**Assignment 3 – Qualitative data analysis**

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# Introduction

The purpose of this assignment is to utilize qualitative research methods to analyze and to generate results and findings while demonstrating an understanding of qualitative research. Qualitative research as stated by Neuman (2006) is based on qualitative data which is defined as, “Qualitative data are in the form of text, written words, phrases, or symbols describing or representing people, actions, and events in social life” (p.457). Typically qualitative researchers tend to be descriptive and open to deep understandings by identifying patterns or relationships; they blend together concepts and ideas and that often provide more than one meaning. Neuman (2006) cites, “the researches goal is to organize specific details into a coherent picture, model, or set of interlocked concepts” (p.459). This paper includes an overview of the qualitative research project assignment; details outlining the method used to perform the research; a coding table; a category definitions table; a code and category frequency table; discussion regarding codes and categories used in the analysis; a section of the journal that exemplifies the thought processes while performing the research; and lastly a commentary reviewing the qualitative research project results and expereince.

# Overview

To practice qualitative research methods a transcription of a series of meetings that address the following three questions were provided:

1. What are the main concepts in distance education?
2. What are the program and instructional design considerations for distance education?
3. What is the relationship between technology and distance education?

These questions were delivered to a focus group that included four individuals: two male students and two female students. The focus group met to discuss these three questions and share their views. The transcripts of these meetings were generated and the analysis of the data commenced. Subsequent to the initial reading of the transcripts additional readings followed and codes were assigned to each response. To begin the qualitative data analysis a method of open coding was utilized. This first step of open coding is described by Neuman (2006) as, “a first coding of qualitative data in which a researcher examines the data to condense them into preliminary analytic categories or codes” (p.461). This method is used to reduce large amounts of raw data into small managable chunks. Once the coding process was completed the next step involved re-reading the transcript while appling axail code. The axial coding method is defined by Neuman (2006) as, “A second step of coding of qualitative data in which a researcher organizes the codes, links them, and discovers key analytic categories” (p.462). This step stimulated thinking which established connections and links, and provoked the consideration of conditions, interactions, and concepts. Once codes were added into the transcript and themes and connections were identified a third reading was completed where selective coding was applied. Selective coding is described by Neuman (2006) as, “a last stage in coding qualitative data in which a researcher examines previous codes to identify and select data that will support the conceptual coding categories that were developed” (p.464). During the selective coding process key themes and ideas were reorgainzd and categorized based on codes and journal notes. While working though the methods of qualitative research such as open coding, axial coding, and selective coding; a journal was continually updated. This journal is a common tool that is used for analytic memo writing while performing the reserarch. It contains entries such as thoughts, patterns, questions, and decisions of every step while reviewing the research. These notes were then used later to provide a insight and stimiulate conderations in intrepreting the data. Once the coding process was completed three tables were created to characterize and summarize the research. Table 1 is a coding table that contains the following information: labels, defines, flag, qualification and example. Table 2 is a category definitions table that clearly defines each code that is used in the research project. Table 3, the final table, contains codes, categories and frequencies of each code’s occurance within the transcript. The final step of this assignment was to compile the results and findings into a report that summarizes the results of the qualitative research project and demonstrates the understanding and usage of qualitative research methods.

# Quantitative Analysis Results

The initial stage of quantitative analysis is coding. The researcher begins to generate and assignment codes that explain student’s responses and statements. Basit (2003) explains the purpose of coding as, “What coding does, above all, is to allow the researcher to communicate and connect with the data to facilitate the comprehension of the emerging phenomena and to generate theory grounded in the data” (p.152). Below is Table 1 – Codes Table, it that contains the following information: codes established while analyzing the transcription, a code definition, a “flag” description of how to recognize the code in the data, any exclusion or qualification, and an example of the code. Codes were selected after reading each sentence within the transcript, once the sentence was read and analyzed reference was made to the assignment’s list of codes. This is a comprehensive list that contains codes relevant to the transcription and adult distance education. During this process the selection of codes were pre-determined rather than forced onto the data.

*Table .1 Codes Table*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Code | Definition | Flag | Qualifications | Example |
| Adult Learning | learning activities designed for those who are mature in, social roles, or self-perception context | Adults in education | Only adults learning in education | F2 - “Like taking into consideration our past experiences and ages” |
| Autonomous Learning | Self-directed, those who take responsibility for their learning. | Independent learning, identifying areas in need of improvement | Adult learners identifying their learning needs and characteristics | F2 - “The really big thing that computer conferencing has done for me, is enabled me to hone in on my writing skills-or think-writing skills.” |
| Change | To make somebody or something different | Where someone realizes something different needs to be done. | Life changes specific to education. | F2 - “It seems that every day we are reading about how things are changing in the educational field.” |
| Choice | A decision to do so something. | Choosing to retrain or refocus | Choices to continue education | F1 - “There was no question that I had to rethink about what I had to go back to school to upgrade or retrain.” |
| Collaborative Interactivity | Working together to achieve a goal. | Where students communicate and work together | A group of adult learners working in distance education. | F2 - “Allowing us to work together.” |
| Community of learners | Groups of students learning the same subject | Classmates | A group of adult learners taking a course for the same reason and are experiencing similar issues. | F1 - “We are connected via our computers we are given the opportunity to learn together and build on each other’s strengths.” |
| Empowerment | A sense of confidence or self-esteem | Confidently contributing in the online learning environment. | Adult learners who are comfortable with their learning and progress. | M1 - “I want to express myself meaningfully.” |
| Flexible | Able to change according to circumstances | Students are able to work, raise children, and complete their course on their own schedule | Adult learners that need to adjust their schedule to balance life and education. | F1 - “I don’t always have the freedom to get to my course work during the day, so it usually is when the kids are in bed.” |
| Independence | Ability to work on one’s own. | Independently learning, being on your own | Adult learners able to work on their own. | F1 - “It is under my direction.” |
| Instructional design | The development of instructional materials and activities using learning and instructional theory. | A online environment designed specifically for adult learning | Courses delivered in an online environment | F2 - “The way our courses are put together along with the kinds of communications technologies used in our distance education program.” |
| Learner-centered | Focus on individual learners | Program geared toward the learner | Programs designed adult for online learning environment (distance education) | M2 - “This way we can get the benefit of solving our own problems which makes learning more relevant and real.” |
| Lifelong learning | Building skills and knowledge throughout a lifetime. | Continual learning | Adults continuing with their education | M2 - “For our parents it was about learning one thing, having one job, Now it is about learning many things, at different times in your life, to prepare you for, potentially, many jobs.” |
| Motivation | A reason or incentive to do something. | Internal drive | Adults wanting to succeed | F2 - “Once you get a taste of doing well, you feel you can do anything.” |
| New challenges | Opportunities | Realizing that programs use technology and new ways to learning | Any new technology or way of learning. Moving away from F2F learning | F2 - “it seems that we are talking about meeting the challenges of a new era-new needs, new expectations, new surroundings and contexts.” |
| Paradigm shift | A change in the way we think | Rethink, refocus | The realization that there are alternative ways of learning. | M2 - “Yeah when we were younger, it seemed that all there was, was traditional forms of schooling—I mean face to face stuff… or that was all we were aware of.” |
| Planning | Arranging to do something. | Adult learners arranging to experience DE and arranging their schedule to complete tasks on time. | Adults having to plan and adapting to everyday life and education | F2 - “It requires organization of your time, and deciding what you need to do first, second, etc.” |
| Support | Provide help and encouragement | Students and teachers encouraging and helping each other. | Encouragement within the online environment (DE). | M1 - “It is like we support each other academically.” |
| Systems | The media that delivers electronic courses to DE students. | Reference to technology | Learning Management Systems | M2 -“Technologies used in our program.” |

After coding was embedded within the transcript, relevant code categories were developed and defined. The purpose of providing a definition for each category is to clarify the researcher’s intentions and perception of the category’s meaning. These categories were then used to group the data codes based on themes, concepts, or other similarities. Each category is defined in Table 2 – Categories Definitions Table as show below.

## *Table 2. Categories Definitions Table*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Category | Definition |
| Settings/context  *Code:* Adult learning | Relevant conditions or constraints. Those involved are considered adult learners. Adult learners have unique settings such as: a full-time job, children, responsibilities and life experiences. These types of characteristics set the stage for many considerations. |
| Situation  *Codes:* Independence,Motivation*,* Support*,*Empowerment*,* Choice | Set of circumstances. Independent learning, being motivated, having support and making choices are all part of a situation that evolves in adult learning. |
| Perspectives  *Codes:* Change, Paradigm shift, Lifelong Learning, Autonomous Learning | A personal view. Adults identifies that a change is necessary as a result in paradigm shift; that lifelong learning is important and that one needs to self-directed for effective learning. Each of these characteristics is often perspectives of adults that are aware of change and obtain the willingness to take control of their learning. |
| Process  *Codes:*Planning, New challenges | A set of procedures or steps. The process of identifying and accepting new challenges and planning around them to incorporate them into their life. |
| Relationship and structure  *Codes:*Community of learners, Empowerment, Flexible, Collaborative Interactivity, Learner-centered | An association or organizing. Many relationships and structures are evident. Community of learners and collaborative interactivity are relationships that form from structures that are learner centered and that is flexible. |
| Methods  *Codes:* Systems, Instructional design | A delivery system based on the needs and preferences of adult learners with an educational purpose |

Once the categories were defined, an extensive examination of the code and category was performed. This examination identified relationships, correlations, and links between various codes and categories. The codes and category definitions table were very useful guides to determine which code belonged in which category. After lengthy analysis of meanings, intentions, and perceptions along with referencing journal notes, each code was placed within a relevant category. The frequency of occurrence of each code was then tallied and recorded in Table 3 - Frequencies Table as show on the next page.

*Table 3. Frequencies Table*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Code | Frequency |
| Settings/context |  |  |
|  | Adult Learning | 9 |
| Situation |  |  |
|  | Independence | 11 |
|  | Motivation | 4 |
|  | Support | 9 |
|  | Choice | 5 |
|  | Empowerment | 3 |
| Perspectives |  |  |
|  | Change | 5 |
|  | Paradigms | 3 |
|  | Lifelong Learning | 4 |
|  | Autonomous Learning | 3 |
| Process |  |  |
|  | Planning | 4 |
|  | New challenges | 6 |
| Relationship and Structure |  |  |
|  | Community of learners | 7 |
|  | Flexible | 9 |
|  | Collaborative Interactivity | 17 |
|  | Learner-centered | 5 |
| Methods |  |  |
|  | Systems | 15 |
|  | Instructional design | 19 |

# Journal

While performing qualitative research an important and critical activity in data analysis is to create and maintain a research journal, documenting questions, thoughts, and decisions. Below is a small portion of the journal created during this research.

Day 1

1. Read assignment instructions and meeting 1 to become familiar with context and participants and develop a sense of direction. Although the courseware suggests to treat the manuscript as one. I need to focus on one meeting is not so overwhelming and keeps my thoughts to one question at a time. – Especially since this is the first time with this concept.
2. Read over the Open coding section and Analytic Memo writing of textbook
3. Watched a few you tube videos on quantitative coding
4. Reviewed the instructions for coding the transcript
5. Read over only meeting 1 transcript again.
   1. read a response, add my own code then refer to the table of example codes to determine if my code matches any of the examples
   2. Words that come to mind but might not be effective coding is: Change, shift, evolve, norm acceptance, idea and beliefs, knowledge perspective, knowledge
   3. Typed in words that came to mind and highlighted them in yellow

Enjoyed coding the first section, feeling motivated to jump into the next session. Not sure if my process is correct. I seem to be thinking of many codes for some sentences. At this point I am sort seem to be brainstorming by inserting codes into the existing text. (very time consuming)

Meeting one and Meeting two – group is all in agreement with topic

Still going moving on to the last section, I initially thought I would focus on just the first meeting and have the figured out; however, I am enjoying this process and the dialog provided. Onward I go ☺.

Don’t understand M1 statement in Meeting 3 M1: I’ve had both--great and crummy F2F and on-line learning experiences. It isn’t so much dependent on the medium, as much as it is the person working it and the materials used to supplement it. (Revisit)

Losing my steam. Will continue with fresh eyes and mind tomorrow.

Canucks lost, now I can focus more on my school work, glad hockey is over.

Day 2

Fresh start, read over memo writing and coding sections from textbook. Read over meeting one:

Meeting One Notes:

Students are in agreement and can identify with the change and shift in education. They recognize the evolution of DE and that DE is changing. Employment is also changing and there is a focus lifelong learning, people are no longer staying at one job for a lifetime. The student’s fee that people need to retrain, and face challenges, education needs to be flexible. Interesting to know how these students came about entering into DE. Was their other motivation behind this decision? It seems that these students have been taking a few DE classes for they can identify effective instruction and classrooms. Teaching adults required a special method of teaching. Instruction is changing communication is important, media, deliver of instruction – instructional design. Students identify that adult learners have special characteristics such as past experiences that contribute to knowledge, what impact does this have on the community of learners? Important for collaboration, contributions for DE learning. DE offers independence yet students are still connected, are able to share, learn and work as a team, are teams created by choice? DE is flexible, isolation is a concern, and students recognize the course design is important to avoid isolation Have they experienced isolation. Students see the instructor’s role as supportive and provide guidance. Interesting to know what the success rate is, how these students are doing academically.

# Commentary

## Findings

Evidence from quantitative research performed clearly indicates that distance education signifies a paradigm shift amoung those who seek change and lifelong learning. Adult learners identify the change and the new challenges that distance education offers. This study also uncovered substantial findings that adult learners choose distance education for its flexibility and the ability to work independently and collaboratively while applying autonomous learning. Adult learner’s view that collaborative interaction is extremely important in distance education, they express that these relationships contribute to the learner feeling supported, motivated, and empowered. Adult learners who are involved in distance education emphasis that effective systems and appropriate technology, along with instructional design that is learner centered, is critical to student success.

## Reflection

Completing this paper has identified key aspects of qualitative research and has signified the unique difference between quantitative and qualitative research as Glenn (2010) cites,

One way of differentiating qualitative research from quantitative research is that largely qualitative research is exploratory (i.e., hypothesis-generating), while quantitative research is more focused and aims to test hypotheses. However, it may be argued that each reflects a particular discourse; neither being definitively more conclusive or ‘true’ than the other. In addition, qualitative research speaks to content validity (p. 96).

The qualitative method of research is absolutely fascinating. Converting text, written words, and phrases into measurable data allows for content validity. The development of patterns, links, meanings, interwoven ideas and thoughts were intriguing, stimulating and interesting. The process of defining the categories and linking them to the codes embedded in the transcript was profound. Initially, it seemed that many codes and categories were similar and hard to group. I realized that when I turned my attention to the definitions that I created in the first two tables the task was not so erroneous for it refocused my thoughts. As outlined in many course readings qualitative research is very time consuming and I can easily identify with that concepts; however, after completing this assignment there was a great sense of accomplishment and clear understanding of qualitative research.

# Bibliography

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Neuman, W. L. (2006). *Social Reserach Methods.* Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

# Coded Transcripts

**Meeting 1: Main concepts in distance education**

R: Welcome and thank you all for coming today. You have been asked to participate in these discussion sessions about issues in distance education in order to raise an understanding about the kinds of things you deal with while learning in this educational environment. Did you all get a chance to preview the issues we will address over the next three sessions?

F1: Uh huh.

M2: You mean we were supposed to read those handouts? (snicker)

R: No matter. Let me refresh your memory. Today’s topic is about concepts in distance education. Now, when I say "concepts”--that we will be discussing "concepts”--what does that bring to mind?

M1: Hmm. This is tougher than I thought. Give me a minute.

F2: Well, when I think about concepts, I guess, I think about the ideas—and things—that form the basis of knowing stuff.

R: Can you give us an example?

F2: Well…..like philosophies and theories…those things are ideas and beliefs all strung together to help us make sense of our world.

R: Can you give us an example relevant to our area of study?

**<Change> < Paradigm shift>**

F2: It seems that everyday we are reading about how things are changing in the educational field—what was once accepted as being the ‘norm’ is now challenged by new ideas—or concepts as you call them—and practices. Like an evolution of ideas--or something like that. Does that make sense?

**</Change> </ Paradigm shift>**

**<Change> <Collaborative Interactivity> < Independence> < New challenges>**

M2: Yeah, it does. When we were younger, it seemed that all there was, was traditional forms of schooling—I mean face to face stuff…or that is all we were aware of. Now there is distance learning—and not just correspondence—but programs that use technologies that support learning independently and together.

**</Change> </Collaborative Interactivity> < /Independence> < /New challenges>**

**< Paradigm shift>**

F1: I guess that is what people mean when they refer to paradigm shifting.

**< /Paradigm shift>**

**<Change> < New challenges> <Lifelong learning>**

M1: Right. All this information age stuff we hear about everyday has affected the way we approach learning, communicate, live our lives. Man, when I think about my Dad and his generation, and how things have changed since they went to University and got jobs, it’s wild. You worked your whole life in one career and never thought—or had to think—about doing something else. Now, that is almost impossible.

**</Change>, < /New challenges>, </Lifelong learning>**

**<Change> < Choice> < New challenges> <Planning>**

F1: I know what you mean. When my company was downsizing, and I got caught in the crunch, I had to rethink about what I was going to do with my life and career. Refocus, I guess. So here I am a middle age woman with a family, whose job was considered redundant. There was no question that I had to go back to school to upgrade or retrain, but with a young family, traditional schools were out. Distance education was my white knight.

**</Change> < /Choice> </ New challenges> </Planning>**

F2: I think you guys have hit on a couple of ‘concepts’ there (chuckles).

R: Can you explain what you mean?

**< New challenges> <Lifelong learning>< Empowerment> < Choice>**

F2: Well, for one, it seems we are talking about meeting the challenges of a new era—new needs, new expectations, new surroundings and contexts. And it also seems to be about personal and professional advancement, and how we have to prepare educationally for it. Distance education is great for that—helping us to meet our educational needs without leaving our jobs and homes.

**< /New challenges> </Lifelong learning>< /Empowerment> < /Choice>**

F1: In my case, it’s just my home. (laughter)

**</Change> </Collaborative Interactivity> </ Independence> </ New challenges>**

**<Change> <Lifelong learning> < Planning>**

M2: Good points. It makes you think about how learning is situated in our lives these days. For our parents it was about learning one thing, having one job. Now it is about learning many things, at different times in your life, to prepare you for, potentially, many jobs. Like an educational continuum. Is that such a phrase—educational continuum? Anyway.

**</Change> </Lifelong learning> < /Planning>**

**<Adult Learning> <Lifelong learning>**

F2: For sure. But it doesn’t end there. It isn’t only about continuing to learn it is also about how we learn—and how we are taught to learn as adults in our distance education program.

**</Adult Learning> </Lifelong learning>**

F1: Look out—I think this is another paradigm shifting! (laughter)

R: That’s good. F2, can you clarify what you mean by that?

**<Paradigm shift> <Instructional design>**

F2: I will if I can. Lets see……well…it seems that there is a method to the madness the way our course materials are put together along with the kinds of communications technologies used in our distance education program.

**</Paradigm shift> </Instructional design>**

M1: Method to the madness?

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Adult learning> <Community of learners>**

F2: Yeah. I mean, umm, those things are put into place for a reason. Like, taking into consideration our past experiences and ages for example. I really don’t find too much spoon feeding goin’ on in our CMC’s, we are given credit for our past learning—or knowledge--and build on it from there with help from our materials, classmates and professors.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Adult learning> </Community of learners>**

**<Independence>**

F1: True. I feel that the focus is on me, but not necessarily the entire onus.

**</ Independence>**

M2: I’m not following you here.

**< Independence> <Community of learners> <Collaborative Interactivity>**

F1: Sorry. What I mean to say is, we may be separated from each other, but because we are connected via our computers we are given the opportunity to learn together and build on each other’s strengths—knowledge strengths, that is. I don’t know about you, but I think a lot about my ideas before expressing them in CMC.

**< /Independence> </Community of learners> </Collaborative Interactivity>**

**<Community of Learners> <Collaborative Interactivity> <Support> <Empowerment>**

M1: I do too. I just don’t want to say something for the sake of it—like getting marks for contributing—I want to express myself meaningfully. That way if it is something that someone else can use, and elaborate on it more, then, hopefully, we all come away with a new perspective. It’s like we support each other academically. And mentally, too.

**</Community of Learners> </Collaborative Interactivity> </Support> </Empowerment>**

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Support> <Systems> <Flexible>**

F2: Funny, it’s like a paradox. Computer conferencing offers maximum accessibility and independence, while allowing us to work together.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Support> </Systems> </Flexible>**

**<Flexible> < Independence>**

R: You mean, independence without the feeling of isolation?

**</Flexible> < /Independence>**

**<Support>**

F2: That works. Oh, and we can’t forget about the input from our professors.

**</Support>**

**< Independence>**

M2: Usually this is true. They tend to be helpful in clarifying and helping us to navigate our coursework. Oh, now, I know what you mean about the onus not being entirely on you.

**</ Independence>**

F1: Ya right—focus but not onus: independence without isolation. What is this, a focus group on clichés? (laughter)

R: It wasn’t meant to be—but they sounded good, right? That was a great first session. I want to thank you for raising these ideas and concepts about distance education. See you tomorrow, and thanks for your participation.

**Meeting 2: Program and instructional design considerations for distance education**

R: Welcome back. Today’s issue for discussion is design considerations in DE. Everybody ready?

M1: No confusion here today. This issue is a little more tangible then the one yesterday.

R: One you can sink you teeth into? Speaking of that, I brought doughnuts. Have some.

F2: Thanks (reaching for doughnut). Really, this issue is not unrelated to what we discussed yesterday.

R: How so?

F2: Ummm…well, we talked about being in separate places…together—and to do this the courses have to be designed properly in order for this to work. Sorry, I didn’t mean so start things off so early with another cliché.

**<Systems> < Instructional design> < Flexible> < Learner-Centered>**

M2: No problemo. I can relate to what you are saying. I have always felt that the way courses are set up and technology used in our program were well suited for one another. For instance, the study guide informs us about what we can expect from the course and gives us clues about what things we should consider reading and when. And offers little activities too. The CMC’s are asynchronous so we can join in when and where we like. Too, the readings are often tied to what we discuss on the CMC’s—although not restricted to just those topics. I just feel the whole thing is really pretty flexible. Good doughnut.

**</Systems> </ Instructional design> < /Flexible> </ Learner-Centered>**

**<Adult learning> <Instructional Design> <Flexible> < Independence>**

M1: Is this the whole focus and onus thing again? (laughter). I tend to agree. Really when you think about it though, most of us are in the same boat—mature learners, with job and family commitments—so these kinds of programs have to be designed with these things in mind. I want to be able to be as unrestricted as possible—to do things on my own time.

**</Adult learning> </Instructional Design> </Flexible> </ Independence>**

**<Adult learning> <Flexible> < Independence>**

F1: I hear ya. With young kids at home, I don’t always have the freedom to get to my course work during the day, so it usually is when the kids are in bed. But you know this isn’t so bad. I do feel that I can manage this very well—that it is under my direction, in a manner of speaking.

**</Adult learning> </Flexible> </ Independence>**

**<Choice> <Adult Learning>**

F2: Although it all sounds really easy to do, managing our lives and schedules takes some bit of work. This mode of study isn’t for everyone.

**</Choice> </Adult Learning>**

R: What kinds of examples can you give us, F2?

**<Flexible> <Motivation> < Independence> < Choice> <Planning>**

F2: For instance, if you were the kind of person who just left things to the last minute, I don’t think you would do very well studying at a distance. It requires organization of your time, and deciding what you need to do first, second, etc., etc. Oh, and I can’t forget that you need a heck of a lot of internal drive—revisited on a daily basis. There are times when I am feeling too tired to want to read, or start an assignment, but I keep reminding myself of where I want to be and how I am going to get there. And I also remember that since I cannot attend traditional kinds of classes right now, I have to take advantage of the ways open to me. This keeps me going.

**</Flexible> </Motivation> </Independence> </Choice> </Planning>**

R: Tell us how this relates to what we are discussing today, F2?

**<Systems>, <Adult learning>, <Motivation>, <Instructional design>**

F2: Gosh. Well, M1 covered it fairly well already, I guess. But I think our program designers takes these things into consideration…our characteristics as learners, I mean how we tend to approach learning and all…as well as the kinds of technology used in our program. Together they create something that helps to promote student success. And that’s what it is all about, learner success, you know. Once you’ve had a taste of doing well, you feel you can do anything. Geeze, am I getting off track here?

**</Systems>, </Adult learning>, </Motivation>, </Instructional design>**

R: No, at all. Good points.

**<Support> < Independence> <Collaborative Interactivity> <Instructional design>** **<Community of Learners>**

M2: Although what you’ve said is true, there are other things worthy of consideration. Like how we as learners connect together, on-line. The reading and assignments and stuff we can all do on our own, but it is important for me to have some input from others—students and instructors. And I get this in our communications on-line. I like to give and get information and help, whenever. If it weren’t for this connection through the computer conferences, I would find it hard to stick with it, because reading alone all the time can get—well, tedious.

**</Support> < /Independence> </Collaborative Interactivity> </Instructional design> <Community of Learners>**

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Learner-centered> <Instructional design>, <Support> <Systems> <Collaborative Interactivity>**

F1: Yes, it’s true. I do miss the discussions that take place in a F2F environment, but certainly the type of technology used here, does promote and support this. Sometimes I even feel that these asynchronous discussions are more productive then if we were F2F, because we can take our time in reading and responding. Or print off helpful responses to keep for later. And get an equal opportunity to contribute. This you cannot do in a F2F environment. And besides, we don’t always work alone on our assignments, we have had opportunities to work in groups. I never really though about it before, but I guess this too is a design consideration.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Learner-centered> </Instructional design>, </Support> </Systems> </Collaborative Interactivity>**

**<Flexible> <Autonomous learning> <Adult learning> <Independence> <Learner-centered> < Choice>**

M2: I’ll jump in here, because of that reference to assignments. I like the fact that we are frequently able to chose our own issues for assignments. We may be given the parameters in which to work, but can feature something that is based in our realities—like a problem from work, or whatever. This way we can get the benefit of solving our own problems which makes learning more relevant and real. And maybe even get to apply these solutions in reality, to boot.

**</Flexible> </Autonomous learning> </Adult learning> </Independence> </Learner-centered> </Choice>**

R: Speaking of support, what about design considerations and the role of the Professor or instructor or tutor?

M1: Were we speaking of support? I’m not sure if you planned to phrase it like that, or if it just came out that way.

R: It’s a secret. But what do you think I meant?

**<Support> <Autonomous learning> <Learner-centered> < Independence>**

M1: Well, you said "speaking of student support”…and that is how I view our instructors, as support systems. But that is not meant in a derogatory way, but rather it ties into this whole discussion of the focus begin on the student, but not the entire onus. I don’t view instructors as add on’s to the program, but somehow as if they part of the overall course design. Are you following me here? For instance, they write the course objectives so they understand what we need to do get to the end point and what may be good ways of getting there. They help to build on what we know. This way we are not left entirely to our own auspices. I don’t believe we could get through courses as well as we do now, strictly on our own—at least I couldn’t anyway. We may be learning independent of a traditional classroom, but this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have traditional kinds of input—like dialogue, direction and those kinds of things.

**</Support> </Autonomous learning> </Learner-centered> </Independence>**

**<Instructional design> <Support> <Collaborative Interactivity> <Systems>**

F2: Wow. You said a lot there. I guess design considerations are more important than you think. The whole kit-and-caboodle. What I get out of this is that a well put together learning package is only one part of the equation, you need to have the other things in place to make it fly.

**</Instructional design> </Support> </Collaborative Interactivity> </Systems>**

R: What, for instance?

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Planning> <Instructional design> <Learner-centered>**

F2: Like people and tools. Well thought out plans and strategies. User-friendly stuff. Means to successful ends, you know.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Planning> </Instructional design> </Learner-centered>**

R: Why don’t we end on that note? Great discussion, thanks. Until tomorrow, then.

**Meeting 3: Technology and distance education**

R: Well, this is our last session. Thank you for once again, joining me. Today’s topic is technology and DE. I think you will see how it ties into what we have already discussed.

**<Systems> <Motivation> <Instructional design> < New challenges>**

F1: Sure. I know that when I started in this DE program, I was wondering how this computer conferencing technology was going to work out for me. But, although the learning curve was a little steep in the beginning, I am very comfortable with the medium. So the notion that it could be fun and useful at the same time, is true!

**</Systems> </Motivation> </Instructional design> </New challenges>**

**<Systems>**

F2: Well, the present conferencing system that is used is far superior to its predecessor—obviously I’m an old timer in this program—I’m glad AU changed. However, the premise remains the same—asynchronous, messaging board, etc., etc.

**</Systems>**

**<Systems>**

M2: Ditto. In my opinion, how easy the tool is to use is as important as what it can do. Who wants to spend half their time on-line wrestling with something that is supposed to make communicating "easier”? It should be like it isn’t even there at all.

**</Systems>**

**<Systems>** **<Instructional design>**

M1: I took a course at work, and they used video-conferencing, and I found it a bit difficult to get used to. Seeing the person you were talking to was kinda neat, but there was a bit of a time delay with the speaking--which was a bit annoying. Anyway, for me I don’t feel the need to see

**</Systems>** **</Instructional design>**

**<Systems>** **<Instructional design>**

F1: Well, as I mentioned before, I do miss the F2F debates that take place in a traditional learning environment. There is an energy present, which is completely lost in computer conferencing. Sure you can have a really intellectual discussion on-line with your classmates and professor, but you don’t get the same "vibes” as you do when you are there—live.

**</Systems>** **</Instructional design>**

**<Systems>** **<Instructional design>**

M1: I’ve had both--great and crummy F2F and on-line learning experiences. It isn’t so much dependent on the medium, as much as it is the person working it and the materials used to supplement it.

**</Systems>** **</Instructional design>**

R: Ah ha! Could this be design considerations—revisited?

**<Instructional design>**

M2: Yes, but that was yesterdays topic and yesterday there were doughnuts. (laughter) Just serious now, I think M1’s point is well taken. Courses have to be created properly so that they work to take advantage of the technologies strengths. And users strengths too. The other thing is, I don’t want any technology to be "in my face” either. All easiness, please.

**</Instructional design>**

**<Instructional design>**

F2: Right. The tools are the means, and all eyes should be on the student and what is to be learned. The other thing about design considerations and computer conferencing technology is that not everything that is learned via this method will be designed in and accounted for. In other words, there can be much learning that is serendipitous.

**</Instructional design>**

**<Adult learning> <Instructional design>**

F1: Other than computer conferencing in this program, the only other technology I’ve used for learning purposes in this program--has been videotapes. Not sophisticated, but useful none-the-less. I listened to the tapes as I read the book—it was an enjoyable supplement for me. But then again, I’m the one who doesn’t mind the lecture thing.

**</Adult learning> </Instructional design>**

**<Autonomous learning>**

F2: The one really big thing that computer conferencing has done for me, is enabled me to hone in on my writing skills—or think-writing skills. Hmmm, is this connected to critical thinking?

**</Autonomous learning>**

R: You tell me.

**<Flexible>**

M1: Well, of all the things that really work for me using conferencing technology, is the turn around time. You can post a question to your professor anytime day or night and within 24 hours you have an answer. That is invaluable to me.

**</Flexible>**

M2: You mean, ‘usually’ within 24 hours. (laughter)

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Community of Learners>**

F1: I like the feeling that I am not necessarily alone. Separated, together--I think someone coined yesterday. Believe it or not, I have made friends with some of my virtual classmates. We can chat about stuff—usually about the course—and it feels like one long coffee break. Nice to know others are in the same boat as you.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Community of Learners>**

**<Collaborative Interactivity> <Community of Learners>**

M2: Along the same lines, is the ability to network. I’ve met and related to classmates who are doing the same kind of thing I do, but in another part of the country. We can compare notes and it is cool.

**</Collaborative Interactivity> </Community of Learners>**

**<Instructional design>** **<Systems>**

M1: But I must admit, there are some drawbacks to this kind of technology. I mean when you are wholly reliant on your computer as a means of connecting to your learning world, not to mention just the word processing functions of ones computer—when it breaks down it can leave you high and dry. I know I’ve lived this experience. Luckily, my instructor understood and I wasn’t penalized for not contributing for 10 days. Imagine not attending a lecture for two weeks in a traditional university at a graduate level? Luckily, there was enough reading, etc, to keep me busy during that time, so I didn’t feel like I fell behind.

**</Instructional design>**  **</Systems>**

**<Instructional design>** **<Systems>** **<Flexible>**

M2: Yeah. Do you remember that ice storm that hit the east a few years ago? That reeked havoc with some of our eastern classmates. No heat, no water, no telephone and no Internet. That dependency is kinda scary when you think of it. They must have received some pretty flexible assignment deadlines. (chuckle)

**</Instructional design> </Systems>** **</Flexible>**

**<Instructional design>** **<Systems>**,

F2: Unlike F1, my kids are teenagers. They need the computer for schoolwork and also want to use it for recreation. So, in my house it can’t always get to my computer when I need it. Juggling schedules is a challenge, and I usually get the late shift. Sure, I have a computer at work, but I cannot rely on checking in on our course conferences during my lunch hour.

**</Instructional design>** **</Systems>**,

**<Systems> <New Challenges>**

F1: Hmmm. When I decided to return to school, it was obvious that we needed to get a new, more sophisticated computer to handle the demands of this program. And although it was just a matter of time before we replaced old Nellie, with me losing my income and having to pay for a premium for distance education courses, it was a bit of a financial hardship. Then, when we got our new system, I have to learn how to work all the new doo-dads as well as navigate the conference software. But I think I already mentioned this. Anyway.

**</Systems> </New Challenges>**

**<Adult Learning> <Instructional design>**

M2: Although I don’t feel this way, there is always the issue that some of our classmates don’t actually like to participate in CMC and do so just because it is required. Some don’t feel comfortable because they feel as though they don’t have anything "intellectual” to contribute. Or they think it is too chatty or time consuming. Or dislike "writing” all the time. Oh, well, viva la differences. Personally, I like the relative anonymity and the "equalizing” effects of CMC. I guess you get out of it what you put in.

**</Adult Learning> </Instructional design>**

**<Systems>**

R: So I guess you are saying, despite the advantages of this technology, there will always be those who don’t care for it.

**</Systems>**

**<Support> <Motivation> <Collaborative Interactivity> <Empowerment> <Community of Learners>**

F2: Sure. I know you’ve said that some students don’t seem to like the CMC’s, but I know I’ve learned a lot from my fellow classmates on-line. Even just simple statements can mean a lot--without being conscious of it, you can help a person by just being supportive. When you are supported and you feel that others care, you are more motivated to continue. That my theory anyway, and I’m sticking to it.

**</Support> </Motivation> </Collaborative Interactivity> </Empowerment> </Community of Learners>**

R: It’s a pretty good hypothesis. Maybe it’s time to wrap it up. I think we’ve covered some interesting topics and raised some great points. Thanks for participating, ya’ll. Good-bye!