for me. 1. The idea of being able to have the time to think about and write exactly what I want to say and 2. To be able to revise my posts so that I am communicating exactly the way I want is helpful. In that same vein, being able to read others’ posts at our own pace and respond the way we want to allows us to have potentially richer exchanges. In SIT classrooms, so many great ideas are thrown around so quickly that sometimes things get missed or are not given enough consideration.”

What students missed the most from spoken face-to-face communication is similarly connected to time, and also to physical proximity. Students mention missing the immediate nature of spoken, synchronous communication that allows them to have faster and thus more numerous interactions and immediate feedback. They miss nonverbal communication such as
facial expressions and eye contact that add to the “warmth” and “emotional connection” of dialogue.

- “What I miss most about f2f communication is the back and forth nature of spoken discussion. When we talk in person, we can see the other person nodding, smiling, and giving short, spoken cues. More importantly, there is the opportunity to take turns and have a real dialogue rather than two major turns (a post and a response). In our SIT online classes, there is so much to respond to at once (and our posts can be so lengthy) that sometimes we may forget to address some things.

For the most part, and not surprisingly, the characteristics that the students miss in text-based discussions are those that enhance social presence. This is in line with research in online learning that recognizes the challenge of establishing social presence in an environment that lacks nonverbal communication clues (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). As mentioned earlier, there is a strong link between social presence and cognitive presence, both in online learning theory and in the humanistic educational principles of the MAT program, which place an emphasis on the socio-emotional relationships between students and instructors, and also on the building of a community as a necessary factor to facilitate higher-order learning. Establishing social presence in an asynchronous, text-based environment is not impossible; it is simply more challenging, and it should be addressed directly as an objective by instructors in designing online courses.

Many students also mention how interactions in writing versus in speaking lead to different cognitive results, noticing something that other researchers have also noted in comparing text-based to spoken communication: students in face-to-face discussions, which have a higher frequency of exchanges, tend to generate more new ideas but written discussions tend to lead to more critical thinking. There is more creative and divergent interaction in a face-to-face discussion, while in a written discussion there is less interaction, but more in-depth thinking
The following quotes from MATLR students illustrate how they experience and interpret this phenomenon:

- “Speaking interactions tend to yield more information exchange than in writing. However, writing exchanges can more easily move beyond the superficial facts and tap into participants’ critical knowledge.”

- “Face-to-face communication tends to change directions, and ‘wanders.’…. writing is better at communicating facts and carefully written thoughts.”

- “Writing is a way of processing and forces us to clarify our thoughts. I never thought about this before, but if I needed to respond verbally to someone’s post instead of writing a response, like in a traditional classroom setting, it would be much more superficial and could not possibly give the post its due justice. I think even in writing, there are times when I don’t let the posts settle enough before I leap into a response, but even then I think it’s bound to be more thoughtful than if I were to do so speaking.”

- “There are so many ideas that can organically arise when people are speaking f2f. The conversations are something I really appreciate when we are on campus. Even the casual ones often can take you interesting places.”

Instructors should be aware of these characteristic differences of speaking discussions versus written discussions so that they can bring that awareness into the design of the courses and into the facilitation of discussions.

Instructors should also be aware of the different preferences of students, as the MATLR students differ on whether other characteristics of spoken discussions versus online discussions are beneficial or disadvantageous to their own learning. For example, one student noted the following:

- “Our [written] conversations are permanent and I find that reassuring. I find that comforting. I find that less stressful, so if I miss something…if it’s recorded in a written form I can just go back without anyone ever knowing I had to read it again.”

That statement sharply contrasts with the following from another student:

- “I hate the permanence of writing, it makes me nervous.”
Some students explicitly state that their learning is better facilitated in online discussions through written communication:

- "I find that I’m very quiet in the classroom because I often feel very overwhelmed. I don’t feel comfortable receiving new information and then speaking about it without having had time to process it and I need to process things often in writing because I really need to organize my thoughts. I can’t make new connections or generate new ideas just in a moment….I find I get a lot out of the online format….I find it does really work for my personal styles and habits…I like getting that extra time to organize my thoughts, revise my thoughts, and then make sure that I’m presenting it to you all in the most clear way possible. “

Other students express their preference for spoken discussions:

- "I prefer the face to face communication because so much of the communication is more than the actual words… Because I speak to understand what I am thinking, I am less comfortable with the written word. I get little pleasure from searching for the precise word to convey my meaning, since I need the engagement and conversation to help me get clearer on what I am saying.”

- "I wish I could have a live class discussion. I would really appreciate it if we could have conference calls to talk about our readings…having to express my ideas in writing was never my cup of tea and I am trying my best to get better at it.”

Instructors need to be aware of the different learning styles of their students so as to design an environment where all learners have the opportunity to succeed. Some students in the MATLR program clearly prefer learning through reading and writing, and a self-awareness of this preference is likely a motivating factor in why those students choose to study in a program that takes place primarily online. Other students in the MATLR program, conversely, express that they learn better through speaking and listening. While they have an opportunity to learn this way during the face-to-face portion of the program, it’s my opinion that there are not sufficient allowances made for these learners during the online portion. In the AYMAT program, there is a blend of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the classrooms. While learning through
Spoken discussions facilitated by the instructor is the most common way interactions in the classroom take place, there are allowances for those learners who process information better through writing and reading. In the “think, pair, share,” activity, for example, which is used in a number of AYMAT courses, students are given a prompt, and then given the opportunity to write and think for a period of time before the discussion begins (first with a partner, and then with the whole group). Similar opportunities should be designed in the MATLR program to give some opportunities for those learners to thrive who learn best through speaking and listening. This can be done by integrating video-conferencing or other synchronous modes of communication among students and instructors and regularly providing video and audio input as well as text-based input.

There is currently little formal direction for students to interact through synchronous, spoken communication in the MATLR program. One reason is the challenge of having students located across different time zones, but this challenge is not insurmountable. Neither is the challenge of navigating the technology. The technology to facilitate synchronous interactions across space is widely available, and ranges from audio only, as simple as using a phone, to video and audio conferencing programs such as Skype and GoToMeeting. Instructors could facilitate group video or audio conferencing discussion sessions at a few different times, so that all students get at least one opportunity to participate. Students could arrange times with each other to meet across time zones or could be grouped with those in their own time zone. The benefit of facilitating opportunities for real-time video or audio conferencing among students and between the students and the instructors outweighs the disadvantage of having to overcome the challenge of time-zones or technological difficulties. Even those students who state a preference for communicating via writing can appreciate the opportunity to use a variety of communication
mediums. One student in particular who noted in the past, “I loathe speaking... I prefer conversations via online posts,” recently shared the following feedback about an assignment that required the use of synchronous communication among students (e.g. Skype):

- “The variety of activities in [the course] so far have motivated & inspired me. Writing a response, using a screencast, Skyping with peers—it’s a great mix and it makes the course more interesting and encourages participation and complete engagement.”

In fact, all of the feedback from the students about this particular assignment, in which students were required to schedule a time to have a discussion via video-conferencing software or by phone, was overwhelmingly positive, despite technical difficulties and being located across time zones.

- “Communicating with my peer group via Skype was a nice change from giving & receiving written feedback. We were able to clarify our statements and elaborate on them as needed in real time. Unfortunately, we lost contact a few times during our conversation but were able to reconnect almost immediately. Overall, it was a worthwhile experience.

- “I really liked having the assignment to talk to my peers. We arranged a group call over Skype for all three of us. It was helpful to talk to them and it was fun to talk to them. And, sadly, as great and easy as it would be to just arrange to talk with them casually, these conversations just don’t get arranged without the assignment to do so. It strengthened my connection to the cohort and program. We all had fairly flexible schedules that weekend, so luckily finding a time across our three time zones was pretty painless. There were minor technical difficulties, but we all seemed to have patience and a sense of humor about it.”

- “I’m so glad that was an assignment. When left up to me, I will avoid any technology I don’t understand. I always prefer to have an actual human walk me through the steps first. But, because it was assigned, I plodded through the steps and finally set up a Skype account. The actual discussion with my group was great.”

- “I really enjoyed the conversation. It was a positive experience.”

- “I hope there will be more opportunities to chat in real time with my peers during the course.”
In addition to facilitating more opportunities for students to communicate synchronously, instructors can utilize different mediums besides text to communicate asynchronously with the students, namely through video and audio recordings. Feedback from students indicates the beneficial role that videos play in helping to create a community of learners by increasing the social presence of the instructor and also the perceived connections among students.

- "The videos are very helpful & add a personal connection to the learning."
- "The videos are a nice personal touch."
- "I really appreciate the weekly videos. It's nice to put a voice to the face and name of the faculty."
- "I liked how [the instructor] would mention pieces of our responses in the videos and address us each individually. It connected us more as a class."

By far the majority of information input and communication in the MATLR courses is text-based. Ideally there would be a greater balance between varying modes of input in order to increase social presence, strengthen the community of learners, and encourage student engagement. Just as in the AYMAT program, where the opportunity for reflective writing periods in class are deliberately given in order to balance out the modes of processing information, so must learners in the MATLR be given a variety of ways to communicate so that all styles of learning are acknowledged. “The student who learns or processes information by talking and who enjoys the give-and-take of discussion may feel disadvantaged in the online setting; the student who requires reflection to learn or construct an answer may be advantaged. Therefore, offering a mix of ways to be involved in discussion may well improve the likelihood that most students find an avenue for contributing that satisfies their learning needs” (Meyer, 2003, p. 62).
IV. Teaching Presence

As noted in previous sections, the teachers in an online program should be aware of the
differences between spoken and written communication and of the different learning styles of
their students (pp. 30 – 38). They should also be able to reflect critically and to integrate
technology into pedagogical inquiry (pp. 20 – 23). Along with this awareness, teachers need to
bring an open and positive attitude towards the potential of the e-learning environment to
facilitate the creation of a community of inquiry and a whole repertory of other awarenesses,
skills, and knowledge to their responsibilities as an online teacher.

Instructors in online courses must take into consideration that the context – the online
virtual learning environment – can be potentially frustrating or cause anxiety among learners
unfamiliar with the space. Instructors need to also be aware of the simultaneous necessity and
challenge of establishing and maintaining social presence in an online environment, all the while
designing and implementing a cognitively stimulating curriculum that both takes advantages of
the affordances offered by the online learning environment and takes into account its parameters.
The multiple roles and responsibilities of a teacher in an online course are described by the CoI
framework as teaching presence.

The next section will focus on teaching presence in the online courses of the MATLR
program, and detail exactly what the MATLR teachers do to facilitate the creation of a
community of inquiry with appropriate levels of social and cognitive presence. What will then
follow is an analysis of the actual levels of social and cognitive presence as reported by the
students in their feedback and in a survey, and as observed in a transcript analysis.

Research has found that the three factors that contribute most consistently and
significantly to the success of online courses and to student satisfaction are as follows:
• A clear and consistent course structure
• A valued and dynamic discussion
• An instructor who interacts frequently and constructively with students

(Swan, 2001, 2002)

Ensuring the existence of all of these factors falls under the responsibilities in the three categories of teaching presence in the Community of Inquiry framework: design and organization, facilitating discourse, and direct instruction. Note that the categories of teaching presence in the CoI framework are similar to teacher responsibilities that are identified by other models of online learning, all of which encompass pedagogical, facilitative, design, social, managerial, and technical roles (Baran et al., 2011). Note also that while the online instructor may be at the visible forefront performing these roles, much of the work is collaborative, shared among other staff and faculty in the program and also among the students – hence the name teaching presence and not teacher presence.

Design and Organization: Infrastructure – Spotlight on Foundations

Planning a face-to-face course that will take place in real-time is fundamentally different from planning an online course that will take place over time and space distances. In a face-to-face course, instructors can make adjustments during the class as they receive immediate feedback from the students on the progression of learning in the lesson. In an asynchronous online course, the instructor needs to put much more detailed attention into anticipating the potential challenges students may have with the lesson, and explicitly design how the learning will progress. Face-to-face, the instructor may have a lesson objective and an idea of what activities may get their students from point A to point B, but the path the students will travel
does not need to be clearly delineated ahead of time, since the instructor has the liberty of being able to intervene and adjust *in the moment* to ensure that learning objectives are met. The online instructor, on the other hand, needs to have a clear vision of how students will travel along the path to meet the lesson objective, because once the lesson has begun, the instructor doesn’t have the advantage of immediate feedback and response to make adjustments during the lesson. Pre-planning and design are vital to the success of online courses.

In my role as the program coordinator, I collaborate with the faculty on the design and organization of the courses. In particular, I am involved in the practicalities of the design and organization within the Learning Management System (LMS) used by SIT: Moodle. Through our collaboration, we have adapted a number of standard design principles, implemented in all online MATLR courses, with key objectives in mind: Technology should not be a hindrance to learning or to the creation of a community, and learners and instructors should not feel frustration or anxiety in navigating the online learning environment. Most courses I work with are converted from a face-to-face to an online format, except for the first course of the program: Foundations, which exists only in online form. Because the program begins online with this seven-week course, it is the students’ first introduction to the program, the virtual learning environment (Moodle), and to each other. It is in Foundations where the groundwork for establishing a Community of Inquiry takes place, and where it is particularly vital that students not be hindered or frustrated by the online learning environment.

The design principles that are implemented in Foundations are carried forward to all of the other online courses in the MATLR program. The first set of principles that guide the design and organization of the courses are adapted from Tina Stavredes’ book, *Effective Online Teaching* (2011). Stavredes introduces the concept of procedural scaffolding as a way to think
about how instructors and designers can minimize learner frustration and anxiety in a new, potentially foreign, online learning environment by “orienting them to the course, helping them understand the expectations for engaging in your course, and identifying processes, resources, and tools that will be used throughout the course” (p. 75). Procedural scaffolds are elements of pre-planning and detailed design that address the issue that there is no opportunity for immediate feedback to gauge student understanding in an asynchronous course. The three types of procedural scaffolds are orientation, resource, and expectation scaffolds.

(Adapted from T. Stavredes, 2011)
Orientation Scaffolding

The first type of scaffold, orientation scaffolding, refers to course activities and design elements that orient the student to the technical skills necessary to succeed in the courses and also to the educational principles that underlie the program.

In Foundations, students are oriented to the technology gradually from the first week. Getting students familiar with the technical aspects of the program early on helps to resolve issues before they can cause anxiety. This helps students feel more comfortable and keeps the focus on the content, rather than the technology. Each week, there is a short instructional video on a technical skill that students are expected to begin using. The skills move from simple to more complicated over the seven weeks. Students begin with the fundamentals necessary for participating and succeeding in the program, i.e. opening files and posting and replying to discussion forums, and each week the technological task gets slightly more advanced (the final technical task is to create and embed a video). At the end of the seven weeks, students should have been introduced to, and should have practiced, the basic technological skills necessary to succeed in the program. There is no technological skill requirement to be accepted into the MATLR program, so there are no assumptions that students know how to, for example, post to a forum or edit a wiki – all of these skills are carefully scaffolded.

In Foundations, again because it is the first course of the program, students are not only oriented to the technological skills they need, but they are also oriented to the fundamental educational principles of the program. The academic content of Foundations focuses on readings and discussions around ideas core to the MAT program, namely Hawkins’ “I, Thou, It” framework (1967), the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984), and the concept of collaborative learning.
To summarize with a simple example of how orientation scaffolding is implemented, in one of the initial weeks of Foundations, students are asked to watch a technical instructional video on opening files and posting to forums, read an article on collaborative transformational learning, and discuss the article in a forum with their peers.

**Resource Scaffolding**

Resource scaffolds are also implemented at first in Foundations and then continued in all other online courses. These are design and organization elements that ensure that students know where and when to find the information they need.

All of the MATLR courses are organized in a physically similar way and utilize common elements. There are patterns in timing, language, layout and design throughout the courses to facilitate efficiency. *Consistency is key*, so that students, once familiar with navigating the first course, can transfer their skills to other courses and do not require any major re-orientation. This lessens any potential student frustration or anxiety in having to spend time figuring out where and when to find the resources they need to access, and instead keeps the focus on learning the content.

Physically, all of the MATLR courses are designed using the same general template: Each course has a banner with the course name at the top, below which is the News Forum where instructors post announcements, a link to the course’s e-reserve, if it has one, and a forum for students where they can ask any questions they have about the course. Below that are the course information documents - e.g. the syllabus. Then, continuing from the top down, the course is organized by module, week, or unit, with the most recent appearing at the bottom. The activities within the modules, weeks, or units are similarly organized consistently within and
across courses. At the top is always a weekly overview, describing the tasks that week, followed by the activity areas necessary to complete the tasks. Usually, because of the collaborative nature of the program, these are areas where the students can work together, such as forums and wikis.

In order for students to always be able to find the resources they need, course elements follow the same naming conventions and are identified by a distinct icon. A forum is always called a forum (and never, for example, a “discussion space”), and an overview is always called an overview (and never, for example, a “summary of the week’s assignments”). The MATLR program’s LMS, Moodle, assigns an icon to each element – for example, a forum is identified with a small, green chat box; a webpage has an icon that looks like a small page; and the red and white Adobe PDF icon identifies a PDF file. The screenshot below is what an example week in one of the online MATLR courses might look like:

**Week Two – Collaborative Transformative Learning**

- Week Two Overview
- Week Two Video
- Group One Forum
- Group Two Forum

In order for learners to easily access and use the resources they need for each task, it is important that the elements in the course are used for their intended purposes. So, a PDF is the preferred type of document for sharing information, a Word document is used when edits by students are required (for example in a worksheet), and webpages are used when there is a need to, for example, embed a video, or include additional links to further directions or additional
resources. Additionally, forums are used as interactive communication spaces, wikis are used for collaborative work or compiling information, and questionnaires are used to get feedback from the students. All of this is to ensure the user friendliness of the site.

Instructors also strive not to change or move anything on the course once it has been made visible to the students. In the rare case that something must be changed, for example a direction, an announcement is immediately sent out to the students to notify them of the change. Finally, individual course documents (such as the syllabus or the weekly overview) exist in one place only, and any access from other locations is done via hyperlink. This lessens the possibility of inconsistencies across documents. For example, if an instructor posts the weekly overview to the course, and then also sends an email to the students notifying them that the overview is posted, the link to the overview that is posted should be included in the email, and the overview should not be attached to the email as a separate document.

The other element of resource scaffolding is timing. Consistency, again, is key. The week’s assignments and tasks are made visible to the students on Moodle at the same time each week. Students are also notified at that time that the assignment is available for viewing. Because of the collaborative nature of the program, all of the courses are heavily discussion based, and so the usual week’s deliverable is to post to a forum and then respond to peers. The due dates for these posts and responses are consistent from week to week and across courses. In the original schedule, new assignments were given at 9am EST (because the SIT campus is located in EST) every Tuesday, initial posts were due by the end of the day Friday, and responses to peers were due by the end of the day Monday. After collecting feedback on this schedule from the students, we adjusted it to allow more work to be done on weekends, and implemented a Wednesday – Saturday – Monday cycle instead. Recently, the cycle has been adjusted again to give students
more time to complete their first assignments over the weekend, and students are currently receiving their assignments on Wednesdays, with their first posts due by the end of Sunday, and their responses to their peers due by the end of Tuesday. The important aspects of the schedule are that it is A) consistent and reliable within and across courses and B) student-centered, and so adjusted based on student feedback. This, again, is to minimize potential confusion, frustration, or anxiety.

The online learning space is meant to become comfortably familiar to the students, and reliably unchanging in its structure from course to course. This reduces the potential for student frustration or anxiety with the virtual learning environment, so the space helps rather than hinders learning.

*Expectation Scaffolding*

The final element of procedural scaffolding is expectation scaffolding. Expectation scaffolds inform the students of what they need to do. In an online, text-based, asynchronous environment, as I have mentioned before, the lack of immediate feedback, whether verbal or nonverbal, presents certain challenges. In terms of expectation scaffolding, the challenge is that instructors can’t see their students’ faces or receive immediate feedback to gauge whether instructions are understood. Once the assignment goes out, there is a time delay before the student can begin working if additional clarity is needed. Extreme clarity, therefore, in all instructions, is vital.

The assignment for the week, module, or unit (depending on the structure of the course) is presented in an overview, and, in line with the principles of resource scaffolding, formatted generally in the same way from week to week (or unit to unit, or module to module), and from
course to course. The overview describes all of the assignments for that week, unit or module with extreme clarity. In my work collaborating with faculty, I work in great detail with these overviews to make sure that everything is formatted uniformly, makes sense, and there is no potential for confusion. I try to read the overview with the eyes of an easily confused student, asking myself repeatedly, “Does this make sense? Is there any potential for ambiguity here?”

One thing I often do is to add more detail to the overviews so it is very clear where students can find the information that they need. For example, note the changes that the following instructions on an overview from the course Language Analysis for Lesson Planning go through from Version 1 to Version 2:

**Version 1**

2. By the end of **Saturday, Jan. 24**, review all of the lesson plan structures in the Lesson Planning Structures. Select one of these that is new to you and post your reactions to these two questions about the structure: 400-600 words.
   - Why does this structure capture your interest?
   - What would this structure allow you to do effectively with your learners?

**Version 2**

1. **By the end of Saturday, Jan. 24**, read in Woodward’s *Planning Lessons and Courses* the Introduction and Chapter 2. This will provide background reading for some of the structures you will explore.
2. **By the end of Saturday, Jan. 24**, read through the descriptions of the lesson plan structures on the Lesson Planning Structures Page under Week Six on Moodle. Select one of these that is new to you, and click on the structure to read about it in more detail and see an example. Post your reactions to these two questions about the structure in 400-600 words to the Lesson Planning Structures Forum.
   - Why does this structure capture your interest?
   - What would this structure allow you to do effectively with your learners?

(Silverman, 2014)
Version 2 includes an additional level of detail that offers the learner more clarity in why they are reading the chapter, where they can find the lesson plan structures, how to access more information about the lesson plan structures, and where to post their answers to the questions. Additionally, you can see that there are formatting changes from Version 1 to Version 2. These are based on some fundamental principles of visual design that are detailed in the next section.

**Additional Visual Design Principles**

Aside from procedural scaffolding, there are a few other design principles basic to web design and user interface design that are implemented in the online courses of the MATLR program. These principles, described below, serve to minimize frustration, increase the appeal and feeling of comfort with the online learning environment, and increase the effectiveness of user interaction with the space. “Good visual design supports understanding through simplicity, clarity, and organization. Nothing in the design of the page distracts from communication. An open, clear, attractive page design enhances communication” (Vai and Sosulski, 2011, p. 51).

1. **Simplicity** – The homepages or “front ends” of the courses avoid unnecessary elements. More complex features of the course homepages, such as sub-activities, or individual resource files are invisible to the user on the homepage. For example, if, as part of a week’s assignment, students are given a number of articles as resources, instead of presenting these as individual files on the homepage, they are embedded into a webpage, which is linked on the course homepage. This is to avoid unnecessary clutter on the course homepage.
2. Text formatting – Because most of the communication in the online MATLR courses is text-based, it is important to consider how text is visually presented. Text replaces spoken communication, so techniques in formatting to add stress, rhythm, emphasis and pauses are used. These include **bolding** or *italicizing* words for emphasis. Underlining is used for hyperlinks online, so any other use of underlining should be avoided. Color should be used sparingly, and with care and purpose. It can serve to highlight and emphasize. For example, due dates on overviews are in blue in the online MATLR courses, and hyperlinks are in orange. (See the example on page 48.)

Fonts are also chosen deliberately and for the sake of readability. One common factor considered in online font choices is the difference between serif (fonts with details called serifs, which include small, tail-like extensions on characters and varying thicknesses in lines like in Georgia and Times New Roman – the font of this IPP), and sans-serif (those without serifs) typefaces. Some argue that sans serif fonts (like Helvetica and Arial) tend to be more readable online and across different platforms (e.g. mobile phones and tablets) because they are simpler and not as dependent on a high-resolution display to see the details (Vai and Solsuski, 2011, p. 57).

3. Page layout: Designers also need to be aware of the amount of white space presented on the page. A large amount of dense text is more daunting to read than the same amount of text organized with sufficient white space and formatting techniques like indenting and bulleted. (See the example on page 48.)

The following checklist can serve as a guide to increase instructor knowledge and awareness of how to approach the visual design of their courses:
## Layout

- Page layout is uncluttered and open, and includes a significant amount of white space.
- There is sufficient space between lines, paragraphs, and to the right and left of text so that it stands out and is easy to read.
- Text is left-justified and right margins are ragged.

## Text

- Headings and subheadings are used consistently to logically organize content.
- A universal sans serif web typeface (e.g. Verdana) assures access across platforms and enhances screen readability.
- Type size should be large enough to be easily readable by all students.
- Bold and italic typefaces are used sparingly and only to emphasize important items.
- Underlining is used only for hyperlinks.
- Words in all caps are avoided.

## Color

- Color is used with purpose.
- There is good contrast between text and background.

## Graphic Elements

- Visual elements (e.g. icons, shading, and color) are used consistently to distinguish between different types of course elements (e.g. lessons, assignments, audio, and video).
- Use bullets or numbers to set apart items that can be listed.
- Numbers are used to identify sequential steps in a task or process. They are also used for rankings and setting priorities.
- Bullets are used to highlight a series of items that are not prioritized or sequential.

(Vai and Sosulski, 2011, p. 66-67)
Procedural scaffolding and the additional visual design principles ensure the user friendliness, clarity, and consistency of the online classroom. Instructors and designers want to make sure that the courses are intuitive and easy to navigate in order to facilitate a low-level of frustration and anxiety. The online learning environment should be a learner-centered space where students feel comfortable.

NOTE: Interestingly, at the time of writing this IPP, the overall look of Moodle at SIT has gone through a sudden change. SIT as a whole has just implemented a new theme for Moodle, changing, among other things, the color scheme. This resulted in the default text color being changed from black to orange. Forum posts, webpage content, etc. were changed to be displayed, by default, in orange. This went against multiple design principles of the program, including the principle of consistency (this change occurred not only in the middle of the program, but in the middle of a course), but also the principles of color and texture. Orange text on a white background is a high-contrast display, meant for highlighting something. Black text on a white background is optimal for readability, because it provides maximal value contrast (Gabriel-Petit, 2007). This change presented a challenge to the MATLR program, and is a reminder that the program operates within the constraints of the decisions of other departments within the organization. As an example, if I had written this entire IPP in this orange color, how would you feel now as a reader? Would this have caused eye-strain? Did you question the use of my choice of black as the default text color? Would you have questioned my color choice if I had chosen orange instead? What are the potential effects of choosing orange as the color of communication for the students? Fortunately, the organization willingly changed the default text back to black for all MAT Moodle course pages in response to instructor feedback. Like other
design decisions in online courses, text color matters, and decisions should be made carefully and through a collaborative, researched process that has a learner-centered objective at its core.

Design and Organization: Coursework – Spotlight on Teaching the Four Skills

The design and organization of coursework is a core component of teaching presence. As stated earlier, the majority of the online MATLR courses are converted from face-to-face courses. In converting the courses, the MAT faculty and program coordinator (my role) follow a process that fits into the ADDIE model of instructional design: Analysis, Design and Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (Morrison, 2013).

1. Analysis - Face-to-face courses are analyzed in terms of how they could be put online in a way that maintains the same learning objectives, but considers the affordances and limitations of the online learning environment.

2. Design and Development – Courses are designed for the online environment considering the parameters defined in the analysis phase. Overviews are developed and the actual Moodle course site is designed and organized. Instructors and the program coordinator problematize along the way to determine where improvements can be made before the course is implemented, for example by making sure instructions are extremely clear.

3. Implementation – The course is implemented.

4. Evaluation – Instructors and the program coordinator reflect critically on their experience implementing the course (during and after the course – reflection ‘in’ and ‘on’ action),
and get student feedback (during and after the course) to analyze how the course can be improved, thus starting the ADDIE cycle over again.

This IPP has already demonstrated that the virtual learning environment can easily be designed to facilitate interaction, so the question in converting the MAT face-to-face courses to online courses is how to structure the lessons in a way that they maintain the same learning objectives and educational principles while taking into account the affordances and limitations of the e-learning context. Many of the affordances have already been mentioned, namely the ability of the online environment to facilitate a collaborative-constructivist approach to learning (with interaction, reflective practice, and situated learning at its core), but little direct mention has been made of its constraints. Two characteristics that instructors and designers have to keep in mind in designing lessons are that 1) communication is for the most part asynchronous, and 2) students are full or part-time teachers and so have their own jobs and lives to attend to while they are enrolled in the program.

Students are expected to spend eight to twelve hours per week on their online coursework. This number comes from SIT’s credit hour rule that states that one credit is roughly equivalent to 45 hours of study. One credit online is usually allotted four weeks. In reality, students report spending anywhere between five and thirty hours per week on their online coursework. The fact that students have to balance their coursework with their jobs and personal lives is mentioned as one of the challenges for our students of learning online:

- “I have felt overwhelmed since the beginning of the program, especially last term. This was due to the amount of work we had to do in addition to many personal issues which took a toll on me.”
• “I feel like I never give my work the attention it deserves any given week. I often feel like I either have to turn in work ON TIME that I’m not 100% proud of or feel finished with or have to turn it in late.”

• “In general, I had sufficient time, but at various times throughout the two-year program, I fell behind due to added responsibilities at work and other unexpected challenges.”

• "Time management has been a continuous challenge."

• “I was left wishing I had had more time to provide feedback for my peers. This has more to do with my own weekly schedule than with the module itself.”

• “Time management has been the most difficult; balancing grading papers, and [other teaching responsibilities] while keeping up with my online posts. I'm still working out the balance.”

• "I continue to be disappointed in myself, in my own schedule, for being unable to contribute more deeply and in a more ongoing way to the forums... I haven't thought of anything that can be changed to make it more possible for me to contribute more, however. It is really just my schedule."

• "We happened to be in our last two weeks of the first term of the year with all the accompanying responsibilities of attending to final exams and grading. I ended up being too tired to do my best with my final writing assignment, despite having been inspired and energized by the accompanying readings."

• “It always takes me longer to write responses to readings, make posts, and reply to posts than I expect.”

Instructors in the MATLR program have found that in order to give students enough time to process input, interact, reflect, and move through the Experiential Learning Cycle to achieve learning objectives, they have needed to cut back on lesson content, specifically on reading material, in their online courses. (One benefit of this is that instructors have had to thoroughly re-examine the readings that they use for courses to pare down to what is core for the student to know.) Why does the online learner have less time to read class materials than the face-to-face learner? I speculate that this is related to the experience of time in online discussions versus in face-to-face discussions.
The MATLR students in their reflections on the differences between written versus spoken discussions consistently noted that one of the benefits of written discussions was that it allowed them more time to reflect upon others’ thoughts and to develop and convey their own detailed responses and postings (see p. 32). This resulted in deeper and more focused critical thinking about discussion topics. Students also consistently notice, however, that discussing in writing is significantly more time consuming than in speaking. Time in online, asynchronous discussions is expanded. Asynchronous text-based discussions take place over several hours and several days. A face-to-face discussion takes place during a fixed time period in class. Because online students spend more time on discussion than face-to-face students do, there is less time for processing readings. Other research reports that students state that written discussions are more time consuming than spoken ones. “What are the differences between face-to-face and online discussions? Perhaps the most consistent finding was the experience that time expanded in the online discussions…” it takes a lot of time’ was not an uncommon comment from students” (Meyer, 2003, p. 60). The existing research doesn’t relate this to necessitating a reduced amount of reading input, but instructors in the MATLR program have experienced that students seem to have less time to read as much content as face-to-face students do. I believe that this may be due to the increased amount of time it takes to participate in written discussions online.

The expanded nature of time in an online course also affects the number of exchanges students can have with each other, the content, and the instructor. It is unrealistic to expect the students to have multiple exchanges over the course of one week if the mode of communication is asynchronous. Lessons must be designed with this in mind. As mentioned previously, the weekly schedule requires one round of initial posts and one round of responses. The effect this
has on the nature of discussion itself is addressed in the following section on facilitating discourse.

Another way student interaction is organized in the online courses is that the students are put into small discussion groups. The MATLR program has fairly small cohorts (thirteen students in the first cohort and nine in the second), but taking into account the amount of time it takes to respond to each other and the fact that in depth and meaningful interactions are the goal, students are usually required to only read through the posts and respond to two or three peers. Often (but not always, as in the example activity from Teaching the Four Skills below), the groups are assigned, especially in the beginning when social presence is being established and students do not know each other very well. Working with just a few peers instead of the whole group gives students the opportunity to form stronger social bonds. Also, ensuring that the students remain in the same small discussions groups over a period of time (for example, for a three-week module) helps to keep the larger discussion flowing when each week only requires one post and response. When groups are assigned, they must be varied within and across courses to give students the opportunity to be exposed to all the different perspectives of their cohort.

- "I like being in small & different groups on Moodle -- if I had to read & respond to every member, it would be an overload and I would lose interest."

- “Having more than one peer group to work with ….is very rewarding in two key ways: 1 – a greater sense that I am connecting with and getting to know my cohort. 2- a greater variety in the dialog.”

- “The varied groupings were beneficial. I like the variety of perspectives that this approach exposed me to.”

Varying the groupings also helps with student satisfaction since students may not appreciate being in a group for an extended period of time with a relatively inactive student or a student who habitually posts late. One student gave this feedback in one module:
• "Only one of the two people in my group responded...I'm frustrated by the way my lesson was processed by others."

The same student then posted this feedback in the following module, after being placed in a new group:

• "Working with two other active participants in the Module really helped my learning."

Group variations must be done carefully and deliberately because student feedback has indicated that students are very aware when they have or have not worked with each other.

• “It’s important that the groups are well mixed every week throughout a course...At the end of the course I realized I was never put in a group with [x] or [y], yet I was in a group with [a] and [b] for 3 out of the 7 weeks. In the future, it would be nice to ensure that each cohort member is grouped with all other members at least once during a class.”

• “I didn’t get to work with everyone, and I worked with some people upwards of 3 times.”

• “There were at least two people that I wasn’t in a group with once and others that I was in a group with twice” “I did not get to work with I think 2 students maybe more”

• "I had a couple groups where I had the same members overlap. For example, I worked with [x] in two groups but never worked in a group with [y]. Not a big deal but would have been nice to work with different people each time."

In order to demonstrate how the method of grouping students and all of the other principles of course design and organization are put into practice, I will look at one course in particular, and how a specific activity and the quantity of readings assigned changed from the face-to-face course to the online course.

Teaching the Four Skills is the first course that the students take online after their initial summer session in Vermont. It is a three-credit course that takes place over twelve weeks and is split into four modules: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Students work in a different group for each three-week module. We will look at the first module of the course, the listening
module, to show how the coursework changed from face-to-face, to the first year online, to the second year online.

_Readings Assigned in the Listening Module:_

| Face-to-face: 7 articles | Year 1 online: 5 articles (4 required, 1 optional) | Year 2 online: 4 articles |

The number of articles assigned decreased in the first year online from the face-to-face version, and then again in the second year online. The choice to reduce the number of articles was based on instructor critical reflection and student feedback. One additional thing to note about this reduction of articles is that in the subsequent face-to-face version of this course (which occurred between the first and the second years of the online version), the instructor chose to remove an article from the module, as a result of the experience teaching the module with fewer articles in the online course. Because the same instructors who teach in the MATLR program teach in the AYMAT program, the experience of teaching in the MATLR courses affects how the instructors approach their AYMAT courses.

_Example Listening Module Activity: Listening Quotes_

Purpose: to develop awareness of the importance of good listening in any language
Face-to-face:
Activity duration - 20 minutes
1. Instructor puts quotes about the importance of listening around the room.
2. Students walk in pairs around the room reading the quotes. Each pair chooses one quote that they particularly like, and take it back to their seats.
3. When everybody is seated, each pair shares their quote and why it is important to them. This prompts the discussion about the importance of good listening in any language.
4. Instructor facilitates the discussion in real-time, e.g. by connecting thoughts and sharing insights.

Year 1 & Year 2 online:
Activity duration/timeline - assignment given Wednesday; post due the following Saturday; response to peers due the following Monday.
1. Instructor posts the quotes about the importance of listening in a PDF document on Moodle on Wednesday.
2. Each student reads through the quotes individually, and then chooses one that he/she particularly likes. The student then posts the quote along with a short explanation about why the quote is important to a whole class forum by the end of Saturday.
3. Students read through each other's quotes and posts, and respond to any two of their peers by the end of the following Monday.
4. Instructor includes a synthesis of the discussions that occurred about the quotes in his/her written weekly summary (making connections between student posts and sharing insights), which is posted as a PDF to Moodle the following Tuesday.

(Adapted from Tannenbaum, 2014)

In this activity, the learning objective remained the same from the face-to-face to the online version. Time expanded online, and a 20-minute activity stretched out over an entire week to give students the opportunity to interact with each other and give the instructor a chance to provide a synthesis and direct input. The discussion face-to-face is allowed to progress organically. Each pair is required to share their quote, but not everybody is required to respond. Students demonstrate engagement in the activity in the face-to-face course with verbal and non-
verbal feedback. For example, students may indicate that they are listening to each other by providing comments but also with eye-contact or by nodding. In the online version the discussion is more directly facilitated to ensure that students remain engaged. Online, each student is required to choose and post their own quote, because of the complexity and amount of time that would be necessary to arrange for students to work in pairs to choose a quote in an asynchronous environment. The online students are then required to respond to at least two peers, thus giving the instructor and the rest of the cohort an indication that all of the students are engaged in the activity. This method of requiring the students to respond to each other is a common feature in the interactive activities of the MATLR courses.

Feedback from the MATLR students from the first year using this activity indicated that they were satisfied with it: 91% of the students rated it either a 4 or a 5 on a 5-point scale, with 5 being, “This is a great activity, keep it!” and 1 being, ”You really need to rethink this activity, it’s completely useless.” (There was no feedback requested on this specific activity in the second year.) Some students gave feedback on the fact that the directions were to respond to any two peers, instead of assigned peers. Students noted that there is a benefit to not having assigned peers:

- “I especially like the unstructured way of responding to quotes because it gives room for connectedness to another’s thoughts.”

They also noted the potential imbalance that may result in allowing the students to choose whom to respond to:

- “I've noticed that by not assigning groups some participants will tend to get more replies while others maybe just one.”

As a result of this and similar feedback on assignments when groups are not assigned, these kinds of assignments now include directions such as, “Respond to any two peers and
collaboratively ensure that everybody gets a response,” or, “prioritize posts that have not yet been responded to in order to ensure that everybody gets at least one response.”

In its transition to an online environment, this simple activity required deliberate organization and explicit directions to ensure that the learning objectives were met. On a micro-scale, this activity is demonstrative of the ADDIE process that MATLR faculty and staff engage in regularly in converting their courses from face-to-face to online.

**Indicators of and Student Feedback on Design and Organization**

The indicators of design and organization that are defined by the Community of Inquiry framework are listed in the following table along with examples taken from recent overviews of the Curriculum Design and Assessment course. Examples of this kind of language can be found in all MATLR online course overviews. As a note, I find the table of indicators provided by the CoI framework to be lacking, and think that research could be done to come up with a more comprehensive set of indicators for design and organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting curriculum</td>
<td>“This week you will have a chance to step back and, with the help of your peers, consider the alignment of your course at this point in its development.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing methods</td>
<td>“You have been placed into new affinity groups (listed below) with two other peers based on similarities in your contexts and/or content.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing time parameters</td>
<td>“You have two tasks to complete this week. You will complete Task 1 by the end of Sunday, March 15th and Task 2 by the end of Tuesday, March 17th.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing medium effectively</td>
<td>“Leave feedback in the forum for your peers in the form of brief comments, questions, and insights.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing netiquette</td>
<td>“Collaboratively try to make sure that everybody receives an equal number of responses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making macro-level comments about course content</td>
<td>“The first unit – and this week in particular – is in the realm of first order thinking. Let your creativity run wild and put everything down on paper. The critical revisions will come later.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A clear and consistent course structure, as stated previously, is vital to student satisfaction and the success of online courses (Swan, 2001, 2002). Feedback from our current MATLR students consistently indicates that our devoted attention to pre-planning utilizing procedural scaffolds and other visual design principles, as well as our detailed approach to the organization and design of coursework is well-appreciated:

- "I like Moodle. Moodle is cool."
- "I liked the online module set up and the format of the modules. I never had problems finding anything."
- "Moodle was essential to this course... I didn’t have any problems with Moodle at any time during this course."
- "The Moodle site is great. It's very user-friendly and the layout is good."
- "Instructions were easy to follow. The clear timelines set are very helpful."
- "Everything is well organized and with our schedules (sometimes very busy), it's appreciated."
- "I'm impressed with the user-friendliness of the Moodle website. It is easy to navigate and post my assignments."
- "I like Moodle. It's fun."
"I also like the tech videos because they help me become more familiar with Moodle in general. I am fairly tech savvy, and learn a lot by playing around with programs myself, however, now I have a better idea of what I’m doing instead of a lot more trial and error."

"I really like the weekly overviews of assignments. Everything that is expected of us is clearly outlined and then detailed further with deadlines. It helps to keep things organized and make sure that tasks are completed on time."

“The weekly overview has specific instructions and deadlines that are easy to follow. I can plan how and when to complete the activities.”

In comparison with another low-residency program that utilizes Moodle, the MATLR program performed significantly better across the board in a survey of student satisfaction with the design and organization of the course. I believe that this is strongly to do with the consistency in and across courses that stems from the collaborative process between the MATLR faculty and staff and their open attitude and commitment to utilizing suggested standardized design principles. The comparator’s program’s courses did not have the liberty of a standardized set of design principles at the outset, (as the MATLR’s did) and so the courses developed without an emphasis towards consistency. Some of the results of the survey are in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who responded disagree or strongly disagree</th>
<th>MATLR</th>
<th>Comparator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moodle enables me to easily complete class assignments.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My instructors organized the coursework well in Moodle.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy to access the documents that instructors posted in Moodle.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The online course design facilitated my learning.</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who responded very difficult or difficult to use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessing course documents, lecture notes and resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who think following changes would make them more comfortable with Moodle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A standard design for Moodle course sites | 25% | 88%

I also surveyed the current MATLR students to measure the reported levels they experience of teaching, social, and cognitive presence in the program (see Appendix). The survey I used, and adapted slightly, is the Community of Inquiry survey that was developed by a team of CoI researchers (Arbaugh et. al, n.d.). There were two statements in the survey that related to design and organization to which students had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. The results are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students who indicated “strongly agree” or “agree”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/time frames for learning activities.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these research findings indicate that students are satisfied with the design and organization in the MATLR program and it has a positive affect on their learning. If faculty and staff continue to work collaboratively to implement technological scaffolding, consistency, clarity, and other standard design principles while carefully adapting the organization and design of coursework to student feedback and to the affordances and parameters of the online learning environment, there should continue to be this kind of positive feedback from students.

**Facilitating Discourse – Spotlight on Language Analysis for Lesson Planning**

The second element of teaching presence in the Community of Inquiry framework is facilitating discourse (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 68). Discussions in the MATLR program are facilitated both by the instructors and by the students. Instructors do not usually participate in
the discussions, but rather set them up with explicit instructions and then let the students play the role of facilitator within the discussion itself (by, for example, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement and encouraging and acknowledging each other’s comments). The role of the instructor in facilitating discourse is related to the expanded nature of asynchronous online discussions that allows for fewer exchanges than a face-to-face discussion, and is also related to the fact that interaction in itself is not sufficient to meet cognitive learning objectives. “Design had a significant impact on the nature of the interaction and whether students approached learning in a deep and meaningful manner. Structure and leadership were found to be crucial for online learners to take a deep and meaningful approach to learning” (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005, p. 3).

As demonstrated previously, asynchronous, text-based discussions online take a significant amount of time. First, students must process input and then compose a written post, which is usually the week’s first deliverable and acts to initiate the exchange among students. Then, they must take the time to read through and reflect upon their peers’ posts before responding in a meaningful way. Taking into account this expanded nature of time in written interactions, the discussions in the MATLR online courses are usually designed to require only one exchange – with posts on Sundays and responses on Tuesdays in the newest schedule. Some may observe that this can hardly be a discussion if there is only one post and one response, and this is indeed an issue that has come up in the MATLR program.

This issue is addressed in a number of ways. First, it should be noted that although the requirement is that there is only one round of posting and one round of responding each week, students will often continue responding to each other. The following is a screenshot from a discussion forum of the second MATLR cohort from the course Language Analysis for Lesson
Planning. Student names have been blacked out. In this assignment, students were required to post their lexicon teaching ideas and then respond to two of their peers. So, each thread should have two replies, but you can see that each thread actually contains more. Students tend to naturally continue the discussion and not leave conversations ‘dangling.’ This can be an indication of cognitive and social presence among students. Indicators within discussions of these presences is addressed in more detail in later sections, but from this simple example we can infer that the MATLR students in this forum have established strong enough relationships that they will continue to respond to each other even when it is not required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Started by</th>
<th>Replies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon Teaching Idea</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second, each weekly discussion is really a piece of a larger discussion in the course or module. Discussion topics from week to week are connected as students move through the
Experiential Learning Cycle and similarly through the practical inquiry model in the CoI framework. This is demonstrated more fully in the section on cognitive presence that will follow.

The third way that instructors ensure that a meaningful discussion occurs even though only one exchange is required is to give very explicit instructions on how students should post and how they should respond. In the first year of the program, some instructors commented on the lack of depth in some of the discussions. In a face-to-face discussion, instructors can facilitate in the moment to guide the students towards critical thinking and deep and meaningful learning. In an online course, the instructor can similarly give a discussion prompt, but then must also follow it up with instructions about how students should respond to each other’s posts in order for the discussion to be guided towards the learning objective. From the first to the second year of the MATLR program, we noticed a distinct increase in the depth of discussions in some courses simply by giving more explicit directions on how students should post and respond to each other. In this sense, the role of the instructor is crucial to effective online discussions. “If students are to reach a high level of critical thinking and knowledge construction, the interaction or discourse must be structured and cohesive” (Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Below are some examples of how the directions for posting and responding for the same assignment changed from the first version to the second version of a course, resulting in an observed increase among instructors in demonstrated higher-order thinking in the discussions. The examples below have been shortened from their original version, and do not include the irrelevant details (for this section), like the due dates or where to find the activities. These examples are also from the Language Analysis for Lesson Planning course.
Example 1

Learning Objective (same for year one and year two):

In this first week we will be capturing the various ways we think about, write and use lesson planning formats. We will be sharing a preferred process and format we actually use and providing commentary on this. Everyone will post their process and format and respond to two other persons’ posts.

Year One Directions for Post and Response:

1. Post a sample lesson plan that you have actually used (preferably recently), along with commentary that presents its desirable (to you) features and how you use it. This should be maximum two pages (about 800 words).

2. Respond to your two assigned peers’ posts. You may note something that intrigued or surprised you and/or would like to know more about. Feel free to engage your peers around other topics and themes.

Year Two Directions for Post and Response

1. Post a document that includes the following three things:

   - In a few paragraphs, or 200-400 words, succinctly capture whatever you do to get to the place where you’re ready to teach your class. This can be anything from brainstorming on the drive home, to batting ideas around with a peer, to checking lessons on your topic on the Internet or in ESL books or thinking about what you did in a previous lesson a similar topic.

   - Then, include whatever you would bring to class to help guide you through teaching the lesson. I am not talking about materials, but rather, whatever notes you use to implement your lesson. This would not necessarily be a formal lesson plan. If you would normally bring in a formal lesson plan, then post that. The length of this will vary according to whatever your format is.

   - Finally, in an additional paragraph or two, tell us to what degree you are satisfied with this kind of plan and this method of planning, or have doubts and might wish to change, expand, or modify the format/process.
Year Two cont.

2. Respond to two of your peers’ posts in 1⁄2 a page or about 200 words. As you read your peers’ posts be aware of the differences they present in comparison to your own preparation. Note something that intrigued or surprised you and/or would like to know more about. Feel free to engage your peers around other topics and themes as well.

(Silverman, 2013, 2014)

The instructor reflected critically after the first year and realized that the desired learning outcome for the assignment was not met. What changed in the second year was not the nature of the assignment itself, but rather the level of detail in the directions and also where the emphasis was placed. In the first year, the emphasis is on the students creating a lesson plan over a commentary. In the second year, the emphasis lies much more heavily with the commentary, which is where the instructor wanted the emphasis to be in the first place. The learning objective did not change from year one to year two, merely the way that the instructor guided the students along the path to attain the objective changed.

This example is also a demonstration of how instructors use word count to facilitate the discussions. Word counts help ensure that students are thorough in conveying their ideas but aren’t unmanageably verbose. Instructors have to consider how long it might take for peers to read and process each other’s posts. This is similar to how an instructor might facilitate a face-to-face discussion by not letting one student speak too long, or giving the students time limits for partner or small group discussions, e.g. giving each person 5 minutes to speak. As one student noted,

- “Knowing when to use word count for the assignment is important...the assignment had a word count that restricted my ability to express my thoughts but it helped me focus on what are the important ideas that I want to communicate.”
Example 2:

Here is another example, again from Language Analysis for Lesson Planning, of how the directions on how to post and respond changed drastically from year one to year two in order to facilitate deeper thinking among the students. Again, the learning objective was the same from year one to year two (to implement a practical application of a previous week’s work on a grammar topic).

### Year One Directions for Post and Response

1. Post a one to two page lesson plan on a particular aspect of modals. Consider your current or recent teaching context and develop a plan for (a) modal-based activity(ies). The focus possibilities are wide-ranging, anything from capturing a meaning category (like prohibition) to working on form issues, to expression functions (like uncertainty), to cross-language comparisons, to correction of common errors, to capturing the range of meanings for one modal. The idea is to create a lesson that speaks to your students. The plan might/may/could (but not should) include other goals besides the modal-based ones. The plan will include goals and outcomes, how you will know the degree to which students have met your goals (i.e. assessment), rationale for this focus given your context, and a paragraph of commentary/teacher thinking.

2. Please respond to the posts of your two assigned partners.

### Year Two Directions for Post and Response

1. Post a one to two page lesson/activity(ies) plan on a particular aspect of modals to the “Modal Lesson Plans” forum. The focus possibilities are wide-ranging: anything from a meaning category (like prohibition), to form issues, to expression of functions (like uncertainty), to cross- language comparisons, to correction of common errors, to the range of meanings for one modal. The idea is to create a lesson/activity that speaks to your students. The plan might/may/could (but not should) include other goals besides the modal-based ones.

Make sure the plan is one that is workable in your teaching context and is one that you could actually implement. The modal component that you are sharing with your peers need not be the plan for the entire lesson; it could be one or more activities within the larger plan.
Year Two cont.

This plan will include:

- goals and outcomes
- how you will know the degree to which students have met your goals (i.e. assessment)
- rationale for this focus given your context
- steps of the lesson plan/activity(ies) (what the students and teacher will actually do) and an approximate time length of each part
- a paragraph of commentary/teacher thinking about the plan

2. Please respond in 1/2 a page or about 200 words to the posts of two peers.

In your response, you may:

- Ask a clarification question if you have one.
- State how you might adapt the poster’s ideas to your own context.
- Share a discovery or insight that you gained from the poster’s writing.
- Ask the poster a question that pushes him or her to go deeper into the choices in the lesson.

(Silverman, 2013, 2014)

Note how the directions for how to post and respond in year one are very minimalist. In year two, the directions go into much more detail, resulting, as stated previously, in an increase in higher-level thinking in the discussions as reported by the instructor.

Indicators of and Student Feedback on Facilitating Discourse

The Community of Inquiry framework lists the following as indicators of facilitating discourse. The column to the right gives a specific example from a MATLR course – either a student contribution from a discussion or an instructor contribution from an overview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators (Garrison &amp; Anderson, 2003, p. 70)</th>
<th>Example (Instructor quotes from Silverman, 2014)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying areas of agreement/disagreement</td>
<td>From student: “Grammar books normally groups the modals all together, and I completely agree with you that that’s not the way to teach them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking to reach consensus/understanding</td>
<td>From student: “While I can’t answer your questions directly myself, I can at least share my experience.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions</td>
<td>From student: “Thanks for sharing your thoughts and expertise!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting climate for learning</td>
<td>From instructor: “As you think about responding to your peers, bear this in mind: Peer responses ideally benefit both the person responding and the peer to whom you are responding. For you, your close reading of peer posts hopefully pushes you into an area that you had not previously considered, or provides you with a different “take” or interpretation of material explored in the course. For your peer, your response awakens her/him to a new question, or perhaps a perspective not previously considered.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing in participants, prompting discussion</td>
<td>From student: “My questions was concerning what the exact rules are in conjugating sentences with modal verbs in the past tense. Any explanation would be appreciated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing the efficacy of the process</td>
<td>From instructor: “Before we begin our exploration of modal verbs, read my summary. From my comments, identify some recurring themes from the posts of your peers about the lesson planning process.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student feedback over the past two years of the MATLR program show how the facilitated discourse in the online courses affects their satisfaction and perceptions of learning:

- “The deliberate attempt to stimulate conversation between the students is working well and exposes me to new ideas. I’d probably be disinclined to interact so much in forums if it weren’t part of the weekly tasks.”

- “The regular task of writing posts on our current hypotheses as well as responding to classmates in a collaborative and understanding kind of way have certainly been crucial in consolidating all the knowledge that I had been exposed to back in the readings.”
• "I can always rely on the cohort to raise new questions and perspectives"

• "As always I LOVE reading what my cohorts write as it broadens my vision."

• "I am stimulated and inspired by the different responses the other students make. I actually print out their posts and a lot of their comments to keep for quick reference."

• The interaction between our classmates, so that we could share ideas, was really good. I liked being able to discuss how we learned these different skills and how that effects what is good teaching.

There were four statements that correlated with facilitating discourse in the CoI survey (see Appendix) that I sent out (Arbaugh et. al, n.d.). Students indicated their agreement or disagreement as follows below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students who indicated “strongly agree” or “agree”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor helped keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the CoI survey and feedback from students indicate that students are largely satisfied with the way that discussions are facilitated in the online courses of the MATLR program. Interactions between students are a core component of all of the MAT programs, and the MATLR program is no exception. Since a valued and dynamic discussion, as noted previously, is vital to the success of an online course and overall student satisfaction (Swan,
the ability of instructors to facilitate discourse to achieve learning objectives is extremely important. Instructors in the MATLR program should continue to use the methods illustrated above to ensure that discussions in their courses result in desired learning outcomes.

Direct Instruction

The third and final element of teaching presence is categorized in the CoI framework as direct instruction (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 70). This element includes those interventions that go beyond facilitation, and are those where content or feedback is given directly to guide students towards the desired learning outcome. This also includes the responsibility of responding to technical concerns, which is always done promptly either by the instructor, the educational technologist, or the program coordinator (my role). Because there is an emphasis in the MAT program on students as resources, students also play a role in direct instruction by giving each other feedback, sharing their own expertise, and sharing knowledge from outside sources. Students note consistently that feedback from their peers has a positive effect on their learning.

- "My learning is most helped by listening to the reflections and feedback of the rest of my classmates."
- "I gained new insights by reading the feedback from my peers."
- "I think that with our group, feedback is so valuable so I liked doing the lesson, seeing how it went, then changing it to incorporate everyone's ideas and then reworking the lesson. That was terrific."
- Strongest part of the course was “providing a setting to…receive quality feedback from cohort members."

The role of the instructor in direct instruction overlaps with facilitating discourse. The instructor focuses the discussions on specific issues by presenting content and questions, and
connects the weekly discussions to each other with synthesizing and summarizing feedback on
the previous week and an overview for the next week. Feedback from the instructor is vital in
connecting student work from week to week.

There are three ways that the instructors in the online courses present feedback, and the
decision of which type to choose is based on a number of factors:

1. Public group feedback – An instructor may choose to give feedback in the form of a
whole group response if the purpose is to summarize the discussion and connect
student ideas. Instructors may mention individuals directly in the group feedback, but
the group as a whole is addressed. Instructors must be aware that students will likely
notice any imbalances in mentioning students, for example if one or two students are
mentioned repeatedly as being particularly insightful, or if seven students are
mentioned and two are not, this can easily be interpreted as instructor bias, which
would decrease student satisfaction and potentially damage the cohesiveness of the
cohort.

2. Public individual feedback – Individual feedback that is public serves the purpose of
addressing individual issues and questions that the instructor may think is useful for
the entire group to hear. This feedback usually comes in the form of an instructor
responding directly to a student in a forum. Each student would receive a response in
this case. Again, students may notice any imbalances, so the instructor must be
careful to shape each piece of feedback similarly, and not be overly praising or
criticizing.
3. Private individual feedback – The instructor often responds to larger assignments – like an end-of-module reflective paper – with private individual feedback. When the feedback is more in depth and personalized, there is less reason why students would benefit from reading feedback to somebody else.

Students report appreciating receiving feedback in a variety of ways.

- “[The instructor] varied the style of feedback. At times it was general and directed at the whole group in one post, at other times it was individualized. Although I was excited to get the individualized feedback directly, I appreciated and benefited from both approaches.”

- “I liked how [the instructor] responded in different ways.”

- “I really liked the way [the instructor] varied the style of feedback... One week in particular, [the instructor] gave us more challenging and critical feedback and wondered if it should be kept private or made public. I think that the feedback could absolutely be made public, though maybe later in the course. By the end, I think we all trusted [the instructor] (and trusted each other) and valued [the instructor’s] input

- “By the way - [the instructor’s] individual feedback was posted for all to see – I think this was good!”

The medium the instructor uses to present feedback and content can also vary. The majority is text-based. Feedback can for example be presented to the students as a group in a PDF document posted on their Moodle site, or an individualized email response to each student, or a written forum response. Content is often in the form of articles and details in the written overviews. Instructors also have the choice to use other mediums to give direct instruction, i.e. audio or video (as mentioned previously on pp. 36 – 38). When using technology to present feedback or content, there has to be a pedagogical purpose for it. As mentioned early on,
instructors don’t use technology for technology’s sake (p. 23), but instead use it as a tool to further the learning objective. Some examples of how instructors use technology to enhance feedback and present content are below:

_Teaching the Four Skills Example:_

In Teaching the Four Skills, students are asked to analyze one of the instructor’s lesson plans and then email thoughtful questions to the instructor about it. I then interview the instructor on camera using the questions from the students as the basis for the conversation. This allows the students to listen to and see the instructor responding to their questions in a more free form way than if the responses were in writing. One benefit here of me being a former student of the program is that I have an understanding of the content and so can conduct a more natural interview than if the content were completely unfamiliar.

_English Applied Linguistics Example:_

In the English Applied Linguistics course, students are assigned a few grammar points to research in depth from the perspectives of a language teacher, a language student, and a linguist. The instructor provides additional perspectives by recording audio interviews with other MAT faculty members about grammar, and then presents these audio recordings to the students in the form of a podcast. The format of this serves a number of purposes. First, it models a task that students are asked to do in the course (create a podcast about a grammar point). Second, like the example above, it presents content in a more free form style than is usual to writing. Third, it gives students the opportunity to hear their instructors in discussion about a language point. This is something that the face-to-face students do not get a chance to witness. The podcast also
models collaboration among the MAT faculty and gives the students and other instructors a chance to reconnect with each other, adding to the cohesiveness of the program.

**Curriculum Design and Assessment Example:**

In Curriculum Design and Assessment, students conceptualize and design a course for their contexts by going through a step-by-step development process. This includes the writing of their beliefs as language teachers. As a response to the individual beliefs, the instructor gave a presentation by creating a screencast (a recording of the computer screen with audio). The presentation went through a number of PowerPoint slides while the instructor provided an audio explanation. The presentation was modeled in the style of Pecha Kucha, where there are 20 slides that last for 20 seconds each (PechaKucha 20x20). The presentation contained one slide chosen by the instructor for each student with an image that metaphorically represented a learning point from each of the student’s beliefs. This style of feedback synthesized and summarized the students’ learning while again modeling a technological activity that the students were given the option to use (presenting using a screencast).

These dynamic and creative methods of presenting content and feedback that are not text-based arguably enhance student engagement. As noted previously, students always appreciate video (p. something), and students have reported their appreciation for other non text-based forms of input as well. On a connected note, students also appreciate being given the opportunity to present their own content experimenting with different forms of technology.

- “I thought the screencast was a neat way to receive feedback. I like the visual to go with the narration, it was a good presentation summary of the week.”
- “It was helpful and interesting to have feedback in the form of a screencast.”
- *I love [the instructor’s] approach with having us experiment with different types of technology -- video, audio, etc. -- and also how creative [the instructor] was in [the instructor’s] activities and check ins.*

- *Strongest part of the course was “the richness in the instructor's feedback comments, with special credits to [the instructor’s] creativity in turning them into real and engaging narratives.*

- *Strongest part of the course was “The varied, creative products/tasks that we were assigned, e.g., podcasts, screencasts, videos, handouts, etc.”*

On a programmatic level (outside of interactions within the online courses), there are a few other very important ways that students interact with and receive direct instruction from instructors. First, each student in the MATLR program has a faculty advisor (who for the first two years of the program has been the program chair), and this relationship is the same as the advisor-student relationship face-to-face. In the MATLR program, a student can communicate asynchronously with the advisor anytime (for example via email), or can arrange a time for a synchronous meeting (for example, via Skype or phone). Second, students in the MATLR program earn six credits in a supervised Interim-Year Teaching Practicum, during which time they work closely with a supervisor (either an MAT faculty member or a professional in the field affiliated with the MAT program) on an individual basis. The IYTP supervisor will not only interact with the student online during the interim year between the two summer residencies, but will also visit the student’s context for a short face-to-face supervision period. This is a core component of the MATLR program, and has an obvious influence on student learning and satisfaction, but this will not be addressed in this paper as the focus is specifically on the online portion of the program.
Indicators of and Student Feedback on Direct Instruction

Overall, there is a very high level of interaction between the students and the instructors in the MATLR program. As mentioned previously, an instructor who interacts frequently and constructively with students is a strong predictor of success in online courses and student satisfaction (Swan, 2001, 2002).

Below is the table of indicators for direct instruction from the CoI framework. The middle column shows who performs the role, and the right hand column has specific examples from course feedback, overviews, or forums (as indicated).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators (Garrison &amp; Anderson, 2003, p. 71)</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Example (Instructor quotes from Iams, 2015)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present content/questions</td>
<td>Students and Instructors</td>
<td>From overview: “Read Chapter 5 of Graves. In this chapter you are presented with a number of different but feasible ways to formulate goals and objectives. After reviewing these frameworks, answer the following question and complete the short task below…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus the discussion on specific issues</td>
<td>Students and Instructors</td>
<td>From overview: “When you post your document to Moodle, include at least one question in the post about your goals and objectives that you would like your peers to address in their responses to you. Ask specific questions in order to focus your peers’ responses.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize the discussion</td>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td>From feedback: “A theme that quickly emerged in your reading responses was a collective feeling of intimidation in designing your own course.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm understanding through assessment and explanatory feedback</td>
<td>Students and Instructors</td>
<td>From feedback: Many of you discussed motivation as you problematized your contexts…There doesn’t seem to be a magical solution in motivating students to...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Responsible Parties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnose misconceptions</td>
<td>Instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inject knowledge from diverse sources, e.g. textbook, articles, Internet, personal experience (includes pointers to resources)</td>
<td>Students and Instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to technical concerns</td>
<td>Instructors, program coordinator, educational technologist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From feedback: “Several of you wrote about the overwhelming number of choices that need to be made...These blank course slates can truly be overwhelming....However, a blank slate may also be liberating for you as the teacher of the course, and spur the creative energy that course design thrives upon.”

From student in a forum: “Thinking about this story reminded me of a quote from a documentary film about the portrayal of women in the media (Miss Representation, 2011)....”

From overview: “Use Vocaroo to record yourself talking. Once you are finished, save the file to your computer so that you can upload it to Moodle later...If you need assistance with any of the technological aspects of this assignment, you can email me.”

Here is feedback from the students on how direct instruction played a role in their learning:

- “I really appreciate [the instructor's] prompt & personal feedback.”
- "The creating, executing, and receiving feedback of our own listening lesson plans was a great hands on approach to apply/test/experiment the methodology."
- “The collective feedback given by [the instructor] is very supportive in the way that [the instructor] highlights individual contributions, but it's also helpful in a wider sense, because it serves to summarize our group’s collective effort and therefore gives us all access to more ideas and insights”
- "The feedback [the instructor] gave us was extremely motivating and helpful."
“The weekly videos and the overviews are very well done and helpful for getting focused on the tasks for the week.

"[The instructor] gave very personal feedback and I feel I was part of [the instructor's] "live" class. It helps, I believe, that we met the summer before."

"Nice format which allowed for productive feedback from peers and from [instructor]."

In the CoI survey sent to the students (see Appendix), there were three statements related to students’ perceived levels of satisfaction with direct instruction. Results are below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students who indicated “strongly agree” or “agree”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the other elements of teaching presence, student feedback indicates that the students are largely satisfied with the level of direct instruction in the MATLR program. Instructors can continue to interact regularly with their students, encourage feedback among students, and design and deliver their feedback in meaningful and varying ways to maintain a high level of student satisfaction.

V. Social Presence and Cognitive Presence

All of the elements of teaching presence described above (design and organization, facilitating discourse, and direct instruction) facilitate the creation of a community of inquiry by establishing an environment where students are required to be and can be both socially and cognitively present. “Teaching presence is what the teacher does to create a community of
inquiry that includes both cognitive and social presence” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 66).

Social presence, as noted previously on p. 29, refers to the ability of people in a community of learners to connect with each other on a personal and emotional level. Cognitive presence, also defined on p. 29, refers to the intellectual processes that members in a community of learners engage in in collaborative constructivist learning.

**Social Presence**

As previously mentioned, social presence is vital to the establishment of a community of inquiry and is a predictor of student satisfaction in online courses (p. 16-17). The MAT program, with its emphasis on the learner as a whole person (see p.16), relationships, and collaborative cohort-based learning has always placed an importance on social presence within a community of learners, and the MATLR program is no exception.

Social presence in the MATLR program is intentionally established and sustained in many ways. Since the program begins online, the first online course of the program, Foundations, is where social presence and the initial creation of community takes place. The first activities in Foundations are like traditional face-to-face ‘ice-breaker’ activities in that their purpose is to give the students an opportunity to get to know each other. For example, the first online discussion that takes place in the program is a purely social activity – students are directed to post two truths and one lie about themselves, and their peers guess which are which. Students also add themselves to an online map, so they can see where they are located around the world. This particular activity is from Nicky Hockly and Lindsay Clandfield’s book *Teaching Online* (2010). Note that the instructor, who is a vital part of the community, also participates in these activities.
The first content that students examine in Foundations also has a social purpose, because it requires students to think metacognitively about themselves as members of a community of inquiry. They study and practice how to become active listeners (and explore how this plays out in text-based communication), and learn about the foundational principles of the MAT program which center around community building and experiential learning.

The intensive three-week face-to-face portions of the MATLR program have an undeniable role in strengthening social presence within the cohort. During the face-to-face portion, students work together intensively and collaboratively on their coursework, which is in part, because of the emphasis in the program on KASA and experiential learning, focused on the self. Students work in close-knit peer mentoring groups on learning goals and objectives and address issues of awareness and identity. For example, they take the first credit of the Intercultural Communication for Language Teachers course in the first summer, the stated goal of which is “to develop an increased understanding and awareness of oneself and others as cultural beings and to use that awareness to develop skills and knowledge for incorporating culture into one’s view of language teaching and learning” (Turpin, 2014). During their three weeks together face-to-face, students are also encouraged to establish their group identity by giving their cohort a name. The first students named their cohort “The Pioneers” because they were the first group of the new program. The second group of students named their cohort “Na Dóanna” (a Gaelic phrase that translates roughly to “the twos”) because they took a one-week Gaelic ‘shock-language’ course together during the summer as part of their coursework.

Not only does the structure of their coursework (collaborative constructivist), the program (cohort-based), and some of the content facilitate the building of student relationships, but the fact that students are living together during their three weeks face-to-face also has a huge
effect. Most students (90%) choose to live on the SIT campus during the three weeks, and so live in dorms in the same building and eat together in the dining hall. There are also a few social events that are organized for students when they are on campus, including a welcome dinner, a formal farewell banquet, and social events scheduled during the student-run Sandanona Conference on the Teaching and Learning of Languages, which is a one credit course that students earn in their second summer by organizing and presenting in the conference. In this environment, it is inevitable that students will build relationships with each other that will make it easier to sustain a sense of social presence online when they leave campus. Students often make references to their face-to-face experiences with each other in their posts later online, mentioning both cognitive and social moments they shared (like studying or drinking wine together), or mentioning how they miss each other or look forward to seeing each other again the following summer. Recently, a student referred to the summer session as “summer camp” with “nice people, [a] beautiful rural area, [and] fun new things.” Another student wrote:

- *"I feel the summer programs did a tremendous job of building a sense of community that will serve us very well as we get into our online coursework."*

The summer sessions have a clear influence on social presence within the MATLR community. It is one of the great benefits of having a blended program that students get a chance to strengthen their social presence and sense of community by meeting and working together face-to-face. There is also a possible benefit to having students meet online first, which students have mentioned in their feedback. Students have a lot of control over their online identities – they can choose which parts of themselves to share publicly in a way that isn’t possible face-to-face. The online environment is a safe space in this sense, where students don’t have to expose any more of themselves than they choose to at the beginning of their relationships.
• “It was really interesting to get to know one another without being in person and then to know one another in person. I think that that helped us to have a much deeper and less judgmental and more open appreciation of one another and ability to work together.”

• “When we first began doing this over the summer, it was a really new experience for me. I’ve never really interacted with people a lot online before and then met them, but I can see why people do it now. There’s so much more depth to a relationship like that, isn’t there? I’ve blogged a lot and have met people online, but I don’t think I’ve really met someone online and then met them in person before this program.”

Once students return to their online courses, social presence must be sustained, and this is facilitated in a number of ways. Many of these ways have already been mentioned in this IPP, particularly in the section on teaching presence.

1. The Learning Management System (LMS), Moodle, is designed and organized in a way to minimize potential learner frustration or anxiety, so technology is not a hindrance to relationship building.

2. Interaction is at the core of the online courses, and students are required to interact and respond to each other weekly.

3. Students work in varying groups, and so get a chance to interact in depth with individuals.

4. Because of the emphasis on experiential learning, students are often required to share personal experiences with each other, as they relate to course content (for example, how they learned to read or the challenges they’ve experienced in learning second languages).

Another way that the online portion of the MATLR program is designed to facilitate social presence among students is by giving them a space that is specifically set aside for social
interactions. Each cohort receives a designated Community Moodle site when their first online course (Foundations) ends, that is unrelated to any of the course Moodle sites. This is where program-wide information is posted, such as schedules and school policies. At the top of each cohort’s Community Moodle is a forum titled, “Teacher’s Lounge,” where students are invited to talk about anything that isn’t course related. Both cohorts have made use of this forum to interact socially. This has included sharing birth announcements, contact information, pictures of pets, classroom activities, holiday wishes, and announcements of conference presentations. These kinds of purely social interactions do pop up in the regular forums within the courses, but it is useful to provide the students with a designated space to have longer conversations about anything non-course related.

Social presence within the asynchronous, text-based discussion forums of the online MATLR courses can be measured using the Community of Inquiry framework. The CoI framework identifies three factors that contribute to the establishment or maintenance of social presence online: affective expression, open communication, and cohesive responses (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 50). Affective expression refers to the ability of online learners to interact emotionally with each other using behaviors possible to text-based communication, like humor, emoticons, and self-disclosure. Open communication is the ability of students to interact in a way that demonstrates that the environment is one where there is trust and acceptance. It is “built through a process of recognizing, complimenting, and responding to the contributions of others, thereby encouraging reflective participation and interaction” (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 52). Cohesive responses are those that demonstrate a sense of group cohesion and of belonging to a community, such as addressing each other by name, using salutations and closings, and using inclusive pronouns, e.g. “we” or “us” in reference to the group. Each of these three
elements have a number of indicators in the CoI framework.

In order to measure the level of social presence online at any given time in the MATLR program among any given cohort, I chose a discussion forum at random to analyze using the indicators provided by the CoI Framework. The forum I chose is from the course Second Language Acquisition. The assignment differed slightly from the traditional assignment where all students are required to post and all students are required to respond. In this forum, students with experience with child rearing in other countries were asked to be ‘panelists’ and share their knowledge on how children in different cultures are raised in reference to first language acquisition. Other students, the ‘responders,’ were directed to respond to at least three panelists with “comments/questions on things that you found particularly important and intriguing” and “offer parallels or difference with what you have observed in the U.S.” The panelists are encouraged but not required to respond to the questions of the responders or post any responses to other panelists (Todeva, 2014). Not requiring the panelists to do anything else but post had a noticeable affect on their social presence within this forum, as I will demonstrate. In the table below I list the categories, indicators, and definitions of the elements within social presence (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 51). Then I note the number of occurrences I found in the transcript and at least one example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th># of occurrences</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Expression of emotions</td>
<td>Conventional or unconventional expressions of emotion, includes repetitious punctuation, conspicuous capitalization, emoticons</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>😊 !!! “Give your wife a big hug for me (I hope I meet her sometime).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of humor</td>
<td>Teasing, cajoling, irony, understatements, sarcasm</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Whenever dads start feeling a bit lonely, they only need to bring their babies along for a stroll in the mall, and all of a sudden magic will happen: girls will begin popping out everywhere!”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disclosure</td>
<td>Presents details of life outside of class or expresses vulnerability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I’ve been struggling to keep my head above water”; “I flew to NYC yesterday”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open communication</td>
<td>Continuing a thread Using reply feature of software, rather than starting a new thread</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Responding to each other’s posts is required as part of the assignment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes from others’ messages</td>
<td>Using software features to quote others’ entire message or cutting and pasting selections of other’s messages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Your point…is very interesting, ‘First, their writing system …..’”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring explicitly to others’ messages</td>
<td>Direct references to contents of others’ posts</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>“X suggests that this is due to the…” ; “You mention that…” ; “Your comments support this”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>Students ask questions of other students or the moderator</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>“Is hiring nannies a newer phenomenon in Brazil, or has that always been a part of the culture?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complimenting, expressing appreciation</td>
<td>Complimenting others or contents of others’ messages</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>“I really appreciate you posting” ; “I found your description fascinating” ; “Thank you for such a rich description of…”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing agreement</td>
<td>Expressing agreement with others or content of others’ messages</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I concur”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesive</td>
<td>Vocatives</td>
<td>Addressing or referring to participants by name</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hi [x]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addresses or refers to the group using inclusive pronouns</td>
<td>Addresses the group as we, us, our, group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Hi everyone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phatics, salutations</td>
<td>Communication that serves a purely social function; greetings, closures</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>“Best to you”; “Have a good weekend”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before going into an analysis of the data gathered, I want to note that this kind of content analysis is useful because it demonstrates what students *actually* do versus what they report they do (as in their feedback), but the analysis itself is problematic due to a number of factors. First, I am not trained or experienced in content analysis. Also, because the indicators are often difficult to define, much of the coding and analysis is subjective. Other researchers looking at the same transcript would likely come up with different results. Because the CoI framework is designed in part to facilitate transcript analysis, there are studies that look at these and similar issues (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole, Kappelman, 2006). For now, this transcript analysis can at least give an idea of how the framework might be put to use in order to measure social presence in the online courses of the MATLR program.

This discussion took place among twelve students (one was completely absent from the forum). There were a total of 35 posts in the discussion. There were seven panelists and five responders.

From this transcript analysis I noted the following:

- Five of the seven panelists *only* posted their initial post, and didn’t respond to any
questions from their peers. Of those five, only one had any social presence indicators in his/her post. The two panelists who did respond to their peers had a high number of social indicators per post (5.6 and 6.88). Remember that it was only suggested that panelists respond to questions, and not required.

  o This would indicate that students who demonstrate more social presence are more likely to continue a conversation even when not required to. It also is useful to note that if instructors want peers to respond to each other’s questions, they should require that it be done, instead of merely suggesting it.

- Of the five responders, all had social presence indicators in their posts. The total numbers of social presence indicators per post were 10.67, 9.75, 6.67, 6, and 3.5. Clearly, the questioners had higher levels of social presence in their posts. This can probably be attributed to the nature of the task, which required students to use the reply button and respond to individuals, and made it more likely that they would use greetings, closures, and their peers’ names. Also, the task required the students to respond about things that they found “particularly important or intriguing” and so responders were likely to express agreement or complement the panelists’ posts. Nevertheless, there is one possible takeaway:

  o The responder that had the fewest number of social indicators per post is currently one of two students who recently did not pass a class in the program due to lack of participation. The second of the two students who has failed (also due to lack of participation) is the one who did not participate in the activity at all. (Note that this course was not the one that the students failed). This indicates that measuring individual levels of social presence at any given time may help predict future
student participation and success.

Again, this transcript analysis is meant to serve as an example of how this table of indicators could be a useful tool to help instructors be aware of what they might look for that would indicate social presence within their online classrooms. This is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the observed levels of social presence within the online courses of the MATLR program.

I measured the reported levels of social presence within the online MATLR courses using questions from the CoI survey (see Appendix). There were a number of statements that related to levels of social presence. The results of the survey are in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students who indicated “strongly agree” or “agree”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the program.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students report for the most part that they experience a high level of social presence in the program. The two statements that score relatively low on the survey indicate that students don’t agree with the very generalized phrase that online communication is “an excellent medium for social interaction.” I speculate that the low score on this statement shouldn’t be particularly concerning because the wording of the phrase easily allows for disagreement (i.e. ‘excellent’ is a much stronger descriptor than ‘comfortable’ which is used in the other statements). Of greater concern is that 22% of students did not feel that online discussions helped them to develop a sense of collaboration. Without interviewing the students who responded in this way (which is impossible because the survey was anonymous), I can only guess that this may be related to the fact that while students are often co-constructing knowledge through interacting in the forums, they are very rarely doing any collaborative assignments, i.e. working together to create a joint project.

Direct feedback from students is another way to gauge levels of social presence in the courses:

- “Being able to see and read everyone’s posts has also helped me feel a sense of being part of a community.”

- In response to the question “How did your course of study at SIT exceed your expectations? Students responded, ”the relationships formed” ; ”the highlight for me has been learning to work in community” ; ”the closeness of the relationships I’ve made”

Social presence is vital to a successful community of inquiry and to the establishment of cognitive presence. “Employing constructivist principles, computer-mediated communication environments can be designed to provide multiple perspectives and real world examples, encourage reflection, and support collaborative construction of knowledge through social negotiation. However, such learning environments may promote collaborative learning which
involves the active construction of knowledge through social negotiation, only if participants can relate to one another, share a sense of community and a common goal. The development of social presence and a sense of an online community becomes key to promoting collaborative learning and knowledge building” (Gunawardena, 1995, p. 164). Instructors in the MAT program have always recognized the importance of social presence in learning, and so have successfully been able to create and sustain social presence among learners in a program that takes place primarily online.

Cognitive Presence

The goal of an educational experience is learning, and while social presence is a vital element in a community of inquiry, the objective of such a community is essentially a cognitive one. As mentioned previously, interaction between students is not enough to ensure cognitive presence (p. 66). The interactions must be structured and systematic to achieve defined learning outcomes. Again, much of how cognitive presence is facilitated in the MATLR program was addressed in previous sections, particularly in the section on teaching presence:

1. Instructors present content and questions.
2. Instructors give explicit instructions for how students should post and respond in discussions.
3. Instructors guide the learning with weekly feedback.
4. Instructors design coursework that moves students through the Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC).
Because collaborative constructivism is at the core of the Community of Inquiry framework, the practical inquiry model that is used to understand how learners achieve cognitive presence is based on a balance of reflection and discourse. The practical inquiry model of the CoI framework is very similar to the ELC that is so familiar to the MAT program: learners move through four phases of a cycle that is centered on experience. The cycle begins with a triggering event. In the MATLR courses the trigger usually comes in the form of a direct instruction from the instructor, for example to connect ideas in an article to one’s own teaching. Learners then move into the exploration phase, which is where they brainstorm on their own and with their community of inquiry to search for information and explanations. In the MATLR courses this takes place publicly in the forums, but also behind the scenes as the students think through the problem on their own. The next step in the practical inquiry cycle is integration, where learners think critically through reflection and discourse about how all the ideas can be connected. The final step in the cycle is resolution, where learners construct meaningful solutions or practical applications.

(Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 59)
The CoI framework provides a table of indicators for measuring cognitive presence within a text-based discussion similar to the way social presence is measured, but this kind of transcript analysis is, as mentioned previously in reference to social presence, problematic. First, assessing individual thought processes is inherently challenging and is easily affected by the subjective assessment of the observer. Second, in using transcript analysis to measure learners’ progressions through the practical inquiry cycle, “observers view only that subset of cognitive presence that the participants choose to make visible,” (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, p. 13). There is no way to observe what is going on ‘behind the scenes’ in the learners’ thought processes.

In determining how to usefully implement the table of indicators provided by the CoI framework (Garrison & Anderson, 2003, p. 61) to measure cognitive presence in the online courses of the MATLR program, I took into consideration that students move through the practical inquiry cycle over expanded periods of time, and not just within one week. So, it would be difficult to find indicators at every phase of the practical inquiry model if I were to just look at a single discussion. Unlike measuring social presence, it would be difficult to measure cognitive presence at any single moment of time in the online courses. Instead, in order to get at least one observed measurement of cognitive presence in the program, I analyzed the transcripts of one student over an entire module of the Teaching the Four Skills course, looking for evidence of the different phases of the practical inquiry cycle. What I found is displayed in the table below. I found three ‘threads’ of thought that demonstrated the student moving through the cycle. These are indicated as examples A, B, and C below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Examples A (red), B (blue) and C (green)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Triggering event | Evocative (Inductive) | Recognize problem Puzzlement | A) “I would like to see more of my students’ own voices in their writing. My students as a whole are primarily lower level writers, and it has been a challenge to put their “thinking words” on paper.”

“The students in my class have a difficult time putting their thoughts on paper, and I find this to be a challenge to slow their thinking down and focus on their “thinking words.”

B) “[State] curriculum writers adapted the Lucy Calkins narrative writing lessons and integrated organizers and diagrams to organize students’ thinking and prepare them to write about their memories, or small moments. This was a painful process. The students were unable to write about a small moment that happened to them because they were prepped and modeled for in an excessive amount, which in turn made them lose their own author’s voice.”

C) “I have been hesitant to begin peer responses so far this year due to the majority of my class being very beginner writers. I had started with peer checking; looking for periods and capitalization.”

| Exploration | Inquisitive (divergent) | Divergence Information exchange Suggestions Brain-storming Intuitive leaps | A) “I personally liked the Riverwriting activity… I found that for myself, this became a stream of consciousness and I realized just how scattered my thoughts are.”

“I really like the use and purpose of double-journaling as Heyden implements throughout his lessons. I’m curious to see how effective this form of journaling will be for [my students].”

B) “After I read the assigned reading for this week, I Googled the curriculum and found this link” I looked at an exemplar of what our students’ writing should look like. I immediately emailed my team, because all of us at one point or another have wondered about the writing experience of the small moment as truly being an assignment that was appropriate for the students to write given their writing capabilities, including what our expectation should be within their writing abilities.”
“I also like how Calkins compared her writing as a personal treasure. I think that is such a valuable connection to make when teaching writing. I think it places more value on the individual’s moment, creating a more authentic writing experience. This was my complaint with how my school system implemented the small moment lesson. They robbed the students of embracing the moment as an important memory that they could illustrate through their writing. Instead, we made *Idea Boards* and organizers to prepare them for their writing process. Why in the world would we need an “Idea Board” to brainstorm a personal experience? It made writing more of a chore and less of a reflective experience. I could go on, and on about this.”

C) “I reflected on Williams’ list of pros and cons to peer responses.”

“I liked how [colleague] implemented a chance for peer response, in creating a framework for them to focus. I may try a similar approach to their next peer response activity.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Tentative (convergent)</th>
<th>Convergence Synthesis Solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A) “[Riverwriting] was very eye-opening, and something I think my students would enjoy trying. This would reinforce how they put their "thinking words" on paper—this is something they truly struggle with.”

“I think I’m going to try implementing more double-entry journaling as their independent work, where my students can find information in the text and then write their reaction to the information they are presented with.”

B) “I also want to revisit the small moment assignment and reteach the whole unit with fidelity for Calkins’ ideals in writing instruction. Students do not need idea boards and organizers to brainstorm memories; they already have them, “Writing does not begin with deskwork but with lifework.” (Calkins, 1994) Children love to tell stories about what they did over the weekend, or even had for dinner last night. While I believe in organizing writing, I think it would be better to structure paragraph writing and organization rather than thinking of ten small moments and choosing one to write about.”

"I..."
The student moved through the cycle of practical inquiry, reaching the final “resolution” phase for one of the threads (A), but not for threads B or C. Comments in the third phase indicate that it is a strong possibility that the student will reach this phase in the future, outside of the coursework.

This is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of the levels of cognitive presence within the online courses of the MATLR program, but rather is an introduction to a model that instructors can be aware of as a resource. Using the practical inquiry cycle as a reference is one potential way that instructors could analyze their own transcripts to assess whether students are cognitively present.

Below are the reported levels of cognitive presence from the students from the CoI survey (see Appendix).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of students who indicated “strongly agree” or “agree”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this program.</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, students report experiencing a high level of cognitive presence in the program. The lowest scoring statement is in reference to an event that would occur as part of the “resolution” phase. This is in line with what I noticed in the transcript analysis – namely that there is less evidence of resolution than of other phases of the cycle. This potential gap in opportunities for students to apply their ideas in practice as part of the coursework is something that instructors should be aware of. Especially in a program that should be taking advantage of the situated nature of learning, perhaps more opportunities for resolution should be designed. On the other hand, there is a large amount of student feedback that indicates that students do put what they’ve learned in the courses into practice. One possible explanation of this disparity between what is reported and what is observed is that the students who agreed with the statements above were perhaps more forthcoming in giving feedback. At any rate, it would be useful to hear from the 22% of students who disagreed.

- "The creating, executing, and receiving feedback of our own listening lesson plans was a great hands-on approach to apply/test/experiment the methodology."
- "I think that with our group, feedback is so valuable so I liked doing the lesson, seeing how it went, then changing it to incorporate everyone's ideas and then reworking the lesson. That was terrific."

### Students' Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on course content and discussions helped me understand fundamental concepts in this program.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge created in this program.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied in practice.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can apply the knowledge created in this course to my work or other non-class related activities.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• "My courses allowed and encouraged me to consider different approaches that may not be mainstream in the public school setting, and challenged me to apply some of the principles that really stuck with me. I appreciated this because it helps me to further reflect on how I can improve my lessons and incorporate principles in teaching that I find to be true."

• "The lesson plan is a great idea to put what we’ve looked at into practice."

• "The lesson plan was great to do and I can't wait to try it out in class."

• "I've already experimented with several of the ideas in my classes."

• "I have a lot to go on to attempt a similar project with students in my classes...I learn best by experiencing. So, teaching as I am studying is a great way for me to learn."

• Strongest part of the course was “great flow from academic to practical, personal use."

• “I have learned so much from other’s reflections and this has spurred me to try many new things I might not have otherwise tried."

• Strongest part of the course was “providing a setting to not only learn about the course material, but to personalize it, explore & experiment with it”

• “I enjoy the work...I also think that it often fit seamlessly into my regular planning, so I could kill two birds with one stone.”

• “The material is so rich and interesting and useful...it relates to all I am doing in my teaching and that is great.”

• “I loved how the assignments were actually things I would be doing and using during the week.”

• “Writing the teaching idea for the lesson structure and getting the feedback from others allow me to make adjustments and then the following week applying it.”

• "I was able to apply what I understood about the theories to writing a lesson. I like having the opportunity to see others' lesson plans and the feedback between the group was very useful. I have not yet taught my lesson, but I plan to post what I can about it when it is completed in the upcoming week."

• "It gave me the opportunity to...really think about incorporating the theory of teaching listening into my lesson planning process and how the practical application of the strategies could work for my students."
The awareness raising activities were very important for me. The course as a whole very successfully prepared us for further thinking on the skills as we think about how to integrate them into lessons and course plans in our upcoming courses.

I was able to implement a lot of the ideas and concepts from the course into my lessons, and my students enjoyed them.

My research indicates that there is a demonstrated high level of cognitive presence in the MATLR program, but a much more in depth observational study of how cognitive presence manifests itself in the online courses could give a clearer idea of where learning might be further enhanced. Based on critical reflection and student feedback after the first year, instructors were able to reportedly enhance cognitive presence, for example by giving more detailed directions on how to post and respond (see pp. 68 - 72) to encourage more in depth discussions. Continued systematic assessment based on critical reflection and student feedback should help ensure that learning goals of courses are achieved.

**Participation**

It is important to note the damaging effect that no presence at all or delayed presence online can have on the community of inquiry. In a face-to-face course, it is possible for students to be physically present, but perhaps not socially or cognitively present. Imagine the student who sits in the discussion circle but spends the entire class looking out the window, or imagine a less obvious example of a student who may look like he or she is paying attention but never gives any verbal indication that he or she is cognitively present. The instructor can assess the student’s engagement based on nonverbal cues (e.g. eye contact, nodding), but in a text-based discussion, social or cognitive presence can only be demonstrated through the action of writing. In an online course, it is impossible for a student to be present at all without being cognitively or socially
present. In this way, absence is much more nakedly apparent online. In a face-to-face course, someone who is not cognitively present may simply not speak, but his or her cognitive ‘absence’ is not glaringly apparent, especially in a large class. In an online discussion forum, instructors and peers can notice immediately who has and who has not responded or posted, especially when the activity requires small group interaction.

Because there is such a heavy emphasis on interaction among learners in the online MATLR courses, when students do not participate or participate late, it affects the learning of their peers and the cohesiveness of the community.

- "Not having people post on time was a challenge for me...When people don't post, you don't get feedback, nor do you get others' perspectives. I understand that people's lives are busy, but I'm sure that I didn't get as much out of it as I could have."

- "When people post late, it is hard to make a connection and share with that person."

- In response to what has hindered your learning: “Peers not posting by the deadlines.”

- "Only one of the two people in my group responded...I'm frustrated by the way my lesson was processed by others."

Instructors are already well aware of the negative effects that student delays and absences online can have, and so in response to their experiences in and to student feedback from the first year of the program, the MATLR program as a whole worked on having a clearer and more explicit attendance policy that is consistent across courses. The importance of timeliness in the courses should continue to be emphasized to the students. Because all of the courses in the MAT programs are pass/no pass, it is difficult to implement a strict attendance policy without the willingness to fail students, so instructors must maintain an attitude of working with the individual students to make sure none ‘fall through the cracks,’ (as the MAT program has always done), while committing to failing students when appropriate. As a way to guide instructor
decisions on passing or not passing students, the MATLR program is currently working on a pointing system that will help measure levels of participation in courses. Once determined, this should also be made very explicit and clear to students, and should be strictly and consistently adhered to across courses.

Also of concern is when students are socially present, but not cognitively present. I have already mentioned that an observed lack of social presence could be an indicator of future levels of student participation (p. 92), but what about an observed lack of cognitive presence? If a student is posting regularly, but the instructor observes that the responses are not at a level desired for the discourse, instructors need to intervene directly with private feedback (so as not to be publicly critical), and work with the student to help attain an appropriate level of cognitive presence.

VI. Overall Student Satisfaction with the MATLR Program

I took two quantitative measurements for overall student satisfaction with the program. The first asked students to rate the following statement on a scale of one to four (with one being strongly disagree, and four being strongly disagree): “Overall, I am satisfied with the program.” 100% of the students strongly agreed (83%) or agreed (17%).

I also assessed the program with a survey question that is used mostly by businesses around the world as a prediction of growth. The question measures the likelihood that customers will recommend a product or a service, and results in a number called a “Net Promoter Score” (NPS) (Reichheld, 2003). Respondents rate the product or service on a scale of one to ten. Ratings of nine or ten are “promoters;” ratings of seven or eight are “passives;” and ratings of zero to six are “detractors.” The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters (so the potential range is -100 to 100). In my survey to the
MATLR students, the NPS question was worded, “How likely is it that you would recommend this program to a friend or colleague?” (see Appendix). Out of eighteen respondents, fourteen were promoters, three were passives, and one was a detractor, resulting in an NPS of 72. The NPS tool is not used regularly in higher education, but I did find some benchmarks from 2014 among the technology sector for comparison, listed below. Note that these examples are not related to the MATLR program in any way, but are shared here as an indication of how an NPS score of 72 is actually quite high.

Highest scores in technology sector (for tablets, laptops, and smartphones):

- Apple iPad - 66
- Apple laptop - 72
- Apple iPhone – 67

Highest scores in online services (for entertainment and shopping)

- Pandora – 54
- Amazon.com – 64

(PR Newswire, 2014)

These benchmarks indicate that the MATLR program’s NPS score of 72 is a strong predictor of growth. That along with the survey result that 100% of the students are satisfied with the program indicates that the MATLR program is here to stay, and is moving in the right direction.

**VII. Conclusions**

The MAT program is grounded in educational principles that provide it with a strong foundation for its new low-residency context: experiential learning, reflective practice, and collaboration are all key tools to building online courses in higher education that can achieve desired learning objectives. The research on the first two years of the MATLR program indicates
that the online courses and the program as a whole is being implemented successfully when measured in terms of student satisfaction and perceived learning. The Community of Inquiry framework provides a method of understanding the factors that contribute to this success – namely an instructor who can design and facilitate an environment where students can be cognitively engaged in the learning experience and socially invested in the learning community.

Before the MATLR program was launched, SMAT student Katrina Baran wrote her IPP on the transition to the new low-residency format, sharing her thoughts on what a successful MATLR program might look like. She concluded with the following six recommendations that she deemed vital for the success of the program.

1. Careful pre-planning must be undertaken.
2. Instructors must receive training in online facilitation and mediation.
3. Instructors must receive technical and design support.
4. Learners must receive orientation.
5. Current face-to-face courses must be evaluated in terms of how to be transitioned online.
6. Consistent standards must be used to ensure a cohesive program.

(Baran, 2013, p. 61)

As I’ve demonstrated in this IPP, the faculty and the staff of the MATLR program have implemented all of these recommendations with one exception: while the instructors are constantly engaged in critical reflection on their teaching, and thus always working to expand their skills, knowledge, and awareness of online teaching, there is currently little direct training
in online facilitation and mediation for the instructors. This could be a focus of professional development for the MAT faculty as the program moves forward.

Other recommendations for the program that have been addressed in this IPP are summarized and synthesized in the following list:

- Instructors should continue to be critically reflective and systematically assess their courses to make adjustments from year to year. There is a danger in implementing an online course where the majority of input is text-based and recorded: materials can easily be reused. Instructors need to make sure not to get stuck in a cycle of repeating their courses just because they are functioning well. “Once teachers internalize the routines of online teaching, the roles they are expected to take and the methods they are to use, their ability to cope with that is guaranteed and with it the need to grow as an online teacher fades. The result is replication of the same class material and content each time it is taught, without the adoption of new methods and technologies into the learning context” (Baran et. al, 2011, p. 432).

- The program should continue to employ a dedicated instructional designer to ensure standard and consistent design principles across courses. Instructors should be aware of these design principles and develop their skills and knowledge around implementing them independently if necessary in their own courses.

- Instructors should be aware of the potential benefits of implementing a variety of technological tools in their courses (including opportunities for synchronous communication among students), but never use technology simply for technology’s sake. “Technology cannot be treated as a knowledge based unrelated and separate from knowledge about teaching tasks and context – it is not only about what technology can
do, but also, and perhaps more importantly, what technology can do for them as teachers” (Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007, as cited in Baran et. al, 2011, p. 433).

- Instructors should be aware of the importance of social presence as a vital element in a community of inquiry and as a predictor of student satisfaction. They can use the indicators provided by the CoI framework to measure levels of social presence and potentially predict future student participation levels in order to intervene when necessary. They can continue to design and implement course practices that encourage social presence.

In this IPP, I demonstrated use of the CoI framework to measure levels of social and cognitive presence in the online courses, but much more in-depth research could be conducted. For example, I looked at levels of social presence at one moment in time among one cohort of students in the program, but it would be interesting to study how social presence levels change over time in the program. The benefit of researching a program that is based in written discussion is that there is a wealth of retrievable data. Continued systematic study into the MATLR program would not only benefit the program but also the e-learning community. With their experience in reflective practice, the faculty members of the MAT program are in an ideal position to contribute to advances in the field of e-learning pedagogy with ongoing critical reflection into this developing program.
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Appendix

MAT Low-Residency Program Student Survey
(rating questions under #6 adapted from CoI survey [Arbaugh et.al])

1. Which cohort are you a member of?

2. How likely is it that you would recommend this program to a friend or colleague? (scale of 1 [not at all likely] to 10 [extremely likely])

3. Have you ever taken online courses before? If so, how did those courses differ from the courses in this program?

4. How many hours do you estimate you spend per week in an average week on your coursework?

5. Do you feel this is a sufficient amount of time to complete your coursework? If your answer is no, please explain in general terms why not (e.g. too heavy a coursework load; personal issues; too busy at work). Also, if there is anything else that has hindered your ability to participate as fully as you like in this program, please share that here.

6. Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the MAT Low Res Program. Note that many of the questions ask about instructors and courses. I realize that you may have varying opinions for different instructors and courses, but I’m just looking for a general answer to get your overall impression of the program as a whole. (scale of 1 [strongly disagree] to 4 [strongly agree])

   a. The instructors provided clear instructions on how to participate in the course learning activities
   b. The instructors clearly communicated important due dates/time frames for learning activities.
   c. The instructors were helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.
   d. The instructors helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.
   e. The instructors helped keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.
   f. Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.
   g. The instructors helped to focus the discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.
   h. The instructors provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses.
   i. The instructors provided feedback in a timely fashion.
j. Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the program.
k. I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants.
il. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.
m. I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium.
n. I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions.
o. I felt comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.
p. I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants.
q. Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration.
r. I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this course.
s. Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.
t. Reflection on course content and discussions helped me to understand fundamental concepts in this program.
u. I can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge created in this program.
v. I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied in practice.
w. I can apply the knowledge created in this program to my work or other non-course related activities.
x. Overall, I am satisfied with the program.
Thanks to The Pioneers and Na Dóanna!