

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: VIRTUALIZING THE TEACHER: THE LIVED
EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING WITHIN TECHNOLOGY

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This research seeks to heighten pedagogical understanding of the lived experience of teachers who teach online using computer technology. Philosophically based and grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology, it explores the question: What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology? Using van Manen's *Researching Lived Experience* (2003) as guide, the researcher seeks to discover existential themes revealed through hermeneutic methodology, a pedagogically grounded research approach to human science research and writing with a focus on lived experience. This research is rendered phenomenological through philosophical texts by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Gaston Bachelard, Edward Casey, and Don Ihde.

For a period of eight months in the fall of 2006 and spring of 2007, six teachers from different continents engaged in multiple, in-depth conversations with the researcher about their experiences as online teachers in multiple online programs. The conversations were text-based and took place in an online forum characterized as a discussion board. The conversational text, additional personal reflections, related literature, and philosophic writings intertwine to create a textual interpretation of this experience. Using the metaphor of knots, the researcher explores themes of presence in distance, presence in text, interface presence, teaching identity, the virtual classroom as place, and the role of imagination and flow in unraveling some of the paradoxes of teaching online.

The research makes recommendations for preparing teachers for online teaching and for the development of policies relating to course design, interface design, and teaching practices. Pedagogical insights include the effects of teaching with technology on several aspects of online teaching: marginalization of contingent online teachers, technical interests related to virtual curricula, online text, teaching memory, and signature and interface pedagogies. A phenomenological rendering of Moore's (2007) theory of transactional distance explores teacher presence in distance.

The researcher offers suggestions for future phenomenological research to explore the meaning of the experiences of contingent teachers, the "best practices" approach to teacher preparation programs, standardized course development models, and media/mediated and non-media/non-mediated teaching identities.

VIRTUALIZING THE TEACHER:
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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing granddaughters, whose beautiful little faces remind me constantly why I have persevered in this research and in pursuit of my doctorate. If I am the path behind, you are the way ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research journey has brought me full circle back to my love of teaching and learning, a love that originated when I was very young. This hermeneutic exploration of teaching and learning with technology has enabled me to grow into my teaching self and helped me to understand the complex relationships we online teachers often have with our technologies, our students, and our discipline content. I have learned to ask many questions about what my experiences and the experiences of others mean and to be curious about these experiences in a systematic and disciplined way.

I want to thank those fellow sojourners from the Hermes Circle who have gone before me in pursuit of understanding how our computer technology has transformed our teaching, Paulette and Stacey, whose many conversations inspired me, and to Alan Vincent, my friend in technology who has taken spirit in hand.

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CHAPTER ONE

POSTCARDS FROM THE BORDERLANDS OF TECHNOLOGY

The Virtualization of the Teacher

I don't have a clue what I'm supposed to be doing. It doesn't really feel like I am teaching.

I like the feeling of being up before everyone else in the house, in the dark and communicating with people who are in the middle or at the end of their workdays. I like the anarchy of time that the online world represents.

When I finish working in a class, I realize my body hurts all over. My hands, shoulders, and neck cry out with pain and cramping. How do I not notice this while I am in class?

I can refine, rewrite, rethink. For the first time I feel a connection with the method and the materials of the moment. Hands on, interactive, ongoing. Everything fluid, nothing fixed.

I love the novelty of it. I was involved in something new, which I always enjoy. Typing in responses to email messages or forum discussions felt like talking to students. I felt connected, in contact, not remote or removed. It definitely felt like teaching.

Conflicts [once] took place in a neutral space – in a classroom or office. Now they take place in my own home. I was confronted with a personalized message from hell – one that seems personal, unfair, and totally inappropriate in its tone.

More work, less creativity, less spontaneity. This is not an alternative medium but rather something different, with different rules, and different expectations regarding work.

Technology problems were time-consuming and frustrating. It was a nightmare. My computer crashed frequently. I had software incompatibilities.

These voices of online teachers reflect the excitement, exhilaration, frustration, and despair of those who find themselves teaching within technology (Whitesel, 2001). Their feelings reflect the emotional and physical pain, the joys of accomplishment and connection, the fears of incompetence and failure, and the loneliness of isolation. Some

revel in the novelty of teaching online, enjoying the challenge of distance; others feel isolated and alienated, and anxious at the distance from students for whom they are responsible. What is it about technology that exhilarates us and brings us to our knees?

Long ago, when I played at being a teacher and dreamed of interacting with others to help them learn, I never imagined that I would find myself teaching with technology or even teaching without the presence of students. I could not imagine a teaching life that meant being alone. My imagination drew on the familiar four walls, with desks, books, sunny window ledges hosting science experiments, and students.

The etymological root of relationship, the Latin root *relatus*, suggests a kind of bringing back or restoring (Barnhart, 2001). Teaching is a bringing back and restoring connections between learner and teacher, between students and what they learn, and between teachers and what we teach. What is the experience, then, of teaching and learning relationships when one is relating to and through the technology rather than directly to the students? Through suggests “in at one end, side, or surface and out the other” (*Random House Webster’s college dictionary*, 1991)¹. Through suggests transparency, which is defined as “easily seen through, recognized or detected, easily understood.” How do we recognize students through the paradox of a technology that both enables us to see through but is not transparent? What might this open up about teaching? Is there any relationship between the four walls and sunny windows and the virtual classroom seen through the computer screen? How do these paradoxes of relating through technology trouble some teachers and exhilarate others? Is there a human reference in this relationship?

¹ All etymological sources are from this dictionary unless otherwise noted: *Random House Webster’s college dictionary*. (1991). New York: Random House.

Some online teachers feel connected to the technology and to students through the technology. This tool use is transparent to them. They smoothly connect, and the connections restore relationships, even in the absence of students. These teachers are bringing back into existence their experiences of students. Other teachers feel disconnected and off balance by trying to relate through technology. They have lost their sense of being grounded in what they know. Some are even techno-phobic, feeling so alienated, so foreign to the technology, as to come to fear the experience. They are strangers in a strange land. How does the technology reflect and refract their experiences as teacher?

For the last fifteen years of my forty years of teaching, I have been teaching online using a computer. I have taught over 100 courses online in several discipline areas from literature to communication theory to writing. I have trained hundreds of teachers new to teaching with technology. Becoming a virtual teacher has been one of the most significant educational experiences of those forty years. As I sit daily in front of my computer, booting it up, signing on with an abbreviated identity and a secret password, I wonder at the wonder of what I am doing and how I got here. Teaching within technology has been the prism through which my pedagogical life has been refracted, reflected, and focused. This experience has opened up paths of enlightenment, new understandings of what it means to teach and be a teacher.

I no longer "know" my students in the way I have always known them. My embodied sense of who they are and of who I am when I am with them has changed. I no longer feel the footloose adventure of rambling into a classroom with 20 or 25 excited students, their excitement so contagious that it ratchets up my own. Instead, I face secrets,

intimacy, cloaking, masking, personas, virtual identities, stillness, silence, absence, and, yes, distance. And yet, I feel present to the minds and thoughts of my students in a new and different way. Indeed, I feel present to my own thinking presence in a new and different way.

In spite of my own exhilaration, when I first began teaching online, I scrutinized my very identity as a teacher. What, then, is a teacher? I came to question my own assumptions of what it means to teach and (re)member what it means to learn. Where were my ground, my experience, and my own memories of teaching? I leaped into the experience, free falling for all it was worth and reaching back for the static line only after I jumped. Where was my parachute? Would I know when to pull the cord? Would I even know how to find the cord? It was breathtaking.

I had no idea how I would (re)assemble my teaching life, where all the puzzle pieces would finally fit. I no longer saw the shapes of these pieces. My identity as an educator had been (dis)membred and (re)membred. I anguished over my assumptions about who I am and what I do through a completely different lens. How I communicated began changing. My interior life was being transfigured. My gregarious performance personality had been subtly shifted toward becoming more thoughtful, more silent. I no longer relied on subtle body language for my cues as to what happens in class.

Yet, I have also become more attuned to bodily gestures and their messages by these extended periods of absence as well as presence. I have asked the question about what communication I receive in a face-to-face situation that I cannot get online. I have asked whether this makes a difference to me and my students. I have asked whether, when I am face-to-face with students, I can even see them. What is the nature of the

messages we receive in this place where our primary access to one another is text and absence? Will I ever come to use my online teaching experiences as the primary referent for teaching at all?

In a very short time, my educational focus moved from teaching writing and literature to education and trying to understand what it means to teach and to learn. I wanted to extend this understanding to how technology influences and informs teaching and learning. In dealing with the challenges of teaching with technology, I had become deeply curious about the nature of this experience. I am both with the technology and in the technological interface. We are together physically and mindfully.

Yet, trying to know the identity of another without the physical presence leaves questions about how much we really know and whether we can meet that person in a relationship of pedagogical care and humanity. We learn important things about one another from our physical presence to one another. We develop our sense of respect for another and our sense of separateness and uniqueness through the experience of physical presence. How do we have to think about our virtual relationships in order to meet our students in their individuality? What is the experience of delocalizing our selves and the selves of our students through virtualization? Virtualization removes the restrictions that often come with physical presence. Does physical presence restrict our virtual selves? What are the implications for this way of relating pedagogically? Is there a different set of rules for us as online teachers?

As computer technology becomes ubiquitous within the higher education curriculum, we are compelled to consider our relationship, as teachers and as learners, to this experience. Our bodily disengagement with the educational experience leads us to

rethink the absence and disconnection facilitated by our computer technology and to give thought to what it might mean for our teaching relationships. We are no longer asking whether teaching within technology will make a difference, but how will this change our teaching and learning. With time and experience, how do the long-distance virtual teachers change?

As my teaching and learning reality has become virtual, my pedagogical relational reality has become virtual. My sense of teaching time and place has become virtualized; they have entered that in-between, almost place of my online classrooms. Even my body has become a stranger to me in this virtual world. Those who willingly teach within technology are more likely to engage the technology and have authentic teaching experiences than those who are averse to teaching online. Engaging suggests occupying our attention and becoming committed or involved with. Those who are reluctant seem desperately ill at ease within technology, unable to engage. What is the nature of this authentic teaching experience? Why are these teaching experiences so dis/parate? How do some of us find a home within technology, while others feel homeless? Is it possible to achieve an authentic teaching identity in a virtual world? How might these paradoxes of teaching online enable me to “rise up” or emerge (Barnhart, 2001) within the borderless virtual world to undertake this understanding? These paradoxes call me to ask the question: **What is this experience of teaching with/in technology?**

Ontology of a Technologist

Teachers are already accustomed to using different technologies to teach. We have used books, chalk, pointers, and blackboards, and we have asked our students to engage various handouts and readings using pencils and pens. We have asked our

students to read technologized words in books and on the Web. In short, we have used these tools to facilitate our teaching and student learning. Nearly all the tools we use for teaching are extensions of our bodies, our teaching hands. They are ready-to-hand for our use because of our intention to use these tools as tools. Heidegger (1926/1962) suggests that when our tools are ready-to-hand, we enter into relationship with those tools. Our intention and attitude lead this process “toward-which” some product is made. I use my pencil, pen, and keyboard to write words that are intended to converse with students about what I am teaching them and what they are learning. These tools are present-at-hand when they are ready-to-hand for my teaching. What is the relationship of these tools to teaching and learning? What is the relationship of the classroom teacher to her tools?

Working with technologies and having relationships with tools are not new to humans and certainly not to teachers. Ihde (2002) reminds us that human-technology relations are often simple – seeing through eyeglasses and nailing with hammers – and that our bodies’ various relationships to technology have led us to “fantasize ways in which we get beyond our physical limitations or our social problems by means of technologies” (p. xiii). In many cases, the virtual teacher faces the challenge of overcoming physical and social limitations in the distances provided by the virtual classroom. How do we face the daunting tasks of moving from interacting with our students to engaging them through a virtual classroom? What does it mean to have a keyboard as an extension of my hands rather than a book or chalkboard? What happens to the students in the process of our coming to them without the pens, pencils, papers, chalk, and books of our trade? Do we fantasize that somehow our distance education programs,

communicated through computer technology, will, indeed, overcome the limitations of absence?

I spent many years as a technical writer of computer and programmer documentation. In my imagination, I could see the huge and complex computer systems I wrote about. They had a life of their own, and I was comfortable with our separateness. It was easy for me to become acquainted with computers and write about them; they were clearly logical and actually very simple machines. But I had little hands-on experience with programming and using these computer systems. The mirrored reflection they cast on me was like the Platonic shadows on the cave wall. I did not know their essence, only their reflection on the pages I wrote. They were “other” to me just as students were “other” to me.

Over time, with the ubiquity of personal desk computers, the technology transformed from being “other” to being an extension of my self. My familiarity with my computer as a tool for communicating with my students enabled me to become familiar with my students’ text. My keyboard and my text extended my self through the screen to my virtual classes. This tool became a way for me to mediate relationships with students in our absence from one another. What is the experience of technology as “other” and then as “extension of self”? Where are the “eye” and the “I”? Does the technology recede into the ontological darkness and become separate from me?

Computers have become a way for me to communicate with others, write, and to travel the world. Since about 1995 when the Internet took on a graphic face and navigating the Internet became more intuitive, I have had little difficulty with the technology. In the beginning, there were commands to learn, software crashes, and

connectivity problems. Mostly, those problems have been solved the last several years. But new problems arise all the time, relating to our uses of the technology and the design of the software. Also, upgrades to our operating systems and viruses keep us challenged and always learning new capabilities. However, virtual classrooms have not changed much in the past ten years, which is the result of the high cost of maintaining instructional technology systems and departments, as well as limited creative thinking about the learning process.

Virtual classrooms, often seen as simulations of “real” classrooms where “real” learning can take place, model something real or the creation of something real based on our perception of it. That which the model is based on does not exist; it is an imaginative concept based on our perceptions. The virtual classroom is both simulation and simulacrum? It is real to teachers who teach within it and to students who learn within it. What and whose are the perceptions upon which the simulation is based? How does the simulation become simulacrum for those of us who experience the virtual classroom as real? Baudrillard (1988) writes, “The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth – it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true” (p. 166). Who are we as teachers in the simulation and the simulacrum?

When some computer component breaks or the virtual class does not work because of some programming problem, we experience the frustration and anxiety of not being able to get to class. Our broken technologies sometimes lead to our breaking down, fragmenting our thoughts and feelings, and leaving us nowhere. We cannot get to class. How are the breaking of chalk and pointers, the missing or torn pages in a book, and the broken copier different from a broken computer? When we become aware that our tasks

cannot be completed, we become frustrated and anxious. I become keenly aware when my computer does not connect me to my class and is no longer ready-to-hand. The word *Kein* has both the meaning of sharply perceptive and intensely felt, as well as another meaning, that of a lament for a death. Heidegger (1926/1962) captures both senses when he writes that the “break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers” (p. 105) becomes “emptiness, and [the teacher] now sees for the first time . . . what it was ready-to-hand for. The environment announces itself afresh” (p. 106). How does a broken computer frustrate us to the point of lamentation? How is our grief transformed into the anxiety of absence?

In 1993, I began teaching with a computer and training others to teach with this technology as well. In addition to its becoming essential to completing my tasks, the computer became essential for communicating. It was here – in the realm of communication – that I experienced my first frustrations with the computer. When my computer did not work and I could not get to my classes, I was frustrated and uneasy. I had this obligation to be in class, a responsibility by any measure, and I could not fulfill it. Part of my sense of myself as a teacher was being in class, communicating, being there for my students. Looking at the “broken” computer and not being able to see my own reflection in it left me anxious. What is the experience of the anxiety of broken technology? What happens to our “I” when the “eye” is not working? What happens to the “eye” when the “I” is not accessible? I felt anguish over being absent from class and not being able to teach. Who did I become when the technology was broken? How could I communicate with my students if I could not be the eye in class? I did not worry that my body was not there in my online class, but I did worry when my text was not there.

What is the experience of having one's identity tied up in the text rather than in the presence of the body? In an attempt to cope with a sense of humor, I often repeated a rhyme someone once passed on to me:

I really hate this darn computer.
I wish that they would sell it.
It never does quite what I want
But only what I tell it.

Who are "they"? What is implied here in the last two lines about our abilities to communicate with the technology and perhaps with one another? What is this love/hate relationship we have with our technology? What is between the "what I want" and the "what I tell it"?

Ihde (1990) notes that when technology malfunctions or breaks down, we can discard it. It becomes junk. We do not have relations with junk; junk is a background phenomenon. Is it so easy to discard the computer and relegate it to the status of junk? Can one ever return to a pre-computer existence? Is it not in the experience of the breakdown and loss that we come to experience the computer as a quasi-other, a not-so-friendly other whose brokenness forces itself into our anxious foreground?

Harman (2002) describes how Heidegger constructs the two worlds of tool-being as being in communion with one another and not able to exist one without the other. Tools that work seem to be extensions of our selves. Broken tools become tools, objects in themselves that have become foregrounded. For Heidegger, writes Harman, there are only *Zu-* and *Vorhandenheit* (tool and broken tool) as seen in the "as-structure" (p. 45). But Heidegger is not writing simply of broken tools, tools that are no longer tools because they no longer work. He is speaking of an ontic realm of tool-being, one that extends far beyond our equipment. What is this paradox for teachers who experience

technology that has broken down? How do we experience the paradox of broken tools in our teaching identities? Is my teaching identity broken when my computer is broken? I need to have presence as teacher in my class for my teaching identity to be present. Who do I become when my technology breaks down and I cannot recover my classes and students? I am no longer existing in the present but anxiously waiting for the future; I am somewhere in-between.

Ontological Reflections with/in the Technology

Teaching with/in/within technology orients me to where I am when I am teaching with the technology. How am I beside the technology and in it at the same time? The word with carries an interesting paradox in its meaning: it can mean “accompanied by” and it can mean against or opposite, with the connotation of “having a separate or opposing force.” My technology accompanies me, extends me, and opposes me at the same time. Who is leading; who is following? Whose shadow falls on whom? The word in locates me within, and when it is used as a suffix for with, creates a place called with-in. Where is this teaching place? The place with-in suggests being in the interior of technology where the parts are. The place I teach within the computer is not within the parts, but within the reflection of what the parts can do and in the reflection of the classroom in my mind. Others have created this classroom through the inter/face; this is neither my face nor my students’ faces. Where does a teacher go to teach?

The virtual classroom is really a software plan for a classroom, a simulation that becomes a simulacrum. The model of a classroom place becomes the working space for our communing relationship. The spaces are named for their functions, much like the parts on architectural designs. There is a conference area where all class members can

come together to discuss topics of interest. The word conference suggests a coming together in a business-like manner and for business purposes. How does naming our place for intellectual discussion a conference area color our sense of purpose in education? If we see ourselves as conferees, do we change our sense of ourselves as learners? This naming certainly adds an element of “getting down to business” as we enter the classroom. Has the pleasure of learning and teaching been replaced by the sense of business seriousness? Most online programs have been established to give degrees to working adults so that they may get the necessary preparation and education to enhance their professional careers and earn more money. Where is the humanistic learning traditionally associated with learning in this place of business and this space of bus(y)ness? In addition to the conference area, there is a menu item that directs one to the syllabus and class projects, class policies, and grading standards.

This desire to standardize learning and the online classroom harkens to a nineteenth century industrial model that was applied to mass produced courses for large numbers of students in the 1950s and 1960s in this country. The courses were “designed to be taught in a fail-safe structure by graduate assistants, apprentice teachers drawn into the classroom with precious little preparation” (Hall, 2003, p. 257). The classes focused on narrowly defined tasks, limited texts, a syllabus constructed by course designers, and general content suitable for any other course with the same title. These courses assumed that students had “marginal academic interest or capacity” (Hall, p. 257). Who do these “fail-safe” courses say that I am as teacher; who do they say my students are? How do they address us? What does it mean for us to meet in this relationship in this kind of class? Where is our presence, and what is personal in such a class?

Class members, with their email addresses and brief biographies, remain names in the list of students. Names represent students' presence, just as I am represented by name and whatever image I choose to share with students. There are private, restricted areas controlled by the teacher for meeting with students privately. There is groupware, software used to bring groups together, give them privacy, and enable them to share and collaborate among themselves outside the public domain of the class but accessible to the teacher. All the places become social spaces. What is this experience of public places and private places in the virtual classroom? How do the experiences of the social spaces merge with a sense of the virtual classroom as place? How do teachers turn this space into a place for teaching?

Although much of the class has already been determined, when I prepare my class before it begins, I build it. I create more rooms if I choose. While I cannot delete any existing room, I can add spaces and places that are like what is already available but can be named by me. Heidegger (1971) tells us "to build is in itself already to dwell" (§ 2). But, he explains, not all buildings are dwellings, and he asks, "How does building belong to dwelling" (§ 2). Heidegger traces the meaning of "build" from the German *bauen*, which means dwell as well as build. Also, the word *bin*, which means "am," belongs to *bauen*. So from *bauen* and *bin* we see the connections of dwelling as a form of being. How is our dwelling also being in a virtual space? How can I make my built classroom a dwelling place for me and my students? What does it mean for us to dwell in a virtual classroom?

The virtual classroom dwells between the "as" and the "as if." The teacher "almost" teaches there, but not quite. The virtual inter/face is meant to be the classroom,

but is not quite the same space. The word interface means “a surface regarded as the common boundary of two bodies, spaces, or phases.” Yet, there are no bodies. Are those of us who meet there spaces? How am I a space? Am I, the teacher, also in this in-between place? Sometimes I feel the nowhere-ness of this in-between space. The prefix inter- means “between or among.” Whose face is represented by this interface? Many teachers who experience the discomfort of dwelling between the “as” and “as if” also experience the separation and aloneness of not being on familiar ground.

In a sense, I have interpreted the classroom and its functions to create a teaching space that becomes a virtual place for us to meet and do our work together. My imagination and thinking have arranged the chairs and our conversations, according to my own imaginative design, in some in-between place. In this sense, perhaps I am a space. I may add graphical elements, e.g., photos, art, drawings, and even scanned representations of illustrations, to suggest different things to students. I may use different kinds of fonts and colors to emphasize and color our texts. I may even bring parts of the virtual world into the virtual classroom through linking to other Internet sites. My virtual space becomes a thinking place, an arrangement that is reflective of my thinking and imagination. My presence becomes this thinking and imaging place. How does my shaping the online classroom as a hermeneutist affect my students? In what way is the classroom a reflection of my inner sense of being a teacher, even indirectly?

For many years, technology was a tool, an extension of what I wished to accomplish. I used computers to write and to work. However, when I began to teach online and create learning environments online, my relationship changed somewhat. I was creating a relationship with the technology in a different way. My interaction with

technology was becoming intellectual as well as manipulative to reach my goals of teaching. Heidegger (1952/1977) illuminates this understanding when he writes, “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [*West*] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens” (p. 13). The word reveal, coming to us through the Latin *revelare* which means to unveil, suggests revelation by removing the veil. What veil is lifted and what is disclosed? How does our classroom technology reveal us? What is brought-forth in the unconcealment?

Heidegger (1952/1977) insists that we must question technology in order to have a free relationship with it. He writes, “Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means” (p. 5). He warns that our relationship to technology must be questioned even as we question technology. The danger comes in *Enframing*, seen as “the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve” (p. 24). Heidegger believes that a free relationship to technology depends on our being open to the essence of technology. *Enframing* and ordering conceal the essence, and the notion that we limit our understanding of technology to its being “standing-reserve” contributes to our losing control over it. In other words, if we allow our technology to dominate and control us, make us standing-reserve, we will lose ourselves and become concealed from ourselves. Losing sight means turning a blind eye, perhaps even blinding the I.

The computer monitor is a screen through which I view my classroom; the monitor is my eye upon the classroom just as it reflects my eyes gazing upon it. My students’ texts and all our textual exchanges are seen through this framed threshold. How

is my “I/eye” reflected in this “eye/I” world? Is the experience different for a teacher when she designs her own classroom instead of depending on the contents of a traditional classroom in an institutional setting? How do I keep my eye on the technology?

Transformation through the Prism of Technology

My entry into a description of phenomenological reflection lies in a deliberate choice of what I would like to call *the metaphor of the mirror*. When asked how I do phenomenology, I reply, I do it with mirrors, because, as we shall see, in both thinking as reflection and the reflection from the mirror, what is arrived at is done so *indirectly*. . . . *The eye is to the mirror as the I is to the world*. (Ihde, 1998, pp. 28, 29)

As with Ihde and his phenomenology, teaching online can mirror our teaching selves. Online teachers and students alike have the opportunity to reflect and think on the text we leave, with the help of the technology, in this virtual classroom space. The thinking and reflecting are accomplished in the mirror of text, and they mirror and reflect the self, the “I” to whomever reads and ponders the language. Reflection is defined as a giving back or showing of an image; a representation or counterpart; a fixing of thoughts on something or a meditation. Reflections are the results of thinking, pondering, or meditating. Ihde (1998) adds another element, the element of indirectness. Pondering and reflecting are done so indirectly, through one another’s text rather than with one another directly. As the eye looks into the mirror of the computer, the “I” is reflected in the monitor and thus to the world in the form of our technologized texts. What is the experience of this indirectness? Is my teaching identity indirect? Can I be present indirectly?

The many facets of prisms reflect and refract light, splintering it into countless waves and particles and frequencies. Teaching within technology has been the prism through which I have seen my teaching self. For many teachers and students in online

classes, the connections seem to take place immediately. For others, the connections take time to form, and sometimes they never happen. How do these connections or lack of connections reflect my teaching self reflected within the technology? The connections are indirect as they are reflected in the thoughts that represent the experiences. And what does it mean to have our “beings in the midst of our technologies” (Ihde, 1990, p. 2)? What is the nature of Being once it has been reflected or refracted through this prism? What difference does it make to us?

I think about my connections with technology, my experiences of being with and in it over the years that I have taught my writing classes with technology. I have wondered how my personal self as well as my teaching self were reflected in the technology, refracted by it, and redirected by it. I even wondered about my enthusiasm for it. I became so excited after so many years of teaching to have found something that seemed new, a new way to teach, and a persona to be with students, to communicate, to learn. But was it really new? Being a writing teacher and relating to my students through writing seemed just too good to be true. What was the source of excitement for me? Most days, I thought it was the sense of being able to know my students’ thinking through their writing. Other days, I was not sure as I realized that I was “out of touch” with students in other, important ways, such as being out of touch with what is happening in the classroom while learning may be taking place. How would we be in-touch online, where touch became a space for connecting?

At first, it seemed easy. There on the screen were the words of students, their thoughts and discussions. I saw in their words those who were reticent and unsure and I could encourage them, make our space together a place for courage and inspiration. I was

able to see in their words their thinking, the “writing to think” kind of writing, and I assisted them in clarifying their thoughts and becoming stronger thinkers and writers. I helped them find the right words and ask the right questions. At least, that is what I thought I was doing. I still wonder whether this is what I am doing. The fact that I continue to ask this question about this experience and this perception of what I believe I am doing says something to me about this ongoing tension of understanding myself as teacher and my students as learners. Sometimes this tension is disorienting. Who am I in this place? Am I really teaching anything? What does it mean to teach? Is it really possible to see into the thinking mind through these words? Is students’ writing really a reflection of their thinking? What is writing?

According to Moore (1996), one of the first theorists of distance learning, the essential nature of teaching online is about “transactional distance” (p. 200). He describes transactional distance as a pedagogical phenomenon. This distance is one of understandings and perceptions caused by geographic distance, and this distance must be overcome by teachers and learners. He insists that the ways to overcome these geographical distances are instructional design and interaction procedures. What does it mean that this distance between my students and me is geographical and procedural? How can it not be pedagogical distance as well? How does this notion of a transaction affect my Self as teacher and my role as teacher? How does this change learning and being a learner? To transact means to carry on or conduct business, negotiations, or activities. The prefix trans- conveys the meaning of crossing from one place to another, giving me a sense of carrying an act from one place to another.

Having this instrumentalized notion of how to relate to students often reduces learning to some kind of procedure. The word procedure suggests that some action takes place beforehand, that a determined course of action follows, and carries with it legalistic implications. If I complete these three steps, then the outcome will be that my students have learned whatever I want them to learn. My understanding and perception of teaching as a business or a negotiation affect my sense of myself as teacher and my students as people. They are business transactions. I am seeing my students and my relationship to them through this legalistic negotiation. My responsibility to them is reduced to following the procedures and trusting the outcomes rather than the more complex moral responsibility described by Lingus (1994): “With a look of her eyes, a gesture of her hand, and with a word of greeting, the other faces me and appeals to me – appeals to my welcome, to my resources, and to my responsibility” (p. 33). How can teaching and caring be reduced to instructional design and interaction procedures? In what manner does this change the essential nature of the teaching experience? What does it mean to have this subtle vision of my students as business associates or clients? What does it mean to care in this virtual place?

Transparencies in the Virtual Light

The word “online” is defined as “operating under the direct control of, or connected to, a main computer.” On-line locates us on a line somewhere, situated perhaps like a trapeze artist on a high wire. When we are teaching online, we are situated electronically somewhere between our computers. What does it mean to be teaching under the control of our computers? What does it mean to be connected to one another this way? The truth is that the technology is so “transparent” these days, I am hardly

aware of being connected or under the control of the technology. Should I be concerned about that transparency? How does teaching online and within technology lead me to a certain lack of awareness of myself and my pedagogy? What does it mean to be connected to this “thing” and not to my students?

The novelty of teaching with technology, especially being able to work with all the writing and the thinking in writing, is intoxicating. As a writer, I am elated and excited about being in the presence of so many words. As a teacher, I am delighted to read so much written by my students and be in the presence of their writing. Students who in a traditional classroom would not speak much are now “chattering” up a storm.

Soon, however, I realized what this transactional distance in distance learning is all about. As the technology becomes more complex and as the numbers of students increase, I struggle to keep up with the demands. My focus shifts to learning techniques for teaching in an online classroom, what is called “best practices” (e.g., how to get students participating and how to manage so many responses). In truth, instructional design methods have become “best practices” pedagogy as online programs adopt Moore’s notion of transactional distance. Techniques and procedures fill the spaces I normally reserve for reflecting on what students are learning and how I need to reach them individually. The technical aspects develop a kind of busy-ness/business associated with creating and managing a classroom as a learning environment rather than being with my students in a learning space. The illusion of direct communication masks the reality of our bodily distances. A great deal of time is consumed in practicing these techniques and less time is reserved for direct engagement with my students. It is assumed that if we teachers practice “best practices,” students are learning and we are teaching.

This concept of *techne*, the Greek root of the word technology, is central to understanding the experience of teaching within technology. The tension between the art of teaching and the craft techniques associated with it has always been a part of the teaching self. While speech and debate, both oral arts, are not considered *techne* because the voice is part of our bodies, writing is considered *techne* because we use an instrument to perform this physical, mental, and emotional craft. In what way do the “best practices” techniques for teaching online mask the reality of my students’ absences and perpetuate the illusion of engagement? What does it mean to change my teaching self when I practice these techniques that mask the bodily distances? We know that some kind of communication does occur. What is the nature of this technologized communication?

Yet, in spite of all the initial excitement, I developed an uneasiness about my presence in the virtual classroom. How many times do I need to be in the classroom to be a teacher? What if I go to class and have something to say and students do not bother to come back for discussion? Am I still a teacher if the students are not there? Over time, of course, some of my questions are answered. I discover that I was not a teacher in the same sense that I once thought of myself, and yet there are some essential qualities of presence I bring to my role.

In some ways, I am a better teacher in the sense that I can relate to and communicate with individual students more frequently in our many electronic conversations. Students who are not very verbal are forced to find some way to communicate with me in writing or lose their very sense of presence in the classroom. I can work with their written thoughts and articulations; they can work with mine. I become more sensitive to the possible effects of my own words. Our words mediate the

teaching experience for me. Are they enough? What is the experience of having teaching relationships mediated by technology and technologized words? What is the relationship cost for us to be teachers and students together virtually rather than physically in the classroom? As Heidegger (1971) points out, “It is language that tells us about the nature of a thing” (§ 3). What is the nature of teaching reflected in the technologized words?

The Incredible Lightness of Being Virtual

When I learned to use a computer many years ago, I realized I enjoyed this particular technology primarily because of the capability it gave me for writing, revising, and communicating – especially communicating in writing. As an inveterate letter writer, I relish the opportunity to communicate with many people, especially all of my students. Being present with my words offers me a chance to reflect on what is written and to think about what I want to write. While I am not particularly a technophile, I find freedom in computer technology, a freedom that reflects a lightness of my Being. I can travel the Internet, visit distant lands, and communicate with family and friends instantly. Although travel by Internet is not the same as traveling by road and being-there, I do have a sense of being able to travel to the place of information on the Internet. I can ride the Information Superhighway and learn things I have not yet imagined. I can read about and respond to students’ comments, carefully selecting words typed by the student and carefully selecting my own. I can get into the middle of a thought by inserting comments within the students’ texts. Is this freedom illusory? In what way does this virtual communication change or influence my relationships?

I am fascinated by the possibilities present (so much presence) in the computer technology for teaching. One notion continues to intrigue me – that of designing a

computer to be ontological, to enable us to feel connected to or engage others through the connection to and communication with software, such as the interface. Heidegger (1926/1962) suggests that some communication technologies might close off the being present that moves us into *Dasein* (p. 27), our concrete link to ontology. Ontology, that branch of metaphysics about the nature and existence of Being, is the vision we have of the world through relating in the world. *Dasein*, an existential word used to explain one's essential mode of relating to one's own Being, contains within its purview the sense that one is moved into *Dasein* through living an authentic life or being with self and others in the world such that one's Being is structured by care (Moran, 2000).

These notions of Being and *Dasein* influence how we come to know our world and how we name how we live our lives. When computer technology is ontologically designed, the software designers of the interface have made the software easily relatable at a human level. Johnson (1997) tells us that interface in its simplest sense refers to “software that shapes interaction between user and computer... serves as a kind of translator, mediating between two parties, making one sensible to the other” (p. 14). Perhaps it can be likened to non-verbal communication in some way. Although the computer works in the language of signs and symbols at its most elementary level, it still must “*represent itself* to the user in a language that the user understands” (p. 14). The power of the computer, or in this case the interface, depends on its capacity for self-representation. More often than not, the self-representation is in the form of a metaphor. In the case of computer technologies in education, the metaphor usually takes the form of a classroom, a simulacrum of the various elements of the traditional classroom, and

names the different ways in which we teachers and students interact or perform our various educational tasks and processes.

Of concern to me as a teacher are the effects of having my teaching forced into roles and functions named by software developers. Who are these interlopers who represent me to my students and my students to me, whose functional language defines how I will engage my students? Is it possible to have authentic relationships through this mediated relationship with both the technology and students? My very teacher-being is mediated by this functional vision of being in the world as teacher. Heidegger (1952/1977) warns us about this Enframing and how it leaves us as “standing-reserve” in service to our technology. Who do I become as standing-reserve? How does this address my students? What can be taught as standing-reserve? This technology that enables us all to represent ourselves as technologized texts within strict and forced functional efficiencies also has stripped us of our identities. How do we find our way to one another? What does it mean to teach authentically in this relationship? The incredible lightness of virtual being weighs heavily on me as I search for ways to see my students among the screens of homogenous text.

Reflections with/in Space

As I cross over the threshold of the computer screen, tapping away on my keyboard, I am aware of crossing over into another world. This doorway is a between marker, a point of entering or beginning. The Latin word for threshold is *limen* and it shares the same root as limb, *limes* or limit and the Greek word *leimon*, which also means meadow (Webster's, 1996). Psychologically speaking, the *limen* is “the point at which a stimulus is of sufficient intensity to begin to produce an effect.” This threshold is a

marker and meadow for new beginnings, a point of entrance as well as departure, and the direction does not really matter. How is the crossing through the computer screen of sufficient intensity to produce an effect? What is the effect? What is the stimulus?

For van Gennep (1960), threshold is a passage “between” sacred places and profane places; the rites of threshold are rites of passage, places of transition and mediation points between social states of existence. He refers to rites of separation from one world as *pre-liminal rites* and the ceremonies of assimilation into the new world, *post-liminal rites*. Van Gennep describes this rite of passage in terms of entering the *liminal*, threshold stage as one person and emerging from this state completely transformed. What is the nature, then, of the transformation when I pass through the threshold of the screen? In what way can I make this crossing more deliberate so that I am more aware of this transformation? Who, or what, do I become?

Gadamer (1960/1999) helps us to understand transformation in his discussion of play.

Something is suddenly and as a whole something else, that this other transformed thing that it has become is its true being in comparison with which its earlier being is nil. When we find someone transformed, we mean precisely this, that he has become another person, as it were. (p. 111)

Over the many times I have crossed the threshold of the computer screen, I have experienced many transformations of which I am aware and likely some transformations that are not revealed clearly. Computer technology has transformed my entire teaching life as well as my writing and communicating life. What transformations might I have experienced that are less transparent to me? Are these transformations play? Actually, as my teaching identity has become more playful, I have to wonder whether computer technology and virtual interfaces might have contributed to a lightening of my spirit.

Gadamer (1960/1999) writes that transformation occurs in play and that play “brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn” (p. 112). This insight helps me understand my own sense of play as I create my online classes. I have always enjoyed building and creating spaces in which to play. When I sit down to the computer near the beginning of a new term, I am excited to be working in the virtual interface, where I can create my class anew. My online classes are rarely the same semester to semester, although the developers have included a feature that lets me “import” material from any previous class into a current class to save time. I smile as I realize that developers think that all classes are fundamentally the same. I have the choice to make the class a copy of another class, or I can greet each class as a new experience. What is the nature of play in the virtual classroom, in this transformation I experience as I cross the between places? What might it mean for the learning environment in a virtual class to be a play space?

When I am “finished” in my virtual classroom, I pass through the threshold again, this time to where I am sitting in front of my computer. I am no longer with and in the technology, so to speak. My thoughts and imagination are no longer envisioning the spaces and places enabled by the technology; my mind is no longer filled with students’ text. My visit to the class and my students’ texts are now a memory. I have seen reflections of my students in our virtual classroom, and I have left reflections in my textual responses to them. We have “seen” each other’s reflections. Through the asynchronous nature, the texts we have posted in the past are present to us even as they become our presence. I am reflected in the experience, and the virtual class now has reflections of me. The mirror of technology has reflected both my “I” and my “eye.” As I

retrace my path, how is this return also a beginning? What is beginning for me as I reflect on the experience of having been within technology?

In this way, the technology has enabled me, through the transformation of bridging of the text, to be with students, their thoughts in writing, and the reflections of my own thoughts. Heidegger (1971) illuminates the significance of bridges as he answers the question: In what way does building belong to dwelling? From bridges, the banks emerge. “The bridge *gathers* the earth as landscape around the stream. . . . Bridges lead in many ways” (§ 23, 24). He claims that the bridge is itself a location not already there until the bridge is built, and “only things that are locations in this manner allow for spaces” (§ 29). By constructing locations, bridges find and join spaces where we mortals persist in dwelling. And dwelling is “*the basic character of Being*” (§ 44). What does it mean to dwell in transformation?

Facets of our Virtual Selves

Facet is defined as “one of the small, polished plane surfaces of a cut gem.” Gems are valued by the cut and quality of their facets. We use facet also to mean an aspect of something, as in the many facets of a problem. Part of the root for this word is the word face. As we ponder the images we create in our minds when we teach online, we see the many faces and voices of our students as we would create them. What face(t)s do we create and how is that accomplished within the technology?

Conspicuously Absent

We use a popular expression “conspicuous by its absence” – how is the absent body conspicuous? The word conspicuous comes from the Latin *conspiciuus*, meaning “readily visible or observable” (*Webster’s*, 1996). I observe something by its absence,

which means I must have expected to see this or else somehow I can see traces of it. Can this absence help us experience lived body in another, perhaps heightened, way? Am I visible in my invisibility? What does it mean to be "absent" in this place? Leder (1990) writes how this occurs when I "dwell within the power of sight as my primary mode of world-disclosure" and "relegate much of my body to the status of neutral background" (p. 25).

The poet William Blake (1757–1827) had an interesting anomaly in his vision, one that perhaps can help us illuminate aspects of reflection and refraction. His condition is called "eidetic vision," from the Greek word *idein*, which is defined as "the formal content of a culture, encompassing its system of ideas, criteria for interpreting experience," and "constituting visual imagery vividly experienced and readily reproducible with great accuracy and in great detail."

For the poet Blake, this capacity represents itself in his ability to "see" images of angels when he looked into the trees around him. He faithfully reproduces these detailed images in his woodcuts, and they inspire the imagery in his poetry. His eidetic vision was so powerful that he could not tell the difference between the reality of the objective images and the images in his head. In modern psychiatry, he would be called an eidetic thinker, someone whose thoughts are formed into mental images of great detail as though the visions are suspended outside of the mind's eye. How do we online teachers use our own eidetic vision to "see" our students, to communicate with them, and to imagine our classrooms? Is our success teaching online dependent on some sort of eidetic thinking? In what manner is the *eidos* reflected, refracted, and faceted in this experience? What is the "inner essence" of this phenomenon?

Refraction is defined as “the change of direction of a ray of light or sound” in physics. In ophthalmology, refraction is the ability of the eye to refract light that enters it so as to form an image on the retina.” When light or images enter the eye, the image is cast onto the retina and our brains perceive what it is that we see, assuming that the neural pathways function properly. Instead of students, I see a computer monitor that frames the technologized words of the interface and the students.

My body is still with me, sometimes more than ever, as I focus my eyes on the screen and then through the screen to the text of my students. Often, I am not aware of my body until my back and neck hurt and my hands ache from all the keyboard activity. The hands that once represented my tactfulness with others now communicate, sometimes painfully, by typing in uniform letters and words that anyone else could type. In a sense, I have lost the identity of my teaching performance, my uniqueness in being a teacher. How can I teach without my physicality? What does it mean to translate the physicality of teaching performance in an online environment? What is performative about teaching within technology?

The word performative suggests performing an act by the very fact of uttering an expression or statement (*Webster's*, 1996). The assumption is that the performance needs an audience to complete the act. An example is the phrasing “I promise.” When the speaker utters these words, the act, the promise, becomes performative. This suggests action tied to speech, and certainly the usage of the word performance conjures up the notion of speech as action that includes an audience. The word audience connotes hearing, from the Latin *audient*, meaning “a group of listeners.” What does this mean in

the absence of my body and the bodies of students? Am I refracted even as my words are separated from my being?

Brent (2005) writes that the concept of “residual orality” might help us understand the notion of teaching as performance art. He uses the term “residual orality” to describe areas of our modern life that have resisted textualization, and teaching is one such area. Even assigned readings and library research are on the periphery of teaching. Even if the professor reads notes, each class is somewhat different from the last one. He contends that teaching has managed to subsume the new technologies into the classroom teaching. The online classroom is the exception. Through collaborative work in the virtual classroom, teaching continues to resist total textualization. However, it is through text that teacher and students alike present themselves and perform. As long as teachers resist the urge to create static comments to post in the online classroom, they can resist static textualization. Perhaps we should rename this phenomenon dynamic textualization. This textualization as teaching has phenomenological consequences for learning. In spite of the trend toward creating many written “lectures” and materials for the online class, the “essence of a[n online] course, like all good courses, is performance, not text” (Brent, 2005, section 5). In what way can the echo of sound be in the text virtually?

One aspect of being a successful online teacher is to establish a presence in the online classroom, a reflection of the teacher self. Over the years, I have consciously worked on this. I have examined carefully my words in an effort to understand what my students might “see” or “know” about me when they read my words. Many teachers develop online personas in order to have presence. Are we lacking authenticity? Or as Heidegger (1926/1962) would have us understand it, freedom to be ourselves? What is

the experience of a student who is reflected in the eyes of a partial teacher persona? Is learning less than authentic? What is the essential nature of physical presence in teaching? Assuming I could know this, how can I project presence mediated by technology?

Reflections with/in the Text

When I enter my virtual classroom, I am aware of being in the presence of technologized words rather than students. Instead of entering through one door in the room, I enter into a virtual classroom that gives me many options for what to do and the illusion that I can go anywhere within the virtual classroom. I am greeted by management decisions rather than teaching and learning decisions. Instead of students, I see a list of functions, functions that are named by software developers who have reduced this intensely rich, personal, engaging experience of teaching to menu items. The functionality and *techné* of teaching become foregrounded as we click through the menus to get to the conversations and the textual presences. How do these menu items influence students' responses and my responses to them? Is there some subtle directive to write certain things because the menu option is named a certain way? My embodied responses are abbreviated to what I can see with my eyes and my fingertips as they glide over the keyboard. My body has been replaced by functional wording that represents teaching. How does technology frame the "techniques" of teaching? What does it mean to be "enframed" in a technique? Am I the simulation or the simulacrum?

This classroom has no smell, no nostalgia for the built places where my memories and self have lingered. There are few colors here – perhaps a gray or blue border, but mostly black words on white background. I know where I have been in the virtual

classroom because the link I “clicked on” with my mouse turns from black to blue. What does it mean to leave no trace, no pathway, except an electronic signal? The sense of having sensate memories, except for sight, is not there. Robinson (2000) shows that the body is often textualized by students who interpret text as the body; and the senses of smell and taste are absent.

The virtual classroom developers have purposefully chosen a bland, neutral, colorless background so as to avoid distractions that being in the presence of color might bring. They have attempted to background the sense of the classroom somewhat, to give it less prominence for us all. What happens when we background a primary orientation to our purpose, such as the classroom, with its suggestions, traditions, and impressions of learning? Students are represented here by their black-on-white words and perhaps a photo if they choose to put one in their biography links. In my physical, traditional classrooms, my students are both masked and revealed by their clothes, scents, facial expressions, hair, body language, attitudes, and language. In the virtual classroom, I know them only by their words, words that both mask and reveal much about who they are and what they are thinking, and a flat photograph. The words reflect student thinking and student identity, and are the reflections by which I will come to know them.

One of the most common complaints of teachers and students in the online classroom is the amount of text to read. In our efforts to provide much information for our students, to orient them as well as we can, we often write too much. Our virtual classrooms are still more heavily text than graphics, and reading the words is the primary way to know what is going on in the virtual classroom.

I have been disoriented and overwhelmed by the amount of text. When did "reading" become "information overload," or as Wurman (2001) would have us believe, "information anxiety"? Or does the anxiety come from another source? Does it have to be that way? What are the implications for this transformation in teaching and learning? I have seen my classroom teaching transformed as a result of this experience. As I try to understand my students' thoughts through their text, I have learned to look more deeply into what their expressions can tell me about them. I have a deeper, broader understanding of how to help them articulate their thoughts. How do I account for this transformation within an anxious and overloaded learning environment?

Gadamer (1960/1999) tells us, "Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" (p. 385), but that texts are "enduringly fixed expressions of life that are to be understood ... the text speaks only through ...the interpreter" (p. 387). When encountering written text, my consciousness achieves its full power of understanding and, thus, potentially my consciousness achieves the will to transform itself through my hermeneutic endeavors. By entering into an interpretative relationship with the text, I have appropriated its meaning. Thus, I nourish and transform my intelligence with the text. What does it mean to be transformed by text? Who have I been as teacher? Who have I become in this new space? How has virtualized text transformed my identity?

Where are the students in their bright colors and spicy perfumes? Where are the shimmer and excitement of new beginnings together, a new community of learners gathered and collected? How do we unmask for each other in the revealing of learning and teaching? What is the meaning of our experience of this reality we shape only with our words?

Reflections in the Silence

In the virtual classroom, often students do not “say” anything, or they write so little that I wonder what the student is thinking or whether the student has disappeared. I no longer have the gesture to give me clues about what the student may be feeling or thinking or learning and how I am seen as a teacher. Although even face-to-face gestures can hide the truth of thoughts, at least in a physical classroom, I can see the student has come to class. Perhaps our reflections of one another will lead to learning; perhaps I can inspire enthusiasm and imagination. I can ask the student in my physical presence what he or she is thinking. But in the online classroom, I cannot tell whether I am “teaching” anything when the students say little or nothing at all. There is no reflection, no calling forth to identity, no confirmation of personhood. I listen intently to the silences and send messages directed to the silent students asking for some acknowledgement that they are indeed “present.”

My sense of myself as a teacher is challenged in the silences. The uniqueness of a particular student is difficult to discover since students all use many of the same words to converse with one another and carry on their class discussions. There is no signature dress or hairstyle or physical feature that distinguishes them, no tone of voice, that unique resonance of language each person has. Some students struggle with language and, thus, with voice, often losing their individuality in their imitations of one another’s words. Is this good for learning, or does it confuse learning? The homogeneity of the text causes my students to blend, or worse, become faceless or mechanical. How can anyone be at home in the online class without a voice?

Where does the silence come from? How can I come to know their uniqueness in their absence? Where exactly are their bodies and their texts – are their bodies and texts even together? How can I be mindful when our minds are not in the same place? While I am in class working with student conversations, I may play music or be distracted by the sounds in my own environment. Yet, in the virtual classroom, silence reigns. I say student words aloud in my mind as I read through their postings. Even students must create a persona online through their words so they do not lose their individuality. Is this persona authentic as learner? Certainly mastering the creation of a persona does achieve certain writing goals. Are we becoming better writers, or are we becoming better deceivers?

The silence of the online classroom is one of the first things I noticed when I began teaching online – no excited voices, no background noise, no shuffling of papers and book pages, no sounds of breathing except for my own. In this near absolute silence, I would stare hard at the text on the screen, trying to “hear” what the student was saying in the writing. Without inflections, tone changes, the music of voices, I often had to reread in order to wrench meaning from the words. I created voices in my imagination to narrate the words to me with tones and inflections as I searched for ways to understand what students might mean in their writing. I realized that I had been discovering sound through the contrasts of sounds. I could hear by creating a medley of sounds from which the students’ voices could emerge.

Robinson (2000) describes what her students experience in (re)creating and (re)membering voices online as a way of filling in the gaps in a virtual classroom. Her students describe it as an orienting phenomenon, a way of knowing where they are in making sense of the text. When I create the voices, I am also creating the narratives of

others. I am interpreting another's existence. I am creating relationship. The word relation comes from the Latin *relatio*, meaning "to narrate, account, or tell" (*Merriam Webster's*, 1974). The suffix "ship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *-scipe*, from the root word *scieppan*, to create or make. To create the narratives of my students through their voices is to create relationship through a form of hearing.

It is not surprising that many people describe their reading online as "hearing." I certainly hear my students' voices. I often reply to them, "I hear you." Clearly, I am creating voices within my own imagination – but from what? Ackermann (1991) captures the profound significance of being able to create voices and to hear.

In Arabic, absurdity is not being able to hear. A "surd" is a mathematical impossibility, the core of the word "absurdity," which we get from the Latin *surdus*, "deaf or mute," which is a translation from the Arabic *jadr asamm*, a "deaf root," which in turn is a translation from the Greek *alogos*, "speechless or irrational." The assumption hidden in this etymological nest of spiders is that the world will still make sense to someone who is blind or armless or minus a nose. But if you lose your sense of hearing, a crucial thread dissolves and you lose track of life's logic. You become cut off from the daily commerce of the world, as if you were a root buried beneath the soil. (Ackermann, 1991, p. 175)

In this etymology lies the heart of the voices I hear in the silence. It would be absurd for me not to create voices so that I still am in touch with life's logic of relationship. I would be that root buried within the virtual text, and the crucial thread that binds me to the world of my students and our virtual class would dissolve. In order to stay sane, I create these voices from the sounds that come from my own experiences in the world. I assign individual tones and inflections and voices to my students. I might even get confused when I give two students the same voice, somehow mistaking them for one another.

It is hermeneutic to create voices for my students. All students are given voice by me in my role as teacher when I read their texts in our virtual class. In my imagination, I

call them forth, however vaguely, into some shadow existence through voices. Do I rob my students of their identities by giving them voices shaped by my own experiences? Might I, then, be in danger of experiencing my students as reflections of me?

Ihde (1998) explains that no object is really silent. If it does not have a voice of its own, such as a person does, the object can have a voice through another's intervention. He notes that seemingly silent things can be given a voice through our striking them. That is the musician's gift to our experience. Even stones, he says, can be given voice by striking them. He writes, "The voice which is given to things, or elicited bodily from things, however, is very *complex*. First, if the thing is struck on the model of musical percussion, the voice is not single but is a duet. The sound produced is both the voice of the thing struck and the voice of the striking instrument" (p. 151). By substituting a rubber striker or a brass hammer, we can elicit different duets.

The analogy holds for giving voice to my online students. To give voice to students' texts is to bring their voices forth from the silence of the text, to bring their meanings forth from the silence of the words and phrases. And it is always a duet, a complex duet of my imagination and their text, their language. With my imagination, I listen for what possible intonations, feelings, and meanings there might be in their words. What is this pedagogical duet like? How can I separate my voice from their voices? Where are the harmony and melody? In what way is my identity called forth in their words? What is the meaning of my imagination calling them into being? Who writes the song?

Over the years of teaching online, I have come to be more aware of my senses. It seems that in the absence of physically interacting with students I have come to need

more sentient experiences. I have come to appreciate the smell of the farm fields near my home where I work. I have made my home study more like a home than an office. I surround myself with my personal things, with scented candles, with jugs of cool water, with fragrant tea. My windows look out into the surrounding woods. My computer workstation is positioned so that I can feel the rising sun on my shoulders and face. The outside colors seem sharper and more vibrant to me after hours of working in the online classes. I burn scented candles and play the sounds of falling rain and gurgling creeks. I often go outside to feel the air and feed the birds, just to be doing something physical, to be moving my body, and to give myself time to think while my body is moving. Unless I have music playing while I work, I really hear my own voice inside my head, talking to me and to my students as I write.

Refracted and Gesture-less

When I began teaching writing years ago, I developed a way of being with students and their writing. I could sit with a student, talk about the writing and the language, what the student intended, how the writing sounded, and whether the student had other resources to achieve the writing goal. I could evaluate in what areas a student needed to learn more; I could help a student understand what was unique about her writing and how she could continue exploring her own writing voice. By listening to the student's conversation with me, I developed a sense of what I needed to say tactfully to this individual student so that she herself became more mindful of her writing.

How can I engage students in learning to write if I am not there, looking over their shoulders, pointing to something, carving out meaning with a gesture, watching for a telling facial expression or observing their bodies' timeless expressions of comfort or

discomfort, helping them to find themselves in their writing? In what way can I guide them in self-awareness when I cannot even see them? The word “aware” means knowing, cognizant, informed, and conscious (*Merriam Webster’s*, 1974). Being aware is having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge. In the online classroom, what is the experience of being aware of students and of guiding self-awareness? The promise is there – an aware student should be able to articulate realization, perception, and knowledge.

When I am teaching online, often I am aware that there is no easy way to emphasize certain things that I write so that students understand my sense of their importance. It is very challenging to mentor online, to give students examples of how a writer comes to find her own “voice in writing” and comes to trust her own experience. Without a way of making my written words exciting and enthusiastic, I am challenged to impart the way a writer experiences writing and imagining. I am challenged to see my students’ excitement and enthusiasm as well as their doubts. With our online conversations, I cannot know for certain what their body language would tell me about their hesitations and lack of confidence, or even their successes. Interestingly, it is the phenomenological technique of writing direct experiences to evoke a bodily sense that seems to explain how a writer achieves the act of writing to think, feel, and know.

How can I show my meaning without my whole body, pacing restlessly as I think aloud, gesturing emphatically with chalk and book at this point and that? What is the experience of helping students to write direct phenomenological experiences as part of their learning to write? How does this change the classroom? What are the challenges of teaching this writing online? Will these techniques work in my theory classes as well?

In a way, my online classes somehow start without me. I prepare the class materials weeks ahead of time and post readings and discussion questions well before my students arrive. Without my presence, class begins. Time is displaced through this different sense of presence. When students arrive, the classroom is prepared and waiting for them. I do not have to be there to greet them. I do send them welcome messages and explanations about how the classroom works and where they can find material for which I know they will be looking. I post information about myself to help give them a sense about me. I ask them to introduce themselves and tell us from where they come to class. I ask them to describe their surroundings. But students come to class and post their introductions when they are ready and not when we are all there.

Time in the Prism of Technology

Many teachers report that they often get into a zone and lose themselves in the virtual classroom and in the students' words (Whitesel, 2001). When we become "expert" at using our tools, we experience what has been called flow, a seamless imaginative experience. Heidegger (1926/1962) writes that when our tools as objects are ready-to-hand, they become objects that have distanced themselves from us, backgrounded to our present experience. Many teachers report that flow, that seamless working of tools, where time is backgrounded and our fingers smoothly type out our minds' thoughts. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes people who get into the flow as those who enjoy things that ordinary people might find unbearable. "Flow," he writes, "is the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake" (p. 6).

Dreyfus (1991) reminds us that Heidegger addresses this sense of circumspection where “the equipment nexus stands first, completely unobtrusive and unthought. ‘Unthought’ means not thematically apprehended for deliberate thinking about things...., [and] we find our bearings in regard to them” (p. 66). When tools become transparent, we are unaware of them. Their use is circumspect. How does this circumspect use of the computer influence my teaching? Surely, the more I can work on the computer in the “flow” zone, the more focus I can spend on teaching.

I have experienced a sense of lost time and timelessness when I work online, lost within the texts of students’ written thoughts. My perceptual field becomes focused on the words, of what is said and not said, as I focus on the online discussions. As my body disappears from explicit awareness, what does it mean that my perceptual field, then, becomes my way of sensing others through their text?

Asynchronicity. Our classroom is asynchronous – we are not all there at the same time. The word asynchronous seems to elicit strong responses in all students. Some students are relieved that they may come to class when it is convenient for them rather than at a prescribed time. Other students panic when they realize they are likely to be in class alone; no one is there to orient them, to give them a feeling of being in class and having someone to chat with and raise questions. In a sense, our classroom is timeless. Two or more of us can be there at the same time and not even know it. We would know of the other’s “presence” in the classroom only after a response or posting shows up in the conversation. We might see by the time and date stamp that we had been there together. We are not time-bound, but in being time-free, we may always feel alone in class. What is the difference between time-less and time-free in our experience? In what

way can we properly start this journey without our collective witnessing? In what way do we bless its beginnings? What does it mean for our sense of timelessness to be rooted in our absent bodies?

Synchronicity. Synchronicity is the “synchronism of events that appear to be connected but have no demonstrable causal relationship.” Synchronism suggests that an event occurs at a particular time and that, if that event were to occur at a different time, it would be a different event. Synchronicity suggests also that the beings involved in this event also would exist at this particular time in a particular way. The word comes from the Greek, the prefix *syn* meaning “with” and the root *chronos* meaning “time” (*Merriam Webster’s*, 1974).

Synchronicity, then, implies uniqueness of experience that occurs with time as one of its dimensions. Einstein’s theory of relativity gives us the idea of a space-time continuum, where time is an essential aspect of being, and we cannot refer to anything or anyone without referring to the time it exists. If I as a physical body were born into a different time, I would be a different person. If I as a physical body were in a different event, that event would have its own synchronicity, but it would not be the same event as another. Therefore, *when* something comes into being is an essential part of its make-up and identity. What is the nature of this unique event? How have other teachers experienced this synchronicity with their experiences of teaching online? Are we different each time we go online? What insights can we gain from understanding the synchronicity – or asynchronicity – of this experience?

(Re)creation through Virtualization

By means of communications and telepresence technologies we are simultaneously here and there. . . .the virtualization of the body that we are

experimenting with today represents a new stage in the process of self-creation that our species sustains. (Levy, 1998, pp. 37-38)

The challenges of teaching within technology have led me to recreate my teaching self for this new medium. For me, teaching is a calling, a vocation. Being called can be a spiritual experience. Calling is defined as "a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action." To *call in* is "to order to return or to be returned." Teaching is a calling in for me, a return to who I am as a human being; teaching is living intentionally in a rich and meaningful way. Huebner (1999) writes that being called by our vocation is "to be prepared to accept newness and surprise, pain and happiness . . . being called by" (p. 380) the voices of our students. He writes that teaching "offers adventure, an invitation to remain open and vulnerable, and occasions to re-shape and re-compose the story of our life" (p. 382). This inner impulse to re-compose my story has been with me since I was a young child attending school for the first time and "playing school" soon after.

In the face of distance education's turn toward efficiency models for pedagogical models, I struggle to maintain my sense of caring and authenticity as a teacher. As I search for understanding of what kind of teacher I want to be and struggle to become that teacher in an online environment, I turn to Parker Palmer for insights into what it means to be a teacher. Palmer (1998) writes of teaching from within and encourages us to ask the "who" question – "who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes?" (p. 4). With these questions in mind, I ask what it means to sustain good teaching and a learning community in the new learning environments within technology.

Palmer (1998) writes, “Community cannot take root in a divided life” (p. 89). He is referring to our living an authentic life and being authentic teachers, that is, teachers who teach with care and from the heart. Heidegger (1926/1962) relates caring to authenticity and Being. It is caring that makes our existence meaningful. When I teach from my home, my own identity-rich space, my life does not feel divided at all. Is there a sense of a divided life when we teach within the technology? What does it mean to question the authenticity of this experience of teaching within technology? What would it mean to make our teaching more authentic through caring and do this through engaging students’ texts?

I am an able-hearted teacher, mindful of my students as individuals. My heart is in my teaching and in relationships with students for those few months we have together. My teaching relationship with students is characterized by a sense of tactfulness and considerateness, giving caring attention to the unique in my students, the learning situation, and their individual lives. The word *tactful* suggests a careful and smooth handling of people, even a political expediency, and is included in the definition of the word *diplomat*, “a tactful person skilled in managing delicate situations.” I am a diplomat (as I was growing up as an American in foreign countries) with my students. Tactfully, I consider my pedagogical interests in their learning goals as I negotiate their goals with them.

Van Manen (1991) discusses tact at length in his work. A tactful person is able to “read the inner life of the other person” and “interpret the psychological and social significance of the features of this inner life” (p. 125). An interesting connection is to the word contact, from *contingere*, which means “to touch closely” (p. 127). The word

suggests connectedness, being-in-touch, and refers to a close human relationship and intimacy. The notion of tact in an online classroom seems almost a paradox and the tactful virtual teacher an oxymoron. In what ways does an online teacher show pedagogical tact? What lies between diplomacy and tact?

Diplomacy and tact shape a framework through which caring is woven. This caring is a listening with heart. Hultgren (1994) addresses Gadamer's philosophic concern regarding what happens over and above our wanting and doing when she writes: "In the process we disrupt our focus on self and the tension between technological knowing and Being. Instead we look at what makes it possible for caring being called to "Be" (p. 180). Our solipsistic self learns "to move in a more open responsiveness and attunement to the presencing of beings" (Levin, 1985, p. 153). Often we forget that *caring* involves an aspect of sorrow, of grief, of being concerned for, as well as the aspect of nurturing and empathy. Pedagogic care requires that I understand and respect that learning may have painful aspects as well as healing aspects.

As I create learning communities in my online classes, I recall the lessons Palmer (1998) passes to teachers. He reminds us that good teaching is always and essentially communal and that connectedness is the principle behind good teaching. Teaching is relationship.

Phenomenology: A Prism for Reflection

It may seem paradoxical and ironic that a study about virtual teaching would use phenomenology as a method. After all, phenomenology is the study of lived experience. My experience of teaching online has been the compass that has led me to this study and to phenomenology and hermeneutics. I want to know what the very heart of this

experience is – at its very essence. I am mindful of what essence is in a phenomenological study. According to van Manen (2003) who draws from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty,

The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe these structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience. A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience. (p. 10)

My pedagogical questions are my fundamental orientation here. My questions are starting points for this hermeneutic study. Van Manen (2003) writes:

Pedagogy requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretative sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the pedagogic significance of situations and relations of living with [students]. And pedagogy requires a way with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact. (p. 2)

Hultgren (1991) tells us, "Finding out what an experience is like in the words of the one experiencing it creates a new discourse that is empowering" (p. 28). As I follow my compass, I want to know how other virtual teachers experience teaching online. I want to create a community of inquiry with others who have lived this experience. What can we learn from one another? What is the experience of traveling with others, or even alone on this journey? What insights into our teaching can we gain through this journey?

My own lived experiences brought me to a unique junction where a career of part-time teaching and working with technology came together. I eased into this experience with little reflection but much excitement. How would I understand this experience? In what manner did my experiences with technology shape this pathway? What is the meaning of a reflexive life of teaching with computer technology? What have been the

experiences and pathways of other online teachers? **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?**

Teachers approach and adapt to teaching in different ways, whether online or in the traditional classroom. In what way does the experience cause them to understand and develop their teaching identities? What can we learn from one another as we mirror the reflections of one another's identities? How will the experience of performing this study online shape me as teacher and student? How will it shape the other teachers? Where will it take us? Being reflective and mindful will be my North Star as I seek understanding.

I want to know how these teachers know themselves as teachers and whether teaching with technology changes their relationships with students. What is meaning of the experience of trying to reconcile their virtual identities with their classroom identities? What does it mean for them to “be alone” in class? What can we learn from a phenomenological study to help new online teachers overcome these anxieties? In what way do classroom teachers transform themselves into virtual teachers?

I want to know how online teachers experience the space-time continuum in their virtual classrooms. In what way does their sense of time while they are teaching online influence their experiences in the non-virtual world? What is the meaning of making a place in space for themselves? What is their experience of teaching from home or a self-made space?

I want to know how teachers experience their students and how they learn to relate to them with a computer to mediate. In what way do teachers experience the other in a virtual class? What is the meaning of the pedagogical relationship experienced in the

online classes? In what way does this experience of virtual relationship transform their notions of how to teach?

What experiences led other virtual teachers to online teaching? How do the various paths – mainstream or marginal – transform the experiences and successes in teaching within technology? In what way will coming to understand our paths change our identities as teachers and scholars? Paradoxically, my hermeneutic understanding leads me to call it teaching with/in technology as well as teaching using technology as I experience the computer as a tool that enables me to teach and a technology that invites me through the screen and into my own teaching reflections.

As I explore my pedagogical life and write about it, I find my paths leading to this place where I have returned home to my love of text, my love for learning, and my love of traveling. This love of learning includes the learning I experience when I help others learn as well. This journey has brought me to an awareness of being in the world in a different way. This virtualization has led me to know fascinating students and be able to teach and learn with such diversity as I would never experience in a traditional environment. It enables me to continue traveling as long as I have my laptop. Also, it is through virtualization that I have come to a greater appreciation of my sensory experiences. My happy feet are now accompanied by happy fingers, as I type my way to engaging others.

Policy and pedagogical decisions continue to be made based on assumptions that teaching with computer technology is the same as or almost the same as teaching in a classroom. Course design decisions continue to be made based on quantitative research that learning in a technological environment is the same as learning in a classroom. Are

they the same experience? Decisions about preparing teachers to teach with technology are based on assumptions that we can teach others the “best practices” of teaching. Is this all we need to know about teacher preparation? And how do we explain that, even after preparation in best practices, many teachers still take flight from the online classroom or feel like failures in their online classes? Is there really such a thing as “best practices”? Can there be a pedagogy that is best for all? What does this suggest?

The Process of Inquiry

I have chosen a methodology for research that is in harmony with my way of being in the world – of thinking through writing and questioning and trying to orient myself with my lifelong deep interest in teaching and learning. This orientation has brought me to a pedagogic stance in the world, and phenomenology helps me raise the questions to guide my journey. "To do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better to *become* the world" (van Manen, 2003, p. 5).

My map is what van Manen (2003) calls "the methodical structure of human science research," which includes the "dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 31):

- (1) turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize this phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

In this first chapter, I have turned to the lived experience of teaching with/in technology. I have deeply questioned what this experience is like and what it means to be a virtual teacher for myself and other teachers. T. S. Eliot (1914) writes in his philosophical notes for his dissertation that there are no answers outside the experience and there are no questions inside it. By examining my teaching life through the prism of technology, I have stepped outside the experiences to reflect.

Our primary mode of relationship as teachers and students in the virtual classroom is intrinsically textual. Since phenomenological research is a process of writing to think and writing to learn, I will use my writing to think about and explore and learn about this phenomenon. Van Manen (2003) writes, "To write is to measure the depth of things, as well as to come to a sense of one's own depth" (p. 238). This research – a reflection of myself as writer, teacher, student, and researcher – will help me explore, through writing, my way of being in the world – both as teacher and student and writer – integrating these experiences with being a researcher.

The Map of Inquiry

At the center of this phenomenological investigation is the project I have turned to with abiding concern. "To think is to confine yourself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 4). This research is rendered thoughtful and mindful by me as thinker, writer, and researcher. It is my project,

where the many projects of my life and my history have brought me. But I am mindful that no single interpretation of the experience of teaching online ever exhausts the possibility of another. Thus, I turn to the experience of other online teachers. As we share our perspectives, we approach an adequacy of understanding and description – only that. Van Manen (2003) writes, "It is to the extent that *my* experience could be *our* experience that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings" (p. 57).

In chapter two, I explore the phenomenon of teaching with/in technology through the themes and language that emerge through my writing to think about it. Through etymological tracings, metaphors, literature, poetry, and philosophical writings, I explore this experience to make it accessible to others and to write my way toward my own understandings. I also explore other research about teaching within technology to understand other perspectives of this experience: what has been foregrounded and what has been backgrounded, what has been made visible and what has been made invisible.

In chapter three, I describe my methodology and the philosophical foundations for this study. By working with philosophers who have grounded their thinking in theories about place, embodiment, time, relationship, identity, teaching, and technology, I ground my own philosophical thinking to support this phenomenological and hermeneutic exploratory.

In chapter four, I explore the themes and questions about virtual teaching that my study and conversants bring forward, guided by the methodological process suggested by van Manen (2003). I explore with an open mind and able-heartedness, keeping open the question of what it means to be a virtual teacher and what it means to engage students in

online classes. Keeping the question open helps me to be mindful and to reflect constantly on who I am as teacher and researcher; being open to discovering the essence of the experience guides me in understanding the experiences of being a virtual teacher as other teachers and I live them.

In chapter five, I include reflections and insights about this experience and bring forth my understandings and discoveries about the experience of teaching with/in technology and what this suggests for teaching, preparing teachers for the virtual classroom, and informing understanding of satisfying pedagogical relationships in online teaching. I also make recommendations for future research in this area. This last chapter explores several pedagogical issues that have evolved as I reflect on the phenomenon of teaching with/in technology. How does “Being-with” and “Being-in” challenge teacher identity and pedagogy and challenge our practices?

Over the years of teaching online, my personal map followed a pioneer’s journey across new territory, as I was called to explore ways to develop online classes in distance learning programs at universities using intuition, judgment, and previous teaching experiences. However, during the course of this research journey, some of these programs took on a life of their own as they grew to be among the largest online programs in the country, even larger than their established traditional programs. Now, I teach both classes of my own design and classes created by others. Today, even the entrepreneurial online course creators are being overcome by policy decisions to standardize learning, course development, teacher preparation, and pedagogy. These programs challenge our personal maps of inquiry and ways of “being with” our teaching.

CHAPTER TWO

SHAPELESS FORM AND SILENT SOUND: THE TECHNOLOGICAL WAY

The Paradox of Technology

The bright Way looks dim.
 The progressive Way looks retrograde.
 The smooth Way looks rugged.
 High Virtue looks like an abyss.

....

Great sound is silent.
 Great form is shapeless.
 (*Tao Teh Ching 41*, 1961/1989, p. 81)

The words of the Tao are so simple, yet the message is complex and filled with paradoxes, just like working with technology. Technology in education has been seen as a way to save money and educate more students. The way has looked bright; but the way has been dimmed by the problems of access to the technology and education. Technology has seemed to be the progressive way, but many teachers have asked whether we are not going backwards as teachers when we move our classes online. There is silence in the virtual classroom and often great formlessness, and many teachers are paralyzed by what seems to be the abyss.

As a teacher and researcher, I have been drawn to the meaning of experience and now to phenomenology as a result of my interest. To become self-aware so that I may know the depths of my experience has been a conscious goal. The conscious and sub-conscious aspects of mind provide the real territory, and "reality" is but the map of the mind. I know not to confuse the map with the territory. As I study phenomenology, I realize how this way of looking at learning and being is so natural to me. Who I am as a researcher is becoming shaped by my spiritual awareness.

The Taoists see the changes in nature as manifestations of the dynamic interplay of polar opposites – which are not really opposites but different facets of the same experience. The energy in the universe, manifesting itself in material things, can be seen in these different facets. Change and transformation are essential features of nature. We are always changing and transforming.

So it is with teachers and students. Whether we teach in the traditional classroom or with technology, we teach and learn. We are all learning from one another. To be a teacher is to be a learner – to touch lives and souls and be touched by the lives and souls of others. The dynamic balance of learning and teaching is with us always as aware teachers.

Technology has led me to find a home for my passion for teaching and connecting with students in a unique way. Many of my students tell me that online education is one of the best things that ever happened to them. They are eager participants, always already in the virtual classroom, conversing, commenting, and sharing who they are through their photos, personal Web sites, and private information about their lives. They eagerly seek community and seem to find it. They construct their thoughts and experiences deliberately, liberating and weaving them, along with the thoughts of others, into their readings and responses. Their online writing becomes enriched in the way that only hypertext enriches writing and reading. Others are so disoriented and confused that being in an online classroom creates immeasurable anxiety and phobia for them. They will sign up for a class and not attend, risking their grades, tuition, and financial aid. Even after nearly a generation of years since the online revolution, there are many unanswered questions about the seeming paradoxical experiences of both teachers and learners online.

Technology is both a barrier and a means of access to students. The experience of facing student text and relating to students through the medium of text are barriers that often generate a lonely teacher-world. I am constantly balancing in the in-between of the textual space of the online classroom and my own home place. Dwelling in the in-between has become a metaphor for homelessness and motivation for trying to find equilibrium in my teaching identity. What becomes of our teacher identity in this in-between place? What do we virtual travelers take on our journeys through the screen? What do we leave? What do we bring back?

As I turn toward examining the phenomenon of teaching online in more detail and exploring the essential meaning in the experience, I challenge myself to think and perceive differently and to explore the multiple facets of the reflections in the mirror, the reflections of my teacher self and my own practice. Van Manen (2003) tells us, “The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (p. 53). The existentials of lived place, lived body, lived time, and lived relation as suggested by van Manen (2003) enable me to reflect on what it means to be in this space called a virtual classroom with our students’ presence known only through their texts. I reflect on text from my experiences, the experiences of other online teachers, and the voices of philosophers of technology, communication, and lived experience, and others who have explored this phenomenon.

My phenomenological concern is twofold: a preoccupation with the concrete aspects of teaching online (the ontic) and the essential nature of the experience of teaching online (the ontological). By reflecting on the experience as a whole and in its parts, I seek to draw nearer to understanding the nature of the experience as it is

meaningfully experienced. I reflect on what makes a pedagogical existence different from other pursuits and what makes a virtual pedagogical existence different from other pursuits as an educator. To this end, I recall the meaning structures of this experience in such a way that the reader can recognize this experience as a possible understanding of the experience. My phenomenological exploration is guided by my experience as I prepare to teach online and cross over into the virtual world of distance learning.

Standing on the Promises of Technology

The research about distance learning reflects a procedural and positivistic interest in students' learning. Gibson (1998) addresses the demographics, motivations, successes, and failures. Eastmond's (1995) famous study of adult learners in computer conferencing attempts to collect meaningful experiences of students as they engage the textual environment of the computer conference for the first time, but does not address at all the ontological and existential issues of being a distance learner. Eastmond focuses on what students experience as they struggle with learning to use computer technology.

What motivates students to take online courses? According to Gibson (1998), motivations vary but are best understood in terms of barriers that block students from enrolling in traditional, on-campus classes. Among the barriers are geographic distances that make conventional study impractical and being place-bound and time-bound by work, family and community responsibilities, improved access to programs of choice and flexibility of courses, and attraction to innovative learning environments (Gibson, 1998). Most of these students, Gibson tells us, view education as a means to an end rather than as a way of developing themselves. How much of this experience is reflected in the development of online classes? Does online education drive this pre-conceived notion of

efficiency in learning goals? Certainly, the fact that students seem to choose online as a way to get their educations must influence the nature of online learning. Students' expectations shape my own teaching as I struggle to transcend the efficiency that students often expect of me. Do these students who view online education as a way around barriers transform my identity as teacher, my teaching, and their experiences as students? What experiences in this learner-centered, distributed, collective community transform their identities? Is the teacher's identity transformed by this transforming, collaborative, complex identity of the online student? In this collaborative environment, can we separate student and teacher? Does it matter?

Many of my colleagues in online education tell me that they are transforming their traditional classroom teaching after they have taught online. What is it about the experience that leads teachers to re/vision how they teach or who they are as teachers? Do teachers who love the traditional classroom and feel at home in it find a home in their online classes? In what way do they cope with the sensory deprivation caused by the virtualization of the classroom and students? I want to understand this transforming experience. What is this experience like? What is the meaning of our experience as teachers in this environment? What is the path from mainstream classroom teaching to the borderlands of online teaching? Are there maps? What do we need for this journey? Where are the borders?

Many online teachers have begun questioning what it means to teach and be a teacher. They are fearful of the experience, disoriented by the virtual classroom and by not seeing their students in one place, and they experience teaching online as traumatic. They cannot conceive of themselves as able to teach in a virtual classroom, let alone

visualize its terrain and negotiate it. Still others embrace it for many reasons, personal and practical.

A study by Diekelmann, Schuster, Nosek, and Hamilton (2000) emphasizes that few studies look at what happens when teachers from the face-to-face classroom are moved to a technologically mediated learning environment, a change that can be "profound and disturbing, even to those faculty who consider distance delivery 'a good thing' in principle but quail at the individual demands on their time, experience, and ingenuity" (¶1). Few researchers actually talk to these teachers to discover their experiences, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and insights. This study also suggests that when teachers are thrust into new teaching situations while they are learning to use new technologies, they feel like new, inexperienced teachers. In what way does virtualization challenge an identity to that extent? What is the experience of decentering the teaching identity when teachers move to an online classroom, an alien learning environment. Diekelmann et al. believe that these teachers are forced, under pressure, to adapt to the technology and to new course materials and design, while they are deriving and creating new teaching and learning strategies. While Diekelmann et al. examine the new teachers' experiences, the study does not look at the transforming experience wrought by these new technologies.

The constructed teacher identities of these new teachers have become dynamic and virtualized in the process of becoming something greater. Is being a teacher ever static, or is it always dynamic? What is the experience of a dynamic identity, one that, as it is changing, experiences "no identity" in the process of acquiring an identifiably new

identity? What is the essence of this new identity? What is the bridge that leads to this new understanding of self?

Also, current studies are related to best online instructional practices and using learning objectives and instructional design to teach basic competencies in the online courses. We must ask the question: best practices according to whom and for whom? This instrumentalized view ignores both Heidegger's (1952/1977) and Ihde's (2003) concerns about how technology has transformed us into instruments of the technology itself. To paraphrase Ellsworth's (1997) question: Who does the online class, designed with learning objectives rather than students in mind, think I am? Who is the teacher? Who is the student?

I am interested in the experience of seasoned teachers, who, having made the transition from the traditional classroom to the online classroom, have been transformed by the experience of teaching within technology. In what way do we come to see ourselves as teachers once we have "crossed over" as online teachers? What can we learn from these experiences with technology that perhaps will inform our insights into teaching online and creating virtual interfaces? In what way do years of online teaching transform our teacher identities and ways of being with students?

For many instructors, the experience of teaching from home has brought them home. Many teachers describe the importance of being able to teach from their own spaces, where they have their own music and the things that make their place an identity-rich place. They talk about how they feel and what they do when they teach from their own home spaces (Whitesel, 2001). Teaching becomes a home-place activity. In what way does the experience of teaching from home change identity and identity-rich places

transform teaching and learning? What is the experience of having the technology use us in our own homes, our own intimate spaces?

In addition, these teachers speak of how much they learned about themselves as teachers and as people in their online classes. They describe the excitement of having students from all over the world in their classes and conversing with them in the online discussions. It seems they, too, experience a kind of euphoria when they are able to interact and relate to their students successfully through text. What is the experience of bringing our teaching lives to our homes, challenging our sense of being teachers? Can we ever experience going back to being the kind of teachers we once were in a classroom? What is the experience of trying to integrate our performative personalities into a virtual world?

Being Engaged by Technology

The word technology comes from the Greek word *technologia*, which suggests a systematic treatment of something. If we take the word apart, we see the same root as the word *techne*, a word used by the Greeks to refer to the technical skills and knowledge used in the artistic process (Webster's, 1996). The definition expands to include the interrelation of these technical skills and knowledge "with life, society, and the environment", a popular use by the Greeks and implicit in Aristotle. Thus, research into teaching with technology may embrace questions arising from aspects of *the world* within which we find ourselves, the *being-in* relationship, and the *being* who is in the relationship. Heidegger (1926/1962) certainly sees these as aspects of the fundamental question about the meaning of Being. How might our experiences of the *techne* of teaching and the *techne* of teaching within technology reveal something about the

meaning of Being? What is revealed when we teach within technology and within our relationship with technology? What relationship comes of being-with technology?

Carl Mitcham (2003) writes that Heidegger believed that the worldhood of the world comes into view through technical engagements and that being-with is a central feature of this. These tools and our engagements with them do not have much meaning by themselves, but are primarily social in nature. In other words, a computer and the software of the classroom interface mean little if we are not using them to teach and to learn. When we engage the *techne* of teaching and use a computer, we are both being-with technology and being-with others through technology. In this process, we make up new words and metaphors or use familiar words and metaphors in new contexts. This *techne*, then, becomes a technology of its own, a language of technology. In what way can an understanding of this technological language lead us to understanding the experience of teaching online?

Heidegger (1952/1977) writes that *techne* and technology are modes of truth-making, of revealing and bringing forth “whatever does not bring itself forth and does not lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another” (p. 13). Although Heidegger does not include computer technology in his analysis of technology and our relationship to it, his insights into how we relate to our technologies are revealing. Computer technology is both a means and a way of revealing. As I ponder my research and the many questions surrounding our use of technology in teaching, I question my experiences of this technology that instrumentalizes teaching and learning. Moreover, I question the ways in which this technology instrumentalizes our relationships in the classroom and masks identities whose social relationships become

“functions.” Do we really have virtual relationships that work both for us as teachers and for our students? What is the nature of these instrumentalized relationships? Where are the promises and where are the lies?

Following Heidegger’s insights, O’Donohue (1999) suggests that being immersed in a technology leads to an opening and presencing experience. He writes that many forms of technology extend our human presence over great distances and bring the absent one nearer. This is certainly true for computer technology, where we have email and our online classes ready-to-hand for communication. In fact, they seem to bring our students and others closer to us since the communication seems so immediate. Are we really closer as we immerse ourselves in the online class? Or do we distance ourselves even farther?

Most technology, however, attempts to explain life in terms of function. Increasingly, when we approach something new our first question is about how it functions. Our culture is saturated with information, which stubbornly refuses to come alive with understanding. . . We learn to close ourselves off, and we think of our souls and minds no longer as a presence but more in terms of apparatus and function. (O’Donohue, 1999, p. 75)

Being Summoned by Technology

Heidegger (1952/1977) warns us that modern technology challenges us to order the real as “standing reserve” in the way it shows itself. This standing reserve is a calling-forth, a demanding summons, called *Enframing*, that “assembles and orders” for use (p. 19). Our creating objects and storing them for use creates an obsession for making consumable objects and promotes compartmentalization. Often, in spite of attempts to avoid compartmentalizing my students’ responses, after hours of working online, I find myself skimming through their texts, compartmentalizing their texts in terms of their parts and places in the online classroom, and not seeing the wholeness or continuity in a

student's thinking. The text itself, broken up into topics and responses, indeed, fragments students' thinking.

What is the nature of this demanding summons for those of us who teach with/in technology? In what way do those of us who have been teaching online many years cease to heed these warnings about how we use the technology? Is there a framework for understanding how this ordering can be restructured anew each time the computer is used? To view our teaching and our students as "standing reserve," as compartmentalized parts being assembled for use, has profound consequences for education and relationships. What might we need to know to be mindful of our uses of technology in the online classroom? What might be the essence of this experience?

Being Addressed by Technology

Irwin (2002) writes about how computer technologies seem to make sense to people who use them for specific reasons. She explains how the audience is there for a reason and those who create the technologies know there is an audience. She describes how the notion of mode of address originates in film theory and that the audience/viewer has to accept certain characteristics of the technologies and enter into a particular relationship with them. As teachers, we do the same. Supposedly, the technology helps us to do our tasks more efficiently and quickly. What is the phenomenological significance of framing our teaching selves with/in our computer technologies? Who does this efficient technology say that I am?

These notions provide us with "a dual mode of address system to focus upon when contemplating pedagogy. How does one address students, each with their separate and distinct experiences with technology, as they enter into a relationship" (Irwin, 2002,

p. 79) with their own computers and the virtual classroom each and every time? How do these students, then, address me with my own relationship with technology? This suggests certain ethical considerations for presence in online classes. Students ask, “Who does the teacher think I am?” Teachers ask, “Who do the students think I am?” Both are asking, “Who does the technology think I am?” In what way does the technology think and perceive being? Somewhere in the balance and the paradoxes, we may find one another.

Being Embodied in Technology

The idea of teaching with/in technology tickles my fantasy. What is this experience of entering my computer to imagine myself within it? While I do not see myself sitting within a technological command station, in fact, I am. I am sitting at my computer desk surrounded by my computer, monitor screen, and keyboard, all necessary to take me to class. At the same time, my mind enters the text through the screen and is framed by the monitor. Although my eyes seem to see through the screen, my fingers on the keyboard actually place me within my text somewhere on the screen. I am here and there as well as in and out. How can this be? Sometimes, when I step back and consciously think about what I am doing, I think, “Beam me up, Scotty!”

Ihde (2002) writes, “We *are* our body in the sense in which phenomenology understands our motile, perceptual, and emotive being-in-the world. . . . But we are bodies in the social and cultural sense, and we experience that, too” (p. xi). In the first sense, he calls this *body one*, the existential body of living, the body that locates our experiences and the body that is the constant in all our experiences. This is my body that feels the cramping in the neck and pain in the hands as I type. This is the body that

perceives my living environment and situates my knowledge. This is the body that taught me embodiment and how to be actively in the world.

In the second sense, this *body two* is not a biological body, but a culturally constructed body. These culturally constructed aspects of our bodies are located as part of our bodily significance. We pass from *body one* to *body two* when we have an embodiment relation, that is, “the relation of experiencing something in the world through an artifact, a technology” (Ihde, 2002, p. xi). When we sit in our chairs at our computers and, with our dancing fingers on the keyboard as extensions of our bodies, minds, and thoughts as we type, we traverse between *body one* and *body two*. We enter a third dimension, the dimension of the technological. What does my body bring to the experience when I am in virtual space? What is the nature of this technological, third dimension? What happens to my identity as teacher when I am in this technological dimension? Where are my two bodies while in this dimension? Where am I in the transition?

Paul Levinson (1985) notes that technologies pass through three stages. First, they are toys or novelties. Then, novelty can be transformed into the second stage, that of technology as mirror of reality. It is here that technology takes on a fascinating quality. The connection between the virtual classroom and the audience for it, students and teacher, creates a reality perception that is a fundamentally objective, group process. When we are in the virtual classroom, do we morph into a collective presence? In what way do we adapt collectively to our technology? How does this affect teaching and learning? What is the experience of having the technology adapt to us? What is the experience, then, of being alone, but together? Am I together? Without some feedback,

some translation of the experience, there would be no technological relationship. As I use the technology, so does the technology use me. Who do I become when this computer technology and this interface use me? What is the meaning of my becoming “standing reserve” for the online classroom? What is the experience of instrumentalizing in this relationship? In what way can we “inspirit” our teaching, as Aoki (1990) would say?

Ted Aoki (2005c) suggests that we may be overwhelmed and drowning in our technology as we try to integrate it into our curriculum. He ponders whether we are able to encounter ourselves as authentic beings when we encounter ourselves as “standing reserve.” We are “interchangeable units ready for application in a complex technological world of instrumental action” (p. 12). My role as teacher becomes one of manipulating the online classroom and activities that are written into the course. The role of the students is to perform the activities requested of them. Our relationship becomes mediated somewhere in the intersection. If I am already dwelling in-between as teacher, where am I when I teach within that third dimension of technology? Aoki echoes Heidegger when he asserts that technology is a revealing and a concealing:

But by so becoming [standing reserve], man tends to be forgetful of his own essence, no longer able to encounter himself authentically. Hence, what endangers man where revealing as ordering holds sway is his inability to present other possibilities of revealing. In this, it is not computer technology that is dangerous; it is the essence of the computer technology that is dangerous. (p. 153)

Students and teachers alike miss the authentic encounter, then, through the ordering of their engagement through the technology. As we ask about the essence of computer technology, we may be asking: what is the experience of dwelling in-between as teacher in this revealing and concealing place? As I cross over to my virtual classroom, my mind enters the third dimension of technology.

Crossing Over

It's time to go to class. I get my glass of tea and a jug of water. Is there any fruit in the frig? Ah. An apple — there's the cheese. Don't forget the baker's chocolate and some walnuts. Maybe I'm ready now. As I move toward my office, my mind moves ahead to my computer workstation and the tasks at hand. Which class first? Did I make notes about what I did yesterday or the day before? Where did I leave off? Seems like I'm lost already. The room is a bit too warm right now. The air conditioning is not quite working here. Move the cat and put on some music. Yes, Gregorian Chants. That will help me relax and tune out everything so I can work. Work? I thought this was teaching. . . Might as well settle in. It's got to be done. My hands and shoulders ache as I think about this.

I log on to the computer, type in my identity and my secret password. I wait for the computer to "authorize" me, to reify my existence. Without a proper and precise naming, I'm not recognized nor am I recognizable. Ah! I'm in! I click on my class and enter the virtual software that serves as a classroom for my 25 students and me. I scroll through the responses posted by my students. On the surface, the responses all look alike and are located in the same place, in our conference. I'm mesmerized by the text scrolling before me. Geez, so many responses to read! My mind begins to reconstitute what my eyes are seeing. I'm trying to make sense of all the text here. Where do I start? My mind's eye gazes through the monitor into the virtual classroom, anticipating student responses. I begin visualizing my class, zoning out and zoning in - seamlessly transitioning. . . (Whitesel, Reflections)

Many teachers report a zoning in and out when they are working in their online classes (Whitesel, 2001). They describe a zoning out of the world around them and an immersion in their thinking and reading in their online classes. They often put on music and background sounds to make the transition easier and to background their bodies. To become present, the mind dissociates from the body, backgrounding the aches and pains of sitting too long without activity. But the mind experiences such an exhilarating sense of freedom and creativity that the subsequent bodily discomforts seem bearable.

One of the puzzles to me is why all teachers do not feel this flow. Some report the flow, while others report anxiety, distress, anger, procrastination, and even a desire to run away. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes this flow experience as having an optimal

experience, an experience so gratifying that we often are willing to engage in dangerous activities to bring back the feeling. He describes the common characteristics of optimal experience:

. . . a sense that one's skills are adequate to cope with the challenges at hand, in a goal-directed, rule-bound action system that provides clear clues as to how well one is performing. Concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant, or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted. (p. 71)

We know that many teachers do feel inadequate working with technology and this may explain some of the distress. I often experience this flow, but not always. And there are many instances where I am frustrated by the time it takes for the classroom data base to respond to my "commands." After I had been working online for many years, I began to lose my sense of flow in the online classroom. Where did it go? What happened to change this experience? I want to know whether other experienced teachers even have a sense of flow. If so, do they lose it? If they do lose it, do they ever get it back? What has happened to my source of energy after I spend so much teaching time in virtual classrooms? What does this teach us about the loss of physical contact with our students?

Rituals for Passage

The fundamental efficacy of ritual practice lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things. (Bell, 1997, p. xi)

The ritual makes creation over again. (Eliade, 1963, p. 346, emphasis in the original)

As I prepare for class, I am aware that I want certain food and drink to take with me. Before I can get myself in the proper mood to go to my home office and cloister myself away to work, I have to prepare. I get my drinks, my tea and my jug of water. I look for some easy snacks, like fruit, nuts, and cheese. In my traditional classroom, I

usually bring a bottle of water or a cup of tea, specifically a fragrant tea like Earl Green, a green tea with bergamot flavoring added to it. It is important to me to take comfort food and drink in some form. *Comfort* (from the Middle English) suggests a strengthening aid, a feeling of relief or encouragement, or to give strength and hope to (*Merriam Webster's*, 1974).

Rituals are rites of passage, ceremonies that mark a change in social status and “dramatize such major events as birth, coming-of-age initiations for boys and girls, marriage, and death” (Bell, 1997, p. 94). These rites of passage embody meaning and narrative for a culture or a group of people. Often when I am about to enter my virtual class, I mark my transition with food and drink, for me a rite of hospitality, a clear sign that I am about to change my status. What is this new status about?

My assumptions about these rituals are that I need comfort food and a sense of strengthening or encouragement before I go online or when I make the trip. Often, I have to overcome my natural reluctance to sit at the computer, tension in my neck and hands, eyes straining to read the monitor. Perhaps the comfort food is a way of backgrounding my body so that my mind can fly free to class. I can distract my body from the usual discomforts of sitting in a tight chair at the workstation for long periods of time as long as I have something to nibble on. Perhaps the snacks appease the discomfort I know I am about to inflict on my body. One explanation that rings true is that my mind knows I am about to enter a world of sensory deprivation. The variety of aromatic and strong tasting foods keeps me grounded in this world. Comfort foods are often associated with home and being home. In addition to special foods, what other rituals create a sense of home? If

I am sitting at home and going to class, why does this experience feel as though I am leaving home? Where am I going? My active body rebels against sitting for long periods.

Lawlor (1997) reminds us that we are all seeking home in some way and that “home offers a practical setting for fostering soul in concrete ways” (p. 16). He writes that we bring soulfulness to our daily lives when we bring care and positive regard to our daily actions. Creating rituals that make my own home workspace more personal and special to me helps me find the soul in my work and keeps my soul mindful. Being able to work from home gives me opportunities to work with a personal style and my own sense of soulfulness. The rituals give me the sense of preparing myself and my space for important soulful work. “Work,” writes Lawlor, “is a means of expressing the spirit [and] a setting that encourages soulful work honors the particular qualities of consciousness that a person offers through his or her vocation” (p. 149).

I have pondered ways to create ritual for my students online. I wonder whether finding successful ways to make the class hospitable to them and to mark their transition to the class as a rite of passage would improve student presence in the class. What can I do to give students a sense of hospitality and passage?

Having these rituals gives me a sense of (re)creation as does each and every class each semester. The word create suggests a new beginning, something unique coming into being, and is related to the word crescent, associated with the moon and a sense of growing or increasing, suggests something dynamic and evolving. When I create, I bring into being something unique and dynamic. The word re-create means to create anew, to form anew in the imagination, to give new life or freshness, and comes from the Latin *recreato*, which also suggests recreation or refreshment of strength and spirits after work

(*Merriam Webster's*, 1974). Why is recreation usually seen as an after-work activity and not as a pre-work or work activity? Can recreation and work ever be synonymous? I often think of teaching as recreation, a renewing of my imagination, creative work that inspires me, a giving new life and freshness to my passion for writing and teaching writing, a refreshment of strength and spirits. However, I am ambivalent about whether teaching within technology offers this same refreshment. As my body aches and becomes fatigued, I reflect that this fatigue is somehow different from the fatigue I feel when my traditional class is over. In what way does teaching within technology mediate that creativity and passion?

Teaching online, which relies on writing, can become such an opportunity for renewal, for refreshing ways to teach writing, and to write and share my passion for writing. But I also think of teaching online as physical work since my body and mind often seem reluctant to do this. Perhaps the rituals of preparing to teach offer me another moment of procrastination; perhaps I perform them religiously to prepare my way for settling into doing what I believe to be important and sacred work. Being able to go to class from my own creative, soulful place has changed my sense of being a teacher. Not only have I become less “controlling” of what happens in the classroom, but I have had to turn over to the students more of the responsibilities of learning. Out of necessity in the online classroom, students must define their own learning more clearly. And I must help them do this.

Rituals for Recreation

In addition to the physical rituals I perform to sanctify my own workspace and tasks, I have rituals that I have written for the online class, rituals that focus on being

welcoming and reducing the uncertainty of the virtual experience. Ritually, I send a welcome email to my students a day or so before class starts. I post welcome messages in the classroom, so that when students log on to the class, they will see my verbal presence welcoming them. Perhaps the class will not feel quite so empty. I post a map of the class, describing to students where I put things, such as announcements, changes in the syllabus, descriptions of their projects, and discussion questions and topics. I describe what kinds of activities they can expect in my classes, such as discussions, graded assignments, and projects. In the first week's conference discussion, I post a note asking students to introduce themselves, and I introduce myself, setting a tone for the class. I also post a special question about our topic so that important questions the first week or two about the syllabus and expectations may not be lost deep within the threads, the threaded discussions that will soon overwhelm us with their sheer volume.

Catherine Bell (1997) describes the rituals of passage as a basic genre of ritual action. Rites of passages are ceremonies, she writes, that accompany and dramatize such major events as birth, coming-of-age initiations for boys and girls, marriage, and death, but they also frequently mark other socio-cultural transitions. Arnold van Gennep (1960) sees all rituals as a three-stage process where the person leaves behind one social group and its social identity to pass through a stage of no identity or affiliation before one is admitted into another social group that confers a new identity. Passage suggests an interim stage, a being-between stage of passing from one place or condition to another, a crossing over (*Merriam Webster's*, 1974). How can there be no sense of identity or affiliation? What is the transitional experience of leaving one group or class and passing into another group or class where my own identity has yet to be formed or constructed, or

is in the process of constant reconstruction? In what way is this experience different when I am with my family physically, but mentally there in the virtual classroom, with or without students? My rituals help me make the transition from my family living to the often estranged virtual social world online.

My own experiences suggest to me that the stage where we are between two social groups is a stage for inward reflection on where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going. It is a place where we can develop our own individual rituals that celebrate where we have been and who we have been; where we are and who we are; and where we are going and who we may be becoming. These individual rituals are not much different from other social rituals. They enable the passage into the virtual classroom and help me feel comfortable in this new territory. Often, this in-between is a place of frustration as I wait for the virtual classroom to display on the screen. Ted Aoki (2005b) would say that as a teacher, I am always in some in-between place, always between curriculum-as-plan and situated curriculum. Sometimes, it is a time to reflect on what needs to be done that day. Could it also be a place of nostalgia, a place to pine for lost places, as Edward Casey (1997) suggests?

As I nestle down in the transition between social groups and between classes, where I have left but have not yet arrived, I sit alone in my office at home with my computer, books, and notes. I think about what I have learned from past courses; I think about what I will do differently in the next classes. I listen to the noises in the woods surrounding our house. I bring myself back to prepare for yet another journey. I even get excited about being able to “design” a new class, a new learning environment.

Each class offers a new social group and new growth for me as teacher. I honor this with the rituals. Change is often disconcerting and, although I have enjoyed change over my lifetime, it nonetheless decenters me and leaves me, for a short time, feeling “in-between.” Sometimes I have projects that I want to complete in this “in-between” time. I always have classes to get ready during this time. Sometimes I feel “rootless” when I am not teaching and have this meaningful purpose to ground me. Can I get stuck in the in-between stage? What happens to teachers who never make the transition? How can our insights and understandings of ritual help new online teachers make the transition to their new status as online teacher? Where is this stage of “no identity” and how can we prepare for it? How does an online teacher develop this new identity and who confers it?

Teachers often do not directly think about the rituals *as* rituals before they commence to teach their online classes, but their lived descriptions often come with details of what they do in advance of going to class (Whitesel, 2001). Some teachers report that they prepare drinks to take along. Others describe how they prepare special places, such as a garden or a patio, to set up the laptop and connect to the class or to grade papers. Still others describe how they carefully select music to better focus on their students and their texts. I have taken great care to position my desk with a window view that has meaning for me.

My own food and drink preparations seem to be part of my sense of hospitality and being comfortable. I associate refreshments with feeling at home and enjoying the company of others. In my traditional classroom, I often bring snacks for my students and invite them to bring something to share with others. These are rituals I have learned from other teachers and my parents as we traveled the world, and I am passing on a tradition.

Perhaps the preparation of tea and fruit is a remembrance and celebration that I am about to embark on an identity-changing experience each time I enter my virtual classroom.

Parker Palmer (1993) writes that because the learning space may sometimes be painful, it must have an element of hospitality:

Hospitality is not an end in itself. It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage, and yield. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur – things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. (p. 74)

It makes sense to wonder whether my engagement with students' texts rather than with their persons can offer such an identity-altering experience. I realize over the years of being in a traditional classroom that the embodied experiences of being in a classroom with others, as student and as teacher, have changed me and my way of being in the world. In the years of teaching online, I have become attuned to how important rituals of welcome are and spend more time creating them. Teaching from home has attuned me to feeling more thoughtful and reflective where I can stop my busy body and think.

The Door – Or Is It a Wall?

How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to reopen, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life. (Bachelard, 1994, p. 224)

As I settle into my desk chair in front of my computer, I notice the warmth in the office and my body begins to subconsciously rebel against sitting in the chair and squeezing its active self into a nearly immovable position. I know that once I get involved in the class, I will not notice my body – I will be zoning, in the flow. And when I emerge from the virtual classroom, my back will ache and my neck will feel cramped. My hands

will ache where I have been using the thumbs to strike the space bar on the computer. Sometimes this door into my classroom seems more like a wall.

Richard Lang (2000) describes the door metaphorically as the transition between the familiar to the unfamiliar. He describes doors to our houses, to our rooms, and to other dwelling places. He describes these doors in terms of being solid and providing a passageway from inside to the outside, as well as ways that protect the isolation and exclusivity of the inside from the intrusion of the outside. Our notion of dwelling, he writes, is the most taken-for-granted aspect of human existence, and the primary center of human habitation is the home. Our home is our second body and our experience of it is incorporated and assimilated into the fabric of our embodied existence. Is my online class a second body? It often feels like that. My teaching is so much a part of me that my classes, both traditional and online, feel as though they are extensions of me. The paradox of having a second body, albeit virtual, is a fertile imaginary space for my teaching imagination.

My teaching from home influences my being-in-the-world. Heidegger (1971) writes, “Dwelling...is the basic character of Being” (§ 44), and thinking belongs to dwelling just as building belongs to dwelling. My dwelling and teaching in the same place belong together. As I dwell in my teaching, so do I dwell in my office space. Before teaching online, I gave little thought to where I taught or whether I could “build” a classroom beyond arranging chairs in a circle. Now I think about it each time I go to class. I think about my office space and how it is important for the space to be just right and have certain colors (I favor teals, rose, corals, and beige). We have remodeled space for me; this space is large, airy, with French patio doors that lead directly to the woods.

With windows on three sides, my L-shaped desk sits under a window and near the door, next to a sofa and chair for relaxing and bookcases. This attention to where I teach led me to examine and re-examine the way I set up the online classes, always looking for insights into making the classroom more comfortable and inviting, the materials more accessible. Lawlor (1997) elaborates this connection:

A setting that encourages soulful work honors the particular qualities of consciousness that a person offers through his or her vocation. Furniture, equipment, qualities of light, color, texture, space, artwork, and time are the elements used to create a place for working that is receptive to soul. (pp. 149-150)

What is the furniture in the online classroom? I use colors, space, and even artwork to enhance its character and soulfulness. How can virtual space be made soulful? Do we attune ourselves to color, technologized text, and computer graphics as place?

The relationship between my first home, my body, and my second home, where I live and work, is now connected. When I pass successfully through the virtual door into the virtual classroom, my body feels quite at home for a time. Other teachers have reported the phenomenon of feeling very intimate in their own homes as they go to class. This feeling of harmony opens me up to “hear” student voices in their texts. Other teachers speak of how this intimacy helps them to overcome barriers of distance as they turn to constructing their online classes as welcome places for them to be (Whitesel, 2001).

Other teachers experience this psychological wall when they do not want to go to class on a particular day, but feel they need to. In the early years of teaching online, when the technology was much less reliable, it felt like an unshakable wall, one I did not have the energy to confront and scale. Today, the technology is more reliable as is digital communication, and I rarely feel the wall that suddenly constructs itself when the

technology is not working. But I do feel the wall often when my body does not want to be pinned in the chair or I wish I were elsewhere. Until my body becomes a cyber body without limitations, I will have to overcome this barrier in another way. As with other activities, developing a discipline in getting to class is all it takes. It seems simple.

Saving face. In the traditional classroom, if I did not show up, I would “lose face” somehow. At some point, I would have to “show myself” to my students, and they would see me as negligent of my responsibilities. So I must go to class to “save face.” But in an online classroom, I do not lose face. Students do not even know when I am there unless I leave a trace, some response to them. Knowing that I will not be seen makes not going to class somehow a little easier. But, over time, the urgent feeling of not being in class takes over and I have to “face” the necessity of going to class. Sometimes the feelings of guilt and negligence lead me to feel bad about myself as a teacher. When teachers do not want to be online, they report feeling angry about having to go to class, but feel compelled by “saving face” to check into their classes (Whitesel, 2001).

One puzzling phenomenon reported by administrators is the situation where an online teacher will simply disappear without a trace. This teacher may simply stop showing up in his online class one day. We assume he hit the “wall,” an expression used in running to mean that the runner loses all sense of purpose, energy, and motivation, and cannot keep going. The individual met an obstacle that could not be overcome and simply stopped going to the virtual class. However, since no one follows up with these teachers or tracks them down, we really do not know what they experience and why they disappear. Based on my own experience and the experience of others documented in my pilot study (2001), I can speculate that the teachers “missing in action” cannot find their

way around the virtual classroom and cannot keep up with the discussions and requirements. They are overwhelmed, alienated from their students and themselves as teachers, and perhaps feel guilty and lose face with themselves. If my face is lost, where does it go? The fact that we speak of these teachers with the term “missing in action” speaks to our feelings that the classroom is a war zone and we are wounded or captured by the enemy. Who is the enemy? How do the “war zone” feelings and imagery change us as teachers? For me and some other teachers, feeling as though I am in a war zone generates a feeling of dissatisfaction with myself as teacher; my students then seem to be barriers to overcome, or even enemies, rather than people who need my assistance. I lose my sense of purpose for teaching and think about leaving the profession. Sometimes I have a strong feeling of being wounded at heart and a prisoner of the educational wars.

Disappearing without a trace requires skills and some knowledge of how to do this. Richmond (1986) asks what motivates reasonable people to make the severe, difficult, and often painful choice of complete detachment. He tells us that people disappear for a number of reasons – legal, financial, or psychological – and the strongest motivation for disappearing is usually psychological, some way of dealing with life’s difficult situations. The persons who disappear often have decided that they no longer care to do battle with something that is not worth the fight. In general, Richmond writes, deliberate disappearance is a defensive reaction to overwhelming and intolerable social pressures. Are we speaking of losing face, perhaps? Perhaps the disappearing teacher is in pursuit of finding his lost face. Many of those who disappear are not able to cope with the stark reality of dis/placement, nor do they find it easier to deal with the problems of not having a home. Being dis/placed is about being driven from one’s place or replaced.

We even have a phrase “displaced person” which connotes refugee status. People who disappear often have a strong fear of reconnecting with their past.

Among the reasons for people’s disappearing are dual identities, boredom, and frustration (Richmond, 1986) – all of which may have some phenomenological significance for those who teach online. Another fascinating reason for disappearing is amnesia, which may also have some phenomenological significance for this study. Amnesia suggests forgetfulness or a loss of memory due to brain injury, shock, fatigue, repression, or illness, or the “loss of a large block of interrelated memories.” Memories are often recalled when we smell or taste something familiar that is tied to a memory, two senses not present online. Perhaps these missing senses explain why our memories online seem fragmented. What are the memories that get obliterated? Do we online teachers experience a kind of amnesia when we go online to teach? What is the experience of “forgetting” to go to class?

In my many years of preparing online teachers, I have been puzzled by the many teachers who drop out of the workshops. While it is easier to determine who will drop out of the workshops, I cannot predict with certainty who will drop out of teaching during the first weeks of an online class. To some degree, those of us who stay with the online teaching, but experience the hesitations about going to class, the agonizing procrastination about visiting the online classes, are potential drop-outs. We stick with it long enough to see the short semester reach an end. Then, we drop out for awhile to this transitional in-between place until the next class. Realizing that we are all potentially disappearing types undermines our professional confidence or makes us mindful.

Teachers who report they would never consider not showing up for a traditional class often procrastinate about visiting their virtual classes (Whitesel, 2001).

According to the communication theorist, Stella Ting-Toomey (2005), our concerns about saving face are more complex in high-context cultures, cultures in which most of the information communicated is located in the physical context or internalized in the person, but little is in the encoded, explicit part of the message. These cultures are usually collectivistic cultures. Losing face entails being humiliated and embarrassed. Saving face means finding a way to avoid humiliation and embarrassment. What insights can this theory of “saving face” bring to our understanding of what happens to teachers online? In what way is our online class experienced as a collectivistic culture? In what way are our online experiences similar to intercultural experiences, as “high-context” or “low-context” cultures? In what manner can this inform our online teaching?

It is not clear where the expression “saving face or losing face” comes from, but, according to folk etymology, it may date to an eighteenth century custom of wearing heavy makeup. When noble ladies and gentlemen would sit too close to the fire with heavy facial make up, the make up would melt. Guards were placed over the fireplaces to “save face.” The presence of make up suggests a mask. What about the teaching experience causes the mask to melt away or stay in place? How might losing face and mask lead to authentic teaching presence?

Carving space. Schafer (2000) describes how we incorporate, through the initiative of the active body, the foreign reality of what is unfamiliar. We bring it into our homes, into our corporeal existence. He describes the home as the intimate hollow we have carved out of the anonymous, the alien. What is the nature of the computer space

that has been hollowed out of the familiar within my home? I have long thought that coming to school by sitting in my own room, with my familiar memories, music, smells, and objects enriches this experience for me. Other teachers report this phenomenon as well. In one study (Whitesel, 2001), all teachers report that they surround themselves at home with what is important to them and are aware of going to class from their own spaces, created by them to make them comfortable. Most of the online students come to class from their own identity-rich homes as well. In what manner do our homes affect our feelings of being in class as teachers and students? Does it matter where teachers set up their computers from which to teach? Does the technology with its alien and anonymous qualities invade our personal spaces, or do we simply carve out some space from within our spaces to accommodate the technology? I know that when I am reluctant to sit down to the computer to work and teach, this reluctance affects my engagement in class. I am restless, impatient with the time it takes to be in the online classroom reading through student responses. My body rebels and my mind follows. What do we do in our traditional classrooms to overcome this reluctance? Do we experience reluctance the same way in each of these teaching environments? Does it matter whose computer we teach on or only where we go to class from?

In his essay on the phenomenology of transition, Richard Lang (2000) writes that it is the labor of caretaking that turns a place into a home, into a place that addresses us as familiar and belongs to us. Our active bodies perform this magic at a primitive level without the assistance of conscious thought. As the body communes with the space we call home, the atmosphere becomes warm and intimate. Perhaps we experience enough warmth to lose face and mask. The room allies itself with the body and the home

becomes a second body. As we prepare a home in our online classes for our students and their learning, are we preparing a third home? In what way do we experience a kind of dissociation from our bodies? Are we furnishing “rented” space, space created by another teacher, or are we building our own space?

Alphonso Lingus (1994) writes about the nausea one feels when one sleeps in the bedsheets of another. Our beds, he writes, are the most intimate sites in our homes, a nocturnal and erotic place. When we sleep in the bed of another whose body has been assimilated to the sheets, we feel a sense of indecency and repulsiveness. He writes that this nausea is the flesh’s revolt against what is not of itself. Some teachers often report a dizzying vertigo when they are asked to teach an online class developed by another teacher, while others happily acclimate to another’s class by sharing their own ideas and intellectual conversations with colleagues through their class materials. What intimate traces are left in the lecture and class materials created by one teacher that another teacher finds so repulsive? What experiences prepare us happily to share a class developed by others and to assimilate their ideas into our own? Why are some teachers never able to work with another teacher’s materials without difficulty?

Not all teachers bother to create a sense of hospitality, and perhaps this may explain why some teachers have difficulties with feeling at home in the online classroom. Some of the teachers I spoke with in my pilot study post very little in the online classroom, preferring not to take the time to put the chairs into the virtual circle. These teachers also report the most difficulty in accepting the online classroom as a viable learning environment. They also report little interaction in the classroom, preferring instead to leave students to their own devices and interact with the students through one-

way comments on their written assignments. The intellectual discussion is limited to a question-answer format. What does it mean to make the doors swing wide? What is the experience of having little invested in the online classroom? Does this speak to distance education issues? Or are we seeing a much deeper attitude or philosophy about teaching? In what manner can the teacher project or fail to project her fundamental teaching identity in the virtual classroom?

Crossing thresholds. According to Heidegger (1971), it is the threshold that bears the between. What goes out and what goes in are joined in the between's dependability. The threshold sustains the middle and is the central structure of the door. Mircea Eliade (1959) writes about existential space thought of as sacred space. "The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where these worlds communicate, where passage . . . becomes possible" (p. 25). There is a temporal dimension to the threshold of passing over to the virtual classroom. Here, my presence stands in the present with my working space around me, ready to move into the past and the present, as in my mind, I pass through the doorway into the classroom. There, in the classroom, I experience time past as I read through the words of students who were in class hours or even days ago. My present and presence morph into a time that seems to be somewhere in-between. My own history, remembrances from my past and the past of others, is there as I review what I have written to and for students. I can cross the threshold of their text and experience that in-between place. Our human dialogue, even in technologized text, is a crucial aspect of our threshold symbolism.

At the same time, the door's threshold tells us that we are separate in time and space and that we have an outside and an inside. Lang (2000) writes of the tragic dimension of existence as symbolized in the undeniable limits of life and the final threshold, death's door. Perhaps we have some Jungian predisposition for interpreting the threshold of passing into the classroom in some way as a division in the space between our reality and our virtual classroom, and we hesitate to cross over, not knowing what awaits us. The word hesitation connotes not acting because of fear or indecision. What causes this fear? What decision do we wish not to make? The word hesitate comes from the Latin *haesitare*, meaning to falter, and *haerere*, meaning to stick. Is it possible that our archetypal understandings of thresholds and doorways lead us to hesitate or falter before we leap into our virtual classrooms? How do we become unstuck at this threshold? Why do some teachers falter and stick while others seem to cross on wings?

The Looking Glass Door

Lang (2000) writes that in modern times we have tried for continuity between buildings and surroundings, between what is on either side of the threshold. We have achieved this, he asserts, with flowing space, continuity between inside and outside. Modern doors have become windows. And he asks how our experiences of doorways have altered this new architectural concept. By standing before a glass door we are simultaneously in two places at once, visibly present inside as well as outside. He notes, "While transparent doors solve a functional problem of accessibility, they also obscure the significance of transition" (p. 208). How might the glass window of the computer screen be the doorway that obscures the transition? And can the glass window be only

one way? When I see in, I also reflect out, back to me. How, then, do I perceive being in and being out at the same time?

Lang (2000) directly addresses the issue of modern technology as one of modern thresholds and modern notions of architecture. He claims that modern technology has provided us with unimaginable freedom of movement. I do experience teaching online as a freedom of movement of sorts. And the online classroom does challenge our notions of what a classroom looks like and is. In what way is this different from our traditional notions of classrooms? In what manner do these modern notions change or shape our notions of teaching and learning? What is the nature of this “unimaginable freedom of movement,” and what are the pedagogical and phenomenological consequences of this experience?

The computer screen can be seen as a glass door. Schafer (2000) tells us that glass shatters our human sensorium, that it “divides the visually perceived world from its aural, tactile and olfactory accompaniments. Or rather, it substituted new accompaniments to the accentuated habit of looking” (p. 97). This glass doorway both gives me access to my online class as well as mediates my direct experience of the online world. Sometimes when the light is right, I can look at my computer glass and see myself reflected. But when I cross through the screen, I am refracted and fragmented in some ways. What are these new accompaniments to the habit of looking?

Sherry Turkle (1997) writes, “We came to see ourselves differently as we catch sight of our images in the mirror of the machine” (p. 9). She is referring both to our relationships with technology in general as well as our relationships with computer technology in particular. The mirroring and glass effects of computers enable us to

diffract ourselves in ways that we could never imagine. Not only can I assume any identity I wish and hide my true identity and purpose, but I can split my mind into multiple tasks with the help of the computer screen. Splitting our minds enables us to turn parts on and off just as it enables us to turn people we meet online on and off. We risk fragmenting ourselves as well as our students. Our selves without bodies, our virtual selves, can have different experiences online. Does the embodied self have superior experiences to the disembodied self? What are the differences in the experiences? Can we even know this, and does it matter to us who teach and learn online?

The Other Side

Where am I when I pass through the screen? Where is my mind while my body sits in my chair at the workstation? How does the looking glass door swing both ways? After performing all the right steps, I find myself looking at the interface for my virtual class. This interface sets my mood, prepares my mind to perform certain tasks, such as go to the conference or discussion area and read what the students have been discussing, or go to the assignment folders and see who has turned in assignments. Where would I go and what would I do if the controlling force of the interface did not direct me? Would I find my own way? I have often wondered what interface I would create from my own imagination. I am guessing that most teachers do not think about this question at all. Most of us simply accept the interface as it is and let it direct us as teachers. Are we losing face when we do not think of this? How can we save face if we are not reflective? What are the implications of this acceptance and direction?

No matter how many place names we see there, e.g., conference, response, reply, assignment folder, grade book, course content, syllabus, the software enables four actions

directly: one can read something written by any class member, one can write something directed to any class member, one can submit a homework file, and one can read one's grades. But one cannot see another person or read body language, watch the process of struggle with concepts and learning, or give comfort and care in person. However, we can interact through our text. Perhaps this interaction is the in-between place where we meet to make meaning. Except for the response function, all functions are really bookkeeping storage functions, functions that reduce teaching to what Freire (2001) calls a "banking" system of education. Even the response option is designed for a question and answer format. What is the experience of alienation from students and from the human values and responsibilities we face as teachers as we encounter students? What is the experience of the in-between place of interaction and meaning making?

Acoustic Space – Where Did You Say?

As I read the students' postings, I begin to (re)construct the author, first as a voice and then in the context of class. I read every word sometimes several times. A vague, hazy image of the author comes to mind and a voice speaks to me. In my mind's ear, I hear the spoken/written words. The voice is somewhat familiar – at first a hazy compilation of voices I have known; then the voices sort themselves out and I hear a distinct voice, with depth, tone, color, intonation, and even nuance. I've crossed a boundary. The author's voice is actualized and integrated into my mind's ear. (Whitesel, 2001)

Schafer (2000) describes space that is defined by sound and space that is dominated by sound. In either case, our experience of a soundscape is one that places us in the center of the experience of sound, unlike the experience of a landscape, where our eye places us at the very edge of the view. When I hear a student's voice, my mind speaks to me and interprets for me. I assign a voice to the student. Later, when I read more postings by this student, the same voice comes to mind, becoming clearer with each

reading. I reference this student's writings in terms of a voice that I can conjure up at will.

My auditory imagination has taken flight and created what Ihde (2007) calls an auditory field. The sounds surround me and create the soundscape. I become immersed in the sound field; it surrounds me and is immersed within me. This space has no horizon or boundary and, within my imagination, "displays an indefinite space in all directions from me" (p. 207). He ties perception and imagination through this sound field to extend "imaging" to auditory fields and believes that visual perception and auditory perception share the same space within imagination. However, Ihde (2007) notes, "Auditory imagination, unlike its visual counterpart, is almost always continuous" (p. 210) and often takes the form of inner speech. If my thoughts bring me present to myself through thinking, then is my mind never still? Since I think with language, my students become the language of my thoughts as I listen for their voices.

Listening to the Inner Voice

Listening theory may help us understand how "hearing" in the virtual silence transforms our experiences. After reviewing the literature on what listening is, Wolvin and Coakley (1993) developed a definition of listening: "receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli" (p. xii). Their taxonomy includes not only the functions and purposes of listening, but also the behaviors that ensue as a result of listening. If we accept that "aural stimuli" include "inner speech," we can open up phenomenological exploration of the voices teachers create for their students.

Johnson (1993) writes about some of these relevant functions when he discusses "inner speech," which he defines as "subvocalized or silent speech used to *facilitate*

symbolic thought in the process of creating word meanings” (p. 171). He examines the structural characteristics of inner speech and defines four independent characteristics. Inner speech, he writes, is egocentric, silent, has compressed syntax, and uses a semantic embeddedness. It is “designed for oneself rather than for others” and is a form of “intrapersonal spoken language” (p. 171). As I read through my students’ texts, I develop a voice in which I hear the words of my students. If this is so, how do I represent my students’ voices in my own inner speech? What is the experience of taking their written words into my inner speech? Does this transform my ego? Who do I become in the presence of their words within my inner speech? I create those voices in my mind as a way to create a sense of interpersonal as well as intrapersonal engagement.

The second characteristic, silence, means that our vocalizations are not audible to the human ear. Johnson (1993) notes, “Although we are unaware of the speech movements of inner speech, previous research has shown the physiological and articulatory activities of the auditory-speech mechanisms are used to produce inner speech” (p. 173). Whose voice is this, then, inside my head? What is the phenomenological significance of my creating student voices within my own inner speech? How clear, then, is the voice of the student inside my head? In my traditional classroom, I do not create student voices; the students speak for themselves.

The third characteristic, compressed syntax, suggests that inner speech rearranges words, compressing sentences and even deleting subjects of sentences. The syntax is, therefore, incomplete. Can I hear my students’ words if I compress their syntax, deleting parts of thoughts? In what way do I fill in for the students? What assumptions do I bring

to this understanding of my students' thoughts? What do I "read into" their thoughts or delete?

The fourth characteristic, semantic embeddedness, suggests, "It is possible for a single word to signify or refer to much more than it would if the same word were used at an extrapersonal level" (p. 175). Once again, Johnson argues that the "functions of inner speech parallel those of other forms of spoken language," suggesting that inner speech helps to develop and maintain "higher mental processes or symbolic thought" (p. 175). These characteristics make inner speech extremely fast and efficient for learning new concepts and making associations between concepts. What is the experience for an online teacher in developing this inner speech? In what way does the evolution of this inner speech transform understanding and develop the teacher's language and writing for the online classroom? Does this inner speech lead us to imagine who our students are and what they look like?

Taking Students at (Inter)face Value

We put on faces to meet the countless faces. This experience is different from losing face and saving face, which relate to an intimate face. Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes this as a kind of being here and being there: "There is a kind of *identity at a distance*, a *ubiquity* of the body; the body is at once present in the mirror and present at the point where I feel it tactually" (p. 139). Like the body, the face has a kind of ubiquity about it. The word ubiquity means having the characteristic of being everywhere, even omnipresent. Through our faces, we get to know one another. Online, we get to know one another primarily through the text. How much text does it take to get to know another person? Who do we see when we see a student whose text is somehow problematic?

We use the expression face-to-face to describe our interactions with students in a traditional classroom, but we do not use the expressions word-to-word and text-to-text. We do not really have an expression that describes the way we see another face-to-face online. Gifford and O'Conner (1986), who research physical orientation and non-verbal communication, conclude that face-to-face orientation is not as intimate as side-by-side when we orient our bodies physically to one another. In what manner should we describe our interactions online? If we are not oriented physically and we use text as our means of engaging, where are the in-between places of online encounters?

The face I put on for the online students is a face that represents my persona, the part of my personality I want to project through my text. Personality exists in the way it is perceived by others and through interactions with others. In a virtual classroom, we often experience the spaces and relations as distorted and fragmented by the temporal and spatial discontinuities. My persona is also experienced as fragmented through my being in the classroom in small pieces of text here and there. Spatially and temporally, I exist in the classroom at different times and different places, just as my students do. What can we call this kind of engagement if not face-to-face? Where do we meet one another?

The virtual focus is the student's text – the point from which all rays diverge by reflection or refraction. The (inter)face distorts the "surface" on which these points exist. Our (outer)face becomes the interface mingled with the text. Even the (inter)weavings of our text seem distorted by our standards of consensus reality. These points in the curved surface of the (inter)textual face do not connect us in straight lines.

However, taken together, these points constitute our collective identity in the virtual classroom. The (inter)face enables the separate and sometimes incompatible

elements of our (outer)face to communicate, coming together to effect change in one another. Within the interface, we experience the tensions of the interface and technologized text. Who does the interface say that I am?

As I pass through the screen and into the virtual class, my mind is anticipating meeting my students' texts and preparing to teach while my body sits in the chair at the workstation. In some ways, I feel fragmented by this experience of being on both sides of the computer screen. Would it make a difference to me as teacher and to my students if I were able to create the interface for my own classes, place the virtual chairs in a circle, create a dimensional-looking place called class?

A pre-designed interface is a subtly controlling experience. Having a software developer design the classroom with functional names on certain links subtly directs my mind to see my teaching in instrumental terms rather than in relationship terms. Teaching is relationship. And when I go to class and find a list of functions a programmer has determined should direct what I do in my classroom, some of my control and choices are taken away. If I simply follow the prescriptive and functional nature suggested by the interface naming of what I do in the classroom, then I may meet minimal standards for teaching certain skills according to the instructional designers who have assisted the software developers in deciding how the class should look. Where am I as teacher in that bureaucratized hierarchy? How do I invest myself in the pre-designed online classroom? Do I really want to? In whose interests is this investment? What is the phenomenological significance of seeing functionality and skill sets in the structure of the class rather than the face of students?

In fact, in most sizeable online programs, instructional designers are instrumental in using the course authoring software to put the classes together and then load them onto the server. These instructional designers have been trained to see the teacher as interchangeable and the software as controlling the learning. Their preparation involves learning several methods of structuring class content around skill sets to be learned using language from Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy. Instructional designers are tasked with the effort of making a course teacher-proof. In other words, their job is to structure the course in such a way that learners can learn should a teacher fail. The more structured the course, the less a teacher may have to do in the online classroom. The system that supports instructional designers appears to assume that teachers may, indeed, fail. Where does that leave me, the teacher? What does this view of teaching and learning say about students?

Interface as Spatial Mnemonic

An interface is a representation of a spatial mnemonic. The classroom interface creates a spatial metaphor that helps me remember, an artificial aid to assist in my memory development. It (re)minds me where I am and helps me to (re)member my teaching relationship to students and how to be a teacher in an online classroom. Reminders, writes Casey (2000), "are expressly designed to draw us back from the edge of oblivion by directing us to that which we might otherwise forget" (p. 90). Remembering invokes the pastness of my experience of being in the class and extends it to the present. Remembering brings my presence into the present.

The bits and bytes are mapped into a virtual representation that ends up as some sort of icon on my computer desktop. For me to engage with students through an

interface, the computer must *represent itself* to me in language and symbols that I understand. In the online classroom, that language consists of the words that represent the functions and spaces that instructional designers have declared represent teaching and learning and the space in which we do that. The word *space* comes from the root word *spies* (*OED*, 1989) and carries with it the denotations of time and distance. But as I experience space, I am not thinking of time and distance. For me, the sense of the present moment backgrounds the sense of time and distance. The only orientation to time in the virtual classroom is the date/stamp that the system leaves on someone's postings. However, I may choose to read postings and follow discussions completely out of sequence. How does the asynchronous nature of the online classroom affect my ability to relate to others?

Interface is defined as “a surface regarded as the common boundary of two bodies, spaces, or phases; a common boundary or interconnection between systems... and people; something that enables separate and sometimes incompatible elements to coordinate or communicate.” Stephen Johnson (1997) writes that the word “refers to software that shapes the interaction between user and computer. The interface serves as a kind of translator, mediating between two parties, making one sensible to the other” (1997, p. 14). The word *shape*, which comes from a root word used before 900 C.E. (*OE gescheapu*) carries the meaning of giving a more definitive or even evolved and complete form and “the collective conditions forming a way of life or mode of existence.” There is some phenomenological and ontological relevance in how we develop interfaces for classroom use and how they shape our relationships, teaching, and learning. What power to have the capacity to actually define and form a way of life for teachers and students to

relate online! How do we go beyond these surface limitations through our engagement with our language and text? Indeed, the etymology suggests that the interface actually is a set of collective conditions that form a mode of existence. What is the phenomenological significance for teachers to have their relationships with students defined by the anonymous middlemen of interface design? In what way do I reconcile my experience of relationships with such a controlled, non-personal relationship defined by software I have no hand in creating? What criteria should we use to evaluate our interfaces? And the most dynamic thinking of my students, of our shared learning world, remains outside my perceptual grasp and reveals itself through these anonymous middlemen. Indeed, the medium is the message.

As I learn to overcome my reluctance to get online and visit my classes, I realize that some of my hesitation relates to the fact that no one will be there in class. I will meet the texts of my students, their faces in the interface. But I will be alone. My relationship with students and my teaching content has been replaced by information-space.

Turkle (1997) writes about the dangers of technotherapy, which has some analogy with teaching. Computerized therapy, she writes, only *seems* to be efficient and unproblematic. However, like teaching, therapy is relationship, and one does not have a “human” relationship with a computer. Technologized interacting does not raise issues of values or relationship or whether someone has been understood. How can I even relate to students through technologized interacting? What is the phenomenological significance of my thinking of students as information-space? Are we so sure that our relationships with computers do not have some “human” components?

(Hyper)Textual Space

In this new world of virtualization, I am forced to face my own language and the language of others, (dis)embodied text, (con)text(less), gesture(less), address(less). What does it mean for the text to be our (inter)face, our (outer)face, our boundaries? When we slip through the computer screen, we (re)construct our identities within this (inter)textual place through the looking glass. We are at once (dis)placed and (im)placed.

Levy (1998) explains virtualization as the process of ascending towards the potential inherent in being, the process of "becoming other" (p. 16). Levinas (1969) tells us that we need to put our concern for the other at the center of ethics. He may even say that our "becoming other" is grounded in *egoism*. He admonishes us to behave in a non-egocentric way and to limit our freedom and spontaneity so that we can be open to the other person. In this way, we permit the other to constrain us. What he describes is a kind of humanism. Our responsibility to the other is not just a fundamental ethical stance, but the stance upon which all other social structures are built. How does this hypertextual "becoming other" challenge our ethics in the virtual classroom? Where does egoism end and our respect and care for our students begin? Is this another in-between place?

Virtualization is an actualization of sorts, our coming into being through our virtualized text, and involves a change of identity. In some sense, all text represents virtual presence, as our ideas in text transcend time, place, space, body, and relation. Words and text re/present me, actualize my presence in the present. Through the loss of an immediate identity and the collectivization, we lose "face" but merge with the textual presence of the Other in hypertext. Our (outer)face is the textual presence within the (con)text of the (inter)face. When we meet in hypertext, we are not time- or space-bound

in the traditional sense. In one sense, we have entered the world of the mystic, where there are no divisions of past, present, and future. Time and space have "contracted into a single moment in the present where life quivers in its true sense...The past and future are both rolled up in this present moment of illumination, and this present moment...ceaselessly moves on" (Capra, 2000, p. 179). Our text becomes this life.

Everyone is "always already" there in class. It does not matter when I go to class or from where – others are here textually. Sometimes they are lurking – here presently reading the postings and entering into the history of the conversations. I am here historically and in the present. There are traces of (y)our presence in the texts. In addition to our textual presence, we are creating text and narrative as we enter into one another's text through the use of hypertext. In hypertext, anyone can "borrow" the language of another, create links to that person's language, thus giving new meaning and understanding that may be quite outside the experience of the original author and meaning. In hypertext, one can also enter into the language of another, leaving traces of one's own meanings and understanding, without a logical end to the process. This textual mingling creates for us another interface, one that transcends the software interface, and moves us beyond the constraints of the software. What happens when we lose our textual identity while in the online classroom? Does this collectivization of our language create new learning in the new interface? Where does this interface locate itself?

Between 1970 and 1975, hypertext was defined as "a method of storing data through a computer program that allows a user to create and link fields of information at will and to retrieve the data nonsequentially." Hypertext is no longer just a method of storing data; it is also a method of creating text and relationship in the (y)our places and

creating new ways of using language and, thus, of transforming culture. As Landow (1994) points out:

This new information technology has the power to reconfigure our culture's basic assumptions about textuality, authorship, creative property, education, and a range of other issues. (p. 32).

In the online classroom, through the use of hypertext, the textual discussion could conceivably never be one text because it is (y)our text, never have an end except arbitrarily when the class ends and access to the text is denied. The text could conceivably lose any connections at all to the originators. The possibilities of what that means are mind-boggling. Who are we or our students when we no longer have (y)our presence in our own text? Are we transformed as a result of others entering our text and linking to our language? There is phenomenological significance to participating in this open-ended, never completed conversation. What is the experience of (y)our text about? What is the experience of coming to (y)our understanding of teaching and learning by way of diversions into another's text and narrative?

Levy (1998) tells us,

Virtualization can be defined as the movement of actualization in reverse. It consists in the transition from the actual to the virtual...not a derealization (the transformation of a reality into a collection of possibilities) but a change of identity, a displacement of the center of ontological gravity of the object considered. (p. 26)

Virtualizing our identity through text may bring us closer to the "other" through (inter)textual weaving of the immediate presence of our language, our historical identity, and our physical actions mediated by technology. Are the technology and the software then embedded into the fabric of our being? How do we experience this weaving

together? Is it merely possibility? Our bodies are here in this world, but they maintain a relationship to our minds even as we are surrounded by our technologies.

Our bodies are the medium through which we relate to the world and to each other. In our face-to-face conversations with students, we relate socially through our bodies. Our voices reinforce this in the way they emerge from our bodies, as do our gestures. As we become more and more familiar with virtualized learning, will we learn to relate virtually? In what way are (y)our bodies embedded in (y)our text? Will we feel alone or lonely? Do we online teachers ever develop a felt sense of belonging to the virtual classroom? Text enables us to ignore (or background) the centrality of the body; text enables us to overcome some of the limitations of our bodies. Text enables us to overcome racial, gendered, and other markers that are part of our bodies. But what do we lose when we lose our unique markers and differences? What do we gain from the homogeneity?

Pierre Levy (1998) writes that virtualization has affected our modalities of being together and the identity of the constituted collective "we" (p. 15):

The problem of collective intelligence is simple to identify but difficult to resolve. Can a group of human beings be more intelligent, wiser, smarter, or more imaginative than the individuals who compose it? . . . Is there a way for us to coordinate intelligences so that they amplify rather than cancel one another? (p. 149)

Levy contends that cyberspace is a dynamic, constructed, non-separated, fabricated, and extended shared object that "provides a bond, serving as the common object of its producers and its users Cyberspace provides objects that move from group to group, shared memories, and hypertexts for constructing intelligent communities" (p. 160). What are these objects for online teachers? What does it mean to make shared memories in our

teaching and learning communities? Are we (re)minding or (re)remembering? In what manner are we more intelligent, wiser, smarter, and more imaginative because we are together in a virtual classroom?

Walter Ong (1982) considers literacy and the technologizing of words as one of the transformations affecting modern thought. When there is a shift in dominant senses, we can expect to see differences in the apprehension and symbolization of reality. Although Ong (1982) does not address digital writing, he does discuss the transformations caused by the shifts from an oral literature to a printed one. He notes that cognition is fostered primarily through the sense of hearing in an oral/aural culture.

Heim (1987) expresses it this way:

The speaker brings the psyche's inner cognition to voice, and what is known comes to sound outside the speaker and can then pervade the acoustic space of a listener. The learner needs to actively repeat the spoken word, since there is no place where it can be looked up. By participating in the repeated vocal performance of the words, the learner endows cognition with stability. (p. 60)

By contrast, where print is used, sight or vision becomes dominant, and knowledge transmission "through printed symbols fosters a spatial sensitivity to reality" (p. 60). The visual sense fosters detachment as knowledge that is transmitted by printed words must carry the conviction of being objective and impartial. Heim holds up the paradox of the aural-visual issue for us to wonder about. Although knowledge is embedded in personal relationships (teacher to student) and is not easily examined in a detached, objective way, aural knowledge remains too close and is not easily "eyed" carefully. This paradox illuminates some of my own conflicts about teaching within technology. Am I teaching in this detached environment? What am I teaching? How do I know? What sort of validity and credibility are there when we are not in the presence of one another? In what way can

presence be created or understood only in a physical sense? What difference does our absence from one another make, if any?

The character of virtualized text. Writing restructures our consciousness and enables us to create "context-free" language or autonomous discourse, detached from its author and basically unresponsive, disembodied. What is the experience of (re)constructing identity through virtual text where technologized text transforms the interior consciousness? What (or who) is the character of this virtual identity?

The virtualized classroom is primarily a place of virtualized text, with all the idiosyncrasies of text situated in place and time yet with this transcendent quality. The online text is embedded/embodied in the context of other online text and can become hypertext. What does it mean for our (dis)embodied text to dwell within the context of other (dis)embodied text?

The lapidary character of text in an online class enables its context to exist forever, even as I choose to copy that text into any other context – even speak or read the words – at any time from anywhere. Yet those words also have dynamic qualities. Words do not hang poignantly in the air, a reflection of the tone and gestures of the speaker, both fading over time. (Hyper)text places our text – indeed, flings it speedily – into the context of the text of others, while creating context for others as well – a manifestation of the Moebius effect. The response function in conferencing software even gives us the illusion/delusion that the text sprang forward on its own, instantly and wholly, like Athena from the head of Zeus, complete, absolute, and wise. In the writing of it, however, we transition from interior to exterior and from exterior to interior, from our (inter)face to our (outer)face and from our (outer)face to our (inter)face. Place and time

join in one continuum where boundaries are elusive and called into question. Yet we connect the dots on this curved surface.

Hypertext, like poetry, enriches our reading experience, deepening the meaning of text and its interpretation to include the voices of the "other." Yet, we often experience reading and writing online as a lonely experience. In the emerging literature of the psychology of Internet relationships, we see clearly that projection is occurring. We tend to see others online according to our own needs; we tend to encounter the self rather than the other. How are these encounters different from the encounters face to face?

Hypertext comes from the word *hyper*, which means excessive or greatly exceeding norms and forming in a non-sequential way, and *text*, which has such rich meanings as words, weaving, patterns, and structure. Taken together, hypertext comes to be seen as words, patterns, and structure that greatly exceed norms and are non-sequential. In fact, hypertext does indeed lend a quality of the "stochastic" to my perception as teacher. A statistical term, stochastic involves a "randomly determined sequence of observations each of which is considered as a sample of one element." In hypertext, one can randomly select the sequence to observe, and each selection in sequence can be a single sample of one element. Students' remarks, and I must assume my own responses to students, thus take on a random determination that has the likelihood of being singular. Every time I go to class, my hypertext sequencing of student remarks is unique. What is the significance of this randomness, both for our identities as well as for our learning? Bolter (1991) tells us:

The technology of writing is customarily regarded as the creation of the human mind, possibly its greatest creation. In fact, it is the other way around: the mind is the creation of writing. (p. 211)

In what manner will technologized writing and hypertext, then, affect the creation and development of mind as we continue to move our learning environments online, mediated by technologies and interfaces?

Levy (1998) points out that when we read or listen to text, we are mishandling it. We weave together the scattered parts, leave holes in the text, fail to read, read more into the text than was stated, and stitch parts together. "Reading a text," Levy tells us, "means rediscovering the textile gestures that have given it its name The space of meaning does not exist before the text is read. It is while moving through the text, mapping it, that we fabricate and actualize meaning" (p. 48).

Listening, looking, and reading ultimately amount to a kind of self-invention. By initiating the attempt at signification that comes from the other, by laboring, digging up, crumpling, and cutting the text, incorporating it within ourselves, destroying it, we help erect the landscape of meaning that inhabits us. The text serves as a vector, a substrate, or pretext, for the actualization of our own mental space. (p. 49)

A meeting of minds. Writing with the computer fosters a particular understanding of the process of writing and of the written text. Where a book format fosters a sense of stability and importance, electronic writing fosters a sense of dynamic, fluid writing and encourages an interactive relationship between writer and reader.

When the writer writes, she externalizes her thoughts. She thinks, in a sense, out loud. Bolter (1991) writes, "The writer enters into a reflective and reflexive relationship with the written page, a relationship in which thoughts are bodied forth. It becomes difficult to say where thinking ends and writing begins, where the mind ends and the writing space begins" (p. 11). When I read my students' writing, I am entering their minds and deciphering their thoughts. I can break the code, the cipher, but I cannot know for sure what the symbols stand for. In most ways, I am able to understand how a student

is thinking, using language and symbols. However, unless a student shares her narrative, I am unaware of how the students' words have reflected their experiences. This writing space has become a metaphor for the human mind and the mind is now a writing space itself. When students are articulate, the mind-space is accessible to me. When students are not articulate, the mind-space is confusing to me. I may find it difficult to know whether a student has made the learning leap. So much of the writing and thinking space in an online classroom is dependent on a student's – and teacher's – ability to use language and manipulate symbols.

As students in my online classes use language, they may enhance their self-awareness. As they write, they may see themselves reflected in the words on the electronic page. As I read their writing, I certainly feel that I am experiencing a view of their minds, their thinking, in action. As I engage their text, and weave my own text into their text, my own thoughts into their thoughts, we experience a connectedness that we may see reflected in text. I stretch for meaning, longing to enter some kind of understanding of what the student is trying to tell me. Although we are still within our own skins, how vulnerable are we to one another through text in the online classroom?

Gadamer (1960/1999) urges us to see reading as a hermeneutic conversation. In trying to understand the text of others, we must be aware of the meanings we bring to the textual experience.

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there. (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 267)

Projecting becomes a hermeneutic dynamic of understanding, interpreting, revisioning our understanding and reinterpreting. And within this creative process, we readers must constantly seek understanding in that the fore-meanings that we project and anticipate must be confirmed “by the things” themselves (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 267). Gadamer adds another dimension to the experience. We must be sensitive to the text’s alterity.

“The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (p. 269).

Identity in the Mirror of Technology

Our virtual identities/personas have embedded within them some idea of "distance" or "closeness." One way of conjuring up the presence of another is to name the person. Without some kind of naming, the Moebius nature of the experience leaves us disoriented, lightheaded, and even bereft.

Hmmm. Who is this? I don't recognize the peculiar spelling – tjfits1. Here's one I can at least pronounce – malloy. Who is Malloy? It's not clear. Malloy doesn't say to whom his/her message is addressed. Malloy's response appears to be linked to mine, but there's no address in the note. Malloy hasn't addressed the response to me. I read it through. I squint hard at it, as though squinting will clear the confusion for me. It's not clear what Malloy is saying or to what s/he is responding. What does this message mean? Is it for me? Has Malloy's note been misplaced here by some accident of the click of the mouse? Malloy doesn't sign the text either. I'm frustrated by this mystery. I sign my name – a kind of silent scream for recognition. I feel out of place and out of touch, like K at the castle door. (Whitesel, Reflections)

When we are working in online classes, the experience of not knowing someone's "real" name or not being addressed by name may have some phenomenological significance. It may have particular consequences for our sense of identity as individuals and as members of the virtual collective, and for our ability to be in relation to others.

Being able to name another and be named by another is a way to witness the existence of another, to have our own existence witnessed.

Bas Levering tells us (Online Forum, October 29, 2000), "A name is directly connected to one's identity. . . . our name functions as a sort of summary of the way we would like to be addressed" (Online Forum, November 5, 2000). Our name calls us forth, brings us into the presence of others, and conjures us. Is this a sacred invocation, a sleight of hand, or both (Onions, 1966)? Our name is our history, our narrative. Often, a name carries with it an entire family history.

When we forget the name of another, we often forget the context in which we know that person and, thus, all the special projects and meanings of that person. We even forget our relationship to that person. How often have we thumbed through our memories for some clue to someone's forgotten name? We search through our various social activities, our work activities, even our church and volunteer activities, searching for a contextual clue for the person's name and identity. Our distraction further distances us from the person whose name we have forgotten. To call by name is to recognize, to call into existence. The spoken name is a gesture and its meaning, a world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1999).

When we forget to address another by name, we forget to acknowledge that person. It is somewhat like snubbing someone and, in a sense, like un-naming him or her. We take something from the person, leave him (with)out. We take some part of his identity as a separate individual and deny him some relation to us. If we are standing with another, at least there is the bodily relationship that exists, knowing someone partially through our embodied experiences of one another.

In an online class, this lack of acknowledgement can lead to even more serious consequences. Not only is it disorienting to read a post by someone who is not clear about whom he or she is addressing, but it is disconcerting to realize that someone may be talking about us by not addressing us directly. It is almost a form of public shunning. Being addressed by name and imagining someone "speaking" our name personalizes the message for us. Being called by name includes us in the distance class and keeps us invited into the group. We are (re)constituted there in the richness of our felt-rich lives.

In the online class, our name has been assigned to us by a machine, a computer that does not know our history or narrative and names us according to a convenient convention. Although this name is not actually "given" to us, we treat this logon name as though it is special. It is our entrée to our classmates. It is the portal through which others online will reach us. It is our "face." It is unique, but not personal. It is similar to being given a number for a name. This logon name is often unpronounceable (or mispronounced), sometimes slightly resembling our "given" name in the "real" world. When we cannot say the name of another, even to ourselves, we are giving "the silent treatment" to that person. Or we are distorting that individual's identity, a peril in the virtual environment. We have no (con)text in which to identify and know that person. There is no history by which to attach and develop meaning.

Calling the other person by his or her name means that we allow ourselves to be addressed by the uniqueness of this person. Indeed the name that has been given to the other to "bear"[bare] through life also gives expression to a fundamental vulnerability. Where is the other more naked than in his name (Online Forum, van Manen, 2000)

The Virtual Landscape of Meaning

This landscape of meaning that we erect, incorporate within ourselves, and that inhabits us, transforms our identity. This self-invention takes place when we zone out while working in online classes (a reported phenomenon by online teachers). This loss of a sense of time and place actualizes and manifests the creative mental place we experience – a unique landscape of identity and understanding.

Casey (1993) reminds us that the term "landscape" does not fit easily into a neat spatial understanding or nomenclature. He writes that there is landscape "where there is a felt difference unrecuperable by the usual designators of place....landscape is what encompasses those more determinate places, such as rooms and buildings, designated by the usual idiolocative terms....landscape has its own determinacy" (p. 24).

Lyotard (1989) writes:

There would appear to be a landscape whenever the mind is transported from one sensible matter to another, but retains the sensorial organization appropriate to the first, or at least a memory of it. The earth seen from the moon for a terrestrial. The countryside for the townsman; the city for the farmer. (p. 212)

We create the landscape of our reality from the landscape of our mental spaces.

We retain our sensorial organization that comes from our memory of inhabiting and dwelling in certain places. We also retain our perspectives and memories, our sensorial history. Do we ever come, then, to use cyber space and, then, the virtual classroom as the referential landscape?

This place is not native to us. Inherent in the etymology of "virtual" is the sense of alternative – or (alter) native. Yet, "alter" is defined as "to make different without essentially changing" (*Merriam Webster's*, 1974). Virtual reality, an "almost" place, with its own set of powers, self-existing, becomes a place for which we must search for

alternative relationships, relations that do not essentially change our identities but alter (perhaps significantly) how we relate to others.

Being placed in space, in virtual space, opens up a new way for us to think about how to be present, how to "be," and who we are as teachers. But this experience comes with potential perils. Our modern classroom technologies are a means to an end. They are instruments of our manipulation. Heidegger (1952/1977) understands that the danger in our technologies is that human beings are the locus and medium for meaning and disclosure, and human beings sustain the revealing that also conceals to the point of oblivion their very humanity and the possibilities of being human. Postman (1993) adds to this understanding:

This is what Marshall McLuhan meant by his famous aphorism "The medium is the message." This is what Marx meant when he said, "Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature" and creates the "conditions of intercourse" by which we relate to each other. It is what Wittgenstein meant when, in referring to our most fundamental technology, he said that language is not merely a vehicle of thought but also the driver. And it is what Thamus wished the inventor Theuth to see. This is, in short, an ancient and persistent piece of wisdom, perhaps most simply expressed in the old adage that, to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Without being too literal, we may extend the truism: To a man with a pencil, everything looks like a list. To a man with a camera, everything looks like an image. To a man with a computer, everything looks like data. And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number. (pp. 13-14)

As Ihde (1990) and Burch (2000) point out, all technologies are non-neutral, suggesting some kind of transformation of experience. Text takes on a different character in a virtual class. Indeed, character (manifest in text) becomes a force to be reckoned with. If we gain our perspective from the nature of the face-to-face experience, we see that even unmediated face-to-face experiences are interpretively constituted – all experiences are interpretively constituted. We are led to question the significance of character.

The virtualization of the body is therefore not a form of disembodiment but a re-creation, a reincarnation, a multiplication, vectorization, and heterogenesis of the human. (Levy, 1998, p. 44)

By entering into an interpretative relationship with the text, I have appropriated its meaning. In some sense, I have virtualized my(self). Levy (1998) argues that when we virtualize ourselves, we deterritorialize ourselves and our text:

[We] are not totally independent of a referential space-time since [we] must still bond to some physical substrate and become actualized somewhere sooner or later. Yet this process of virtualization has caused [us] to follow a tangent. [We] intersect classical space-time intermittently, escaping its "realist" clichés: ubiquity, simultaneity, massively parallel or distributed system. Virtualization comes as a shock to the traditional narrative, incorporating temporal unity without spatial unity. (p. 29)

When we teach online, our bodies materialize from wherever our workstation gives us access to our online classroom. Yet, by our textual presence, we are also reconstituted online through our virtualized text, where someone's reading of our text situates us, gives us status as "other." We are (re)created by the reader. Each reader of our text brings another layer of understanding. Each "technological interpreter," each device adds a layer to our skin, placing boundaries between our inner selves and outer selves, our inner worlds and outer worlds.

Logging Out

Usually, when we think of leaving the computer class, we think of the system's having shut down prematurely. Or we think of getting stuck somewhere in the class, when the computer gets stuck, and not being able to get out of class. But what about when we willingly log out of the computer class, when we are ready to go home again? We log off or log out. We can speculate about the origin of the word. To log in comes from the practice of signing one's name to gain access to a secure area or a restricted

area. One enters personal information into a log book. Logging off or out suggests that one signs off in a personal way; that is what one does when leaving the computer application.

When the class work is over and it is time to turn off the computer, I often feel a kind of relief. There are no rituals, just a signing off. I click the mouse and I am history in this space. I anticipate logging off the computer and getting back to my real world. Just before I log off, I quickly review where I have been within the computer class I visited. Did I find everything? I am usually slightly anxious, wondering whether I found everything left by students, responses and assignments alike. But I am always relieved to be leaving the classroom, thinking – hoping – that my business is finally finished. I wonder whether other teachers feel this way or whether they feel bereft of their virtual students.

When my traditional class is over, I am exhilarated and eager to review what we did in class and how I can make the learning experience more exciting for my students. When class is over, our ritual is a parting one. Students come to the desk to chat about the class, about upcoming assignments, and about their personal lives. As I leave the class to return home, I reflect on what worked well and what I can do next class to continue the learning conversation. Unless I have run out of ideas for the class, I am usually very energized by my engagement with the students and our subject matter. What does the traditional classroom give me that the online does not? What do I bring to the traditional class that I am not bringing to the online? What do I take away from the traditional classroom that I do not take away from the online class?

Birkets (1994) describes how electronic words have a kind of weightlessness of presentation and “seem to arrive from some collective elsewhere that seems more profound, deeper than mere writer’s subjectivity. The word floats on the surface like a leaf on the river. Phenomenologically, the word is less absolute” (p. 160). When the words are archived and removed from the class, they become invisible. When I log off, I am invisible to students. Should I grieve this invisibility? What does this say about those of us who left our words in the online classroom? What is the meaning of becoming weightless and less absolute? Do we lack substance as a result of our visit there? Where does our substance go, once we are without words?

Hermeneutic phenomenology enables us to explore the essence of these experiences. In the next chapter, I explicate the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology as a way of revealing the lived experience of teaching within technology.

CHAPTER THREE

REFLECTIONS IN THE MIRROR OF TECHNOLOGY

Slipping through the computer screen
 (re)constitutes my identity.
 I am (dis)placed as the gravity of my centered being shifts.
 And (im)placed as I come to light upon your words
 in this (inter)textual space.

Through this looking glass I am forced to face my own text,
 Pecked laboriously outside of time,
 My self, (re)constituted and projected,
 Laboriously within time,
 Weaving my immediate presence and history
 with (y)ours.

Who do I become as teacher when I enter this textured space?
 Who are you to me? Who am I to you?

In this place where seeing and knowing exist
 within the gaps between your words,
 Is being virtual the vector
 of my ascension toward becoming you? (Whitesel, Reflections)

This poem, inspired by readings and my experiences teaching online, captures many questions about my experiences and the experiences of others with whom I have had conversations. One can see the questions about being and identity, the nature of teaching in this virtual space composed of technologized text, the notions of the meaning of time, understandings of our relationships through hypertext, and the spaces that bridge the journey from embodied place to virtual space and from teacher to students. Within this extraordinarily rich pedagogical experience I have situated the exploration of my methodology.

The journey that brings me here to this research and this desire to explore this phenomenon of teaching within technology is a journey about trying to find a pedagogical home and a pedagogical identity within the borderlands of university life.

The stories of many underemployed higher education teachers today are about a pedagogical homelessness and attempts at finding teaching jobs within a competitive and changing educational system. Many of these homeless teachers find adjunct jobs in distance education, but risk losing a sense of identity and purpose as teachers when they become virtual beings without a permanent foundation in an institution. Over fifteen years ago, I found myself teaching online classes and, for the first time, was able to find a pedagogical home, albeit in virtual classrooms using the technologies I used to access my online classes. I found new dimensions to my teaching while helping to prepare faculty new to teaching with technology; I learned to bridge the gap between myself and others through these technologies. I reconstituted my teaching identity and practice and reconciled my disappointments in not finding a permanent teaching position.

My computer has helped me bridge the terrain between where I am physically and this virtual world of my classrooms. Heidegger (1971) helps us to understand the power of bridges:

The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream. Thus it guides and attends the stream through the meadows. . . . The waters may wander on quiet and gay. . . . Even where the bridge covers the stream, it holds its flow up to the sky by taking it for a moment under the vaulted gateway and then setting it free once more. (II, ¶ 3)

What is the experience of being between places on a bridge and of traversing bridges to get to these borderlands? What is the meaning of a bridge that can set us free? Do we ever retrace our steps back to the physical classroom? How do I experience myself as teacher and writer the same way after these years of teaching online? “Bridges lead in many ways” (Heidegger, 1971, ¶ 4). What is the experience of being poised between these places? These virtual teaching experiences have been the bridge for my changing

identity as teacher and writer. The question of this hermeneutic phenomenological investigation is rooted in these puzzles: **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?**

The phenomenon of this study is rooted in being in the lifeworld with technology and experiencing technology in an existential way, as well as experiencing students and one's identity as teacher mediated through and within the technology. Each facet and reflection of this phenomenon speak to and address the ways in which pedagogy and the curriculum can be defined and explored through integrating technology into the curriculum of higher education. Hermeneutic phenomenology grounds my investigation and reveals specific dimensions of knowing and being. This chapter provides the philosophic grounding for my study and provides a description of the methodology that guides my hermeneutic phenomenological engagement with the phenomenon.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Foundations

When I returned to graduate school in 1999, the burning question on my mind was what was happening to my teaching life and what had teaching become in my online classes. After several years of teaching online, I could sense significant changes in myself as teacher. My awareness of my teaching experience had become heightened and focused. I was intensely curious about this experience and what it meant for my teaching life. I wondered whether students felt the same excitement and were they learning more as a result of their heightened engagement or even mine. Other teachers mentioned that teaching online was changing their teaching lives. I wondered what experiences we had in common and what we were thinking about these experiences.

When we use hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology, we are seeking “a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 2003, p. 9). This practice manifests itself through writing.

A phenomenologist seeks to be a writer, and as a writer he or she seeks to enter the space of the text where one tries to gain a view of or to touch the subject one is trying to describe. Phenomenology not only finds its starting point in wonder, it must also induce wonder. (van Manen, 2003, pp. 44-45)

The phenomenologist seeks to enter the text and the lifeworld created by language.

Through writing, the phenomenologist explores the essence of an experience not merely through description, but through mining the deeper shafts of textual representations through anecdotes, etymologies, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, imagery, and analogies.

The phenomenological question asked by the researcher must be made clear and understandable, and the phenomenon under study must also be “lived” by the researcher. As a phenomenologist, I cannot simply write down my question and then begin. I must be able to teach “the reader to wonder, to question deeply the very thing that is being questioned by the question” (van Manen, 2003, p. 44). The questions must be explored reflectively to remind us of what may lie at the core of the questions. Van Manen notes that phenomenological research helps us “bring to light that which presents itself as pedagogy in our lives [and] guides us back from theoretical abstractions to the reality of lived experiences” (p. 44).

"The purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something" (van Manen, 2003, p. 77). He notes that seeing the meaning or essence of something is both easy and difficult. It is easy because everyone sees meaning and essence in everyday life. It is more difficult to reflect and explicate or articulate what

the phenomenon is. To get at the phenomenological structure of the lived experience involves "a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (p. 78). This process brings forward themes and understandings for consideration.

Phenomenology invites me to have more direct contact with the experience of teaching with technology as lived. The meaning of this experience needs to be found in the experience of it. I want to grasp the meaning of teaching online in a virtual classroom, of knowing my students in their physical absence and in the presence of their technologized words. Looking at texts reflectively and analytically engages the human science researcher in a way that helps to bring the essence of the experience to life for the researcher. Mining the texts through this hermeneutic process enables me to come closer to understanding my phenomenon and to bring the essence of the experience to life. The philosophers I draw upon for my methodological grounding are Max van Manen, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Don Ihde, and Pierre Levy.

The axioms and concepts of phenomenology are rooted in the lifeworld and in the understanding of ontology, a concept that derives its meaning from the Greek root *ont*, or *onto*. Primary to ontology is the understanding of the nature of being or existence and its relationship to the lifeworld through perception and the existentials of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations. These concepts are facets of our understanding of lived experience as well as manifestations of lived experience, and lived experience is made intelligible to us through the hermeneutic process of textual interpretation. Through the notion of lived experience, we can unravel aspects of existential experience and

textual interpretation to ground our study in human science research. All axioms and concepts start with the notion of Being.

Ontological Questions of Being

Heidegger (1926/1962) explores the central ontological questions of Being in his explication of *Dasein*. He starts with the premise that to understand Being, we must first understand the being who asks the questions about Being; and to ask such a question suggests that we understand something about Being already. To study Being as phenomenological is to interpret and be hermeneutic, and to be hermeneutic, to open up truth, is both a revealing and a concealing. When one interpretation is opened up, another necessarily is closed off. The fundamental question “What is it like to be?” is embedded in understanding lived experience.

Dasein's primary orientation (Being) in the world is ‘care’ (Heidegger uses ‘*sorge*,’ the German word for feeling as well as sorrow) – a kind of being-with Others and Being-in-the-world. Care is the Being of *Dasein*, the nature of human Being and the structure that scaffolds every human existence. *Dasein* is located in the actual and embedded in the socio-cultural context. This kind of Being is grounded in the mode of everyday Being-one’s-self (Heidegger, 1926/1962). Heidegger explains that the workworld of the [teacher] is the everyday world in which we encounter the equipment used and Others for whom the work is intended. Both are present-at-hand and ready-to-hand. But it is *Dasein*, Heidegger (1926/1962) writes, that frees them and brings them there, too. In this sense, then, *Dasein* has a spatiality of Being-in-the-world, which belongs to it – *Dasein* discovers remoteness and distance, categories whose nature is not that of *Dasein*. *Dasein* enables orientation with regard to someone or something else.

“*Dasein* lets any entity be encountered close by as the entity which it is” (p. 139). Thus, a study of *Dasein*, both as Being-in-the-world and Being-with Others, enables us to look at what *Dasein* encounters for what it actually is. Heidegger states, “Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in *Dasein*; in the ‘there is’” (p. 26).

The Being of *Dasein* is Being-ahead-of-itself. In this sense, *Dasein* is always there, but does not cause a situation. *Dasein* becomes present or finds itself because of the situation. Being-ahead-of-itself is pre-ontological and refers to *Verstehen*, or understanding, which is *Dasein*’s way of being with possibilities.

Experience in the Flesh

Merleau-Ponty (1962/1999) grounds experience in the flesh, “a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of being” (p. 139). He writes that the body is a perceiving thing, a body-subject-object. Body grounds us in space and time and is the ontological ground. If flesh is the ontological ground, in what way does my flesh understand the relationship to space and time in the virtual environment, which plays with both space and time? What does it mean for my flesh to understand my students when my flesh is in my office chair at home and my students are perceived as technologized text? In what way does my flesh experience “being-in” in a context within a software interface? How do I, then, understand this experience of dual-being?

Merleau-Ponty’s (1962/1999) term for naming the body as a perceiving thing is *percipient-perceptible*. The body has two sides: it senses and it is experienced as sentient, two attributes for one sole existence. This raises phenomenological questions about what

we experience with these two sides when we are within technology. In what way do the two aspects unfold in an online class? In the collaborative space of the virtual software or classroom, I can experience being fragmented. My body can be sensing what is around me and, at the same time, be sensing through my eyes the text in the virtual classroom. What does it mean “to be” within the technology, in the virtual classroom? What does it mean to experience our students as text, typed within the virtual classroom?

Understanding and Perception

Gadamer (1960/1999) explains the idea of understanding text as a way to know

Being-in-the-world:

A person who “understands” text . . . has not only projected himself understandingly toward a meaning – in an effort of understanding – but the accomplished understanding constitutes a state of new intellectual freedom. It implies the general possibility of interpreting, of seeing connections, of drawing conclusions, which constitutes being well versed in textural interpretation. (p. 260)

To be in the world and understand text phenomenologically is rooted in understanding perception and the ways in which the object we perceive is attached to the actual conditions under which it is presented to us. What perceptions do I bring to understanding the text of my students? What perceptions, then, are attached to the actual conditions of the virtual classroom, my conception of it, and the actual space of the interface?

One perceives through the ego, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962/1999), and brings in preconceived understandings to make sense of the perception. In that sense, what we perceive in the virtual environment is a reflection of what we bring to the experience, a reflection of our individual selves, our historical selves, and our collective selves. In what way, then, do we see our students? Are they projections of our inner

perceptions? In constituting them through my perception, who am I to them? Merleau-Ponty helps us to see that part of the significance of perception is to work toward moving beyond our prejudices and the prejudices of the world.

To perceive is not to experience a host of impressions accompanied by memories capable of clinching them; it is to see standing forth from a cluster of data, an immanent significance without which no appeal to memory is possible. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1999, p. 22)

As I perceive my students, I am obliged to keep open the “givenness” of this lived experience and my relationship to the thing perceived. In perceiving, I bring forth the immanent significance that inspires my connection and relationship. As I experience this relationship, I reflect on what this means to me as I perceive through my own understandings to make sense of the perception.

Making Meaning of Perception: Interpretation

The hermeneutic process is a circle that circumscribes a path of knowing the lived experience. This path is a path of questioning, visioning, and revisioning the textual boundaries of experience. This “vision quest” is a journey alone by the researcher into the wilderness of understanding in search of essential meanings, and it becomes a way of knowing. Through the interplay of one’s memories and understandings with text, this “vision quest” becomes an “ontological structure of understanding” (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 293), and the phenomenological text and the author become fully realized.

Gadamer (1960/1999) addresses the significance of written texts for interpretation. He writes, “Written texts present the real hermeneutical task. Writing is self-alienation. Overcoming it, reading the text, is thus the highest task of understanding” (p. 390). He quotes Droysen and calls texts “enduringly fixed expressions of life” to be understood. Gadamer (1960/1999) continues:

That means that one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, speaks only through the other partner, the interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back to meaning. . . . It is like a real conversation in that the common subject matter is what binds the two partners, the text and the interpreter, to each other. When a translator interprets a conversation, he can make mutual understanding possible only if he participates in the subject under discussion; so also in relation to a text it is indispensable that the interpreter participate in its meaning. (pp. 387-388)

Thus, as I interpret, I participate in the text. I am bound to my students through their text. This is fully consistent with my questioning how I, as teacher, enter the text of the student through hypertext and other technologized means. In the virtual classroom, this question can extend to reconstituting the student through text. To this end, I want to explore the aspects of teaching within technology and how phenomenology addresses technology in the lifeworld and in technologized text.

Lifeworld Mediated by Technology

Our lifeworld, where we work, breathe, play, and relate, has always been textured by technologies that reflect both our need to handle or manipulate the world around us and our need to create beauty in the world around us. Over time, technologies have become more sophisticated and more complicated in our efforts to use tools to control our ever increasingly complex environment and communication. In education, we have moved from pencils, pens, chalkboards, and paper to computer technologies dominated by increasingly smaller chips and devices with increasingly larger spheres of influence and presence.

The primary medium of communication and presence in online education is through typing our thoughts, i.e., a type of writing. We represent ourselves through our writing, as well as what we select to enhance the writing, such as graphics, emoticons, and other images. But primarily in online education the teacher is the teacher through her

writing, and the students are the students through their writing. While writing distances us from our lived experiences, that distance enables us to discover the structures of our lifeworld more readily. We have more questions when we are distanced and more answers, however doubted, when we are close to the phenomenon we are studying. In what way does online writing create distance? In what manner is “distance learning” alienating and problematic? Van Manen (2003) suggests:

Writing creates a distance between ourselves and the world whereby the subjectivities of daily experience become the object of our reflective awareness. The writer’s immediate domain is the paper, pen or keyboard on the one hand and language or words on the other hand. Both preoccupations have an alienating effect. (p. 127)

The world of online learning, like the world of phenomenological hermeneutic research, is enriched by these characteristics. How does distance learning, through writing, create the tensions that enrich learning?

This lifeworld is a place of intentional experiences and, in our time, is almost always a place of technology. Education is no different. Teachers who teach online and students who learn online integrate technologies into their lifeworld and being. As humans, we are tool-beings; as learners we are tool-beings who have evolved beyond what Heidegger describes as having tools ready-to-hand. Heidegger (1952/1977) writes about our human-tool experience and how it defines our identity.

Heidegger (1952/1977) links the themes of tool/broken tool and technology in his explication of technologized being. Tools are either tools or broken tools and are visible for what they are only after they are broken. When we use tools with intention, we use them seamlessly, as seamless extensions of our being. As such, *Dasein* converts tool-being to present-to-hand and ready-to-hand. The tool itself really is not a tool until it is

used. In fact, *Dasein*'s projection is the projection of the tool. Zimmerman (1990) observes:

The user is informed in advance by knowledge about his or her situation, about the capacity of the tool, about the task to be accomplished. The practical activity of using the tool, then, is not productive of but instead derivative from the knowledge which leads one to pick up the tool in the first place. (p. 142)

Heidegger (1952/1977) explicates the notion that technology is a mode of revealing and concealing. "But how does bringing-forth happen, be it in nature or in handiwork and art? . . . Bringing-forth brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment" (p. 11). He further reminds us that this bringing forth is a production and what is brought forth is brought to light from the shadows of its being. He notes that the production in Greek philosophy refers not to a primary physical making, but rather to a form of knowing. And he links *tekhne* with *episteme*. "Knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing. . . Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens" (p. 13). Through our technologies we are known. What do they mask? What do they reveal? One way we relate with our technologized being is through our perceptions of the sensual world.

Perception within Techno-Relations

The notion of perception is a central concept for a phenomenological hermeneutic researcher. Merleau-Ponty writes about how our bodies are connected to perception through the notion of flesh. Our bodies are "the measurement (*mesurant*) of all, the *Nullpunkt* of all the dimensions of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1999, pp. 248-249). The rational principle that governs the universe to help us understand perception is *logos*.

The truth in the *logos* is not mere perception; perception “always places being in a relationship, assigning something to it” (Gadamer, 1960/1999, p. 412).

When technology significantly mediates our relationships in online classes, we must search for a model on which to base our query into the discovery of this experience. For this, I turn to Don Ihde, one of the foremost philosophers of technology and the phenomenology of how we are engaged bodily in our technologies. Ihde (1990) situates the human engagement with technology in his “human-relation-world” model as a perceptual connection in the lifeworld (p. 23). As he discusses the notion of general intentionality relations for technology, he replaces “relation” in this model with “technology.” To acknowledge technology’s mediation, his model becomes “human-technology-world.” The relational encounter is no longer face-to-face, but face-to-technology (Ihde, 1990). Since there is no direction suggested in his model, we can talk about technology mediating the world for humans and humans for the world – an appealing concept when we consider teaching and learning within computer environments.

Ihde’s (1990) model for techno-relations illustrates this relational process. His concept has three variants (p. 89):

General intentionality relations:	Human-technology-world
Embodiment relations:	(I-technology) → world
Hermeneutic relations:	I → (technology world)

In the case of embodiment relations, I am embodied within the technology and my perception is toward the world. Together, the technology and I perceive the world. That would be the case when I am teaching online and am in my virtual classroom. My students may even see me in this view, as teacher embodied within technology, perhaps

even robot-like at some level. In the case of hermeneutic relations, I am viewing the world of technology. I am somewhat distanced and sitting at my keyboard looking “into” the virtual classroom at the words. My perception of my teaching experience then is technologized – and instrumentalized.

Since Ihde’s discussion takes place within the context of instruments of science, he has no model for the “object” of technologized perception looking back on us. In the case of the online classroom, students are looking back at me through the technology and viewing me as part of their technologized educational world, just as I view them that way. There are ethical considerations, as well as phenomenological implications, for our viewing one another in instrumentalized relation.

When perception changes and focuses on the technology, we shift to an instrumental perspective that causes our horizon to shift. One element of the lifeworld is brought into focus before another element. The hermeneutic relation mimics sensory perception, Ihde (1990) tells us, but our seeing is referential rather than face-to-face. When I am teaching online, I am embodied both in my true body in my seat at my workstation. I can feel my keyboard beneath my fingers and my aching neck and tired eyes; I can experience the rich sensory world around me – the music I play, the rain on the window, the green woods out back of my office, the smell of tea and cinnamon. These perceptions, while not present in my online classes, are brought to the online classes through my direct perception of them while I simultaneously work online. In virtual reality, I am absorbed by my work, but not distracted from the real world.

What happens then to our bodies and our sensory perceptions when we become virtual? Recalling Ihde’s (2002) notion of *body one* and *body two*, when I teach online,

my *body one* sits in the chair at my work station. My *body two* does not seem to be present at all online since my cultural and social markers may not even be noticed at all. My words may represent some of my socially constructed, cultural self. As I go from my work station and my chair, my music and my sensitive fingers, to the virtual classroom, in which body is my self-identification? Is my transmigration from *body one* to *body two* within the technology?

Ihde (1990) understands that the second set of technology relations are hermeneutic, which enables us to have an interpretive relation with technology. He writes that “hermeneutic relation mimics sensory perception insofar as it is also a kind of seeing as _____; but it is referential seeing . . .” (p. 85). This hermeneutic transparency “allows the partial symbiosis of myself and the technology” and demonstrates “the capacity of the technology to become perceptually transparent” (p. 86). Do my students achieve a level of hermeneutic transparency? Do I? How might this affect our relationships as teacher and learner? This recalls Heidegger’s sense of tools as seamless. Does this mean my students are experienced as invisible? Am I experienced as invisible to them?

Because the virtual classroom is primarily text-based, I interact with my students through text and technologies that enable reading and writing to “extend hermeneutic and linguistic capacities *through* the instruments, while the reading itself retains its bodily perceptual location *with* or *towards* technology” (Ihde, 2002, p. 88). Ihde writes, “Textual transparency is *hermeneutic* transparency not *perceptual* transparency” (p. 82). My engagement with my students’ texts is hermeneutic; I interpret what I read there. The reading locates me bodily in my chair at my computer. As I read and write in the virtual

classroom, I am called to question whether this sense of being seamless, of hermeneutic transparency, draws us into being with the technology or even with one another.

Ihde (1990) suggests that through hermeneutic relations “We can *read* ourselves into any possible situation without being there” (p. 92). This hermeneutic place of text takes me out of myself and helps my mind achieve flow, the state of creative engagement where I am aware only of what I hold in my mind. As I background my body, my aches and pains, my mind expands into the narrative place where it is possible to know my students to a certain degree. Do I shift my bodily sense of self within the technology? In what way am I aware of myself as being with technology or being within it in any sense at all? Are the computer and the online classroom, then, an extension of my Self and my mind through this communication?

The third set of technology relations suggested by Ihde (1990) is *alterity* relations.

He writes:

Alterity relations may be noted to emerge in a wide range of computer technologies that, while failing quite strongly to mimic bodily incarnations, nevertheless display a quasi-otherness within the limits of linguistics and, more particularly, of logical behaviors The computer’s genuine usefulness still belongs to the borders of its hermeneutic capacities. (Ihde, 1990, p. 106)

There may be phenomenological implications in my experiencing my students as quasi-others and their experiencing me in the same way. How do alterity relations affect our communication? What is missing from the communication? What is revealed and what is concealed?

The Promises of Techno-Relations

Pierre Levy (1998) writes about how virtual reality and the digital age “enable us to experiment with the dynamic integration of different perceptual modalities” (p. 38).

His stance on the power inherent in becoming virtual is one of the most radical in the literature.

Virtualization involves a change of identity, a transition from a particular solution to a general problematic, the transformation of a specific and circumscribed activity into a delocalized, desynchronized, and collectivized functioning. The virtualization of the body is therefore not a form of disembodiment but a re-creation, a reincarnation, a multiplication, vectorization, and heterogenesis of the human. (Levy, 1998, p. 44)

Ihde's (2002) *body one* and *body two* become Levy's hyperbody, and text, or hypertext, becomes the "vector, a substrate, or pretext, for the actualization of our own mental space" (p. 49). Writing virtualizes memory; it desynchronizes and delocalizes, especially and the virtual environment is no exception to this. In fact, perhaps the virtual environment is the classic example of this.

Hypertext, Levy (1998) writes, "is a matrix of potential texts, only some of which will be realized through interaction with a user. There is no difference between a possible text and a text we read on the screen" (p. 52). He suggests that hypertext is the result of a series of decisions, an arrangement of connections, structure, and navigation. This process does not return us to the author of the text we read. Instead, it transforms text into one of many possible figures in an available, mobile, freely reconfigurable, textual field, and thus connects it with other texts, incorporates it in the structure of other hypertexts and the various instruments of interpretation. By doing so, hypertextualization multiplies our opportunities for producing meaning and makes the act of reading considerably richer.

But it also alienates us even more from the source of the text. The implications of this for online teaching are astounding. I often experience this phenomenon when I teach. As I read my students' responses, I often ask myself whether I understand what my

students write. Am I interpreting accurately? Is my interpretation creating hypertext, where I fling my own interpretations and mental images into the students' texts? How can we know?

Levy (1998) believes that the virtual world holds great promise for our communities, and by extension, our learning communities in particular. He claims that the virtualization of intelligence and the reconstitution of the self enable us to map the contours of collective psyches:

Cyberspace promotes connections, coordination, and synergy among individual intelligences. And its effects are even more pronounced when a living context is shared, when individuals or groups are able to identify one another in a virtual landscape of interests and skills, and when there is greater diversity of shared or mutually compatible cognitive modules. (Levy, 1998, p. 144)

Even Levy's model, like Ihde's model, offers insights into how technology moves from extensions of our hands to become transparent tools of the mind through different modes of instrumental mediation. In the world of the online teacher, the computer moves from embodied relations to hermeneutic relations to alterity relations. This focus on technology as "other" scaffolds the perceptual tensions between humans and instruments, but also masks the important tensions of perceiving students as "other." Although alterity relations with the computer give the technology a life of its own, the hypertext identity of students may actually weaken their presence. I often experience my online students as ghost-like, transparent and vague.

Being Within Technology

We are bounded by the surfaces of the monitor in our virtualized classrooms. Through the framing of the monitor, we make sense of this virtual place. We screen the world within the software, the interface, and the text. Screens limit us, filter what we see,

bring forth some things, and hide others. Screens control information and shape our perception of the world within; they help us “forget” the world without.

Merleau-Ponty (1962/1999) writes that we experience our lifeworld and the objects in it in an intertwining way. “I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive of space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them” (p. 140). Merleau-Ponty’s work on perception explicates the way embodiment is inclusionary as the link in the relational process with the objects, in this case our computer technology. “Our perception ends in the objects, and the object once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it which we have had or could have” (Merleau-Ponty, p. 67). The perceptual gaze, then, brings into focus the object on the horizon and attempts to close the gap between the viewer and the object by focusing on the object and trying to take in the whole object. Bounded orientations, seeing the classroom and students mediated through the technology, frames our experiences with others and does not leave us open to the presence of the other. This understanding of being in technology invites my abiding question: **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?**

Methodological Reflections of the Investigation

Just as phenomenological writing brings forth the essence of an experience through examining the relationship between language and experience, the human science researcher, as “scholar/writer” (van Manen, 2003, p. 30), teases out the understanding of these essences using a framework. This framework helps us conduct phenomenological conversations and then engage in hermeneutic analysis to interpret the text. Van Manen (2003) suggests six research activities that can help a scholar/writer conduct a study:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing a phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogic relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

It is by way of this framework that I conduct my own study of the lived experience of teaching within technology.

Turning to Teaching within Technology

In chapter one, my turning revealed my long-time relationship of teaching with technology and distance learning. For over fifteen years I have been intensely involved with the integration of and use of the computer in the higher education curriculum at several universities and colleges. During this time, I have also been deeply involved in developing and defining teacher preparation workshops and criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of online classes. My pedagogical focus for those years has been with online teaching and learning. Becoming a virtual teacher has been the most significant of my own educational experiences as teacher.

As I explore the tensions between face-to-face teaching and techno-teaching, between being a teacher and being with technology, my reflections bring me to various philosophers of technology, for example, Heidegger and Ihde, who offer insights into how we live with technology and the role it plays in our lives. I explored my own history with and relationship to technology, especially as I have used it in teaching. I found it compelling to be teaching writing with a medium that encouraged writing for my students. I realized that something exciting was happening in the online classrooms, but I was not sure how to define it. I was both enthusiastic about going to class and, at the

same time, I dreaded it much of the time. I found student writing to be exhilarating but, over time, began to see the limitations of working with students through technologized words. Even as I found freedom in the lightness of using technology, of being able to travel the Internet to different lands with different students, I found myself chained to a chair and desk in my own home as the number of hours online increased in my efforts to earn a modest living teaching.

As I talked to many other online teachers, I realized they, too, were experiencing something akin to the love-despair relationship that I had with technology. I began to wonder about this experience of teaching within technology and what happens to the virtual teacher's identity as teacher after long years of working with virtual students. A hermeneutic phenomenological investigation seemed to be the appropriate way to explore the essence of the virtual teacher's experience with computer technology.

Phenomenology appeals to our immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, most self-evident to us. The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions and experiences as we meet them in the lifeworld. (van Manen, 2003, p. 19)

As a writer, teacher of writing and literature, and researcher, I am most engaged by hermeneutic phenomenological research that enables me to attempt to construct an interpretation of some aspect of the lifeworld where the situation is the departure point for analysis and interpretation. My fascination with literature and what it tells us about individual human experiences and lifeworld meanings orients me; phenomenological research, as Linschoten notes, "starts there where poetry has reached its end point" (as cited in van Manen, 2003, p. 19).

Investigating Experience As We Live It

Most phenomenological research begins at the place of personal experience, with the researcher and with others who have had the experience under study. Through my own reflections and readings, I have explored my lived experience of teaching within technology. Since my own experiences are most accessible to me, this is a logical starting point. In chapters one and two, I give direct descriptions of my experience and reflect on the experience, writing and rewriting my understanding as it manifests itself within my own lifeworld. My interpretation of the experience is but one interpretation and not the only interpretation.

Van Manen (2003) writes, “The lifeworld, the world of experience, is both the source and the object of phenomenological research” (p. 53). From here, the researcher searches existing lived-world material that might yield insight into the experience under study. Etymology served me well in chapters one and two. To this end, meaning is unraveled through root derivations of words related to my phenomenon that uncovers original sources and definitions of central words and themes. Early uses of words as well as idiomatic phrases and expressions often put us “in touch with an original form of life where the terms still had living ties to the lived experiences from which they originally sprang” (van Manen, 2003, p. 59). It is especially true in the culture of technology that language can mask the meaning of our experience with that technology.

In his description of phenomenology, Kuhn (1968) describes the concept of horizon as the ultimate circumference within which all things real and imaginable lie. To study the horizon means to move away from the things that are familiar, yet ever to broaden the context. Kuhn believes that this is a progressive inherent drive in experience.

The horizon limits our view and also frames it. By encompassing what we understand about our experiences, framing also enables us to reveal shades of meaning from the context or situation.

Gadamer (1960/1999) explains that the concept of horizon facilitates our understanding of how we frame and expand our thinking. We speak of narrowing the horizon, expanding the horizon, opening new horizons, and even looking beyond the horizon. Gadamer (1960/1999) writes:

The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. . . . On the other hand, “to have a horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. . . . To acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand – not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion. (pp. 302, 305)

Our writing about our experiences and gathering the text of others through conversations, eliciting written responses, and participant observation enable us to become more experienced ourselves. Our material includes phenomenological descriptions and conversations as well as other kinds of interpretive methods. As I conduct my study, I question the lived experiences of others who have been teaching within technology. However, in the process, the focus “remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of [teaching within technology] as an essentially human experience” (van Manen, 2003, p. 62).

We want to give the questioning full play. Gadamer (1960/1999) explains that play is the “mode of being something” (p. 101):

The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open. If a prejudice becomes questionable in view of what another person or a text says to us, this does not mean that it is simply set aside and the text or the other person accepted as valid in its place. Rather . . . our own prejudice is properly brought into play by being put at risk. Only by being given full play is it able to

experience the other's claim to truth and make it possible for him to have full play himself. (p. 299)

His notion of play encompasses both the intention of the play experience and the player; it reflects that "play fulfills its purpose only if the player loses himself in play" (p. 102) and takes the play as wholly serious. When the player is engaged, he cannot behave toward play as if toward an object. However, while the player knows this is play, he does not know exactly what it is that he knows. Gadamer (1960/1999) tells us that play "becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it" (p. 102). The movement of play is the constant dancing (*spieling*), the constant back and forth of "playing" the question to reveal the tensions and underlying themes, the dynamic vibrations of all the elements revealed and discovered in each claim of truth. Thus, my engagement with the question, texts, and other materials helps to keep open the possibilities in understanding of the phenomenon and the essence of the experience.

The so-called "data" of human science research consists of the telling of human experiences. Writing my own phenomenological descriptions and understandings help me to understand what the experience of writing these descriptions might be. I look to van Manen (2003) for understanding of how to produce a lived-experience description:

- (1) You need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations. For example, it does not help to state what *caused* your illness, *why* you like swimming so much, or *why* you feel that children tend to like to play outdoors more than indoors.
- (2) Describe the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: The feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc.
- (3) Focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience.
- (4) Try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time.
- (5) Attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc.

- (6) Avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology. (pp. 64-65)

Using this guide as a way of capturing the experiences of others, as well as my own, and of exploring the nature of lived experiences reveals the lived sense of the experience. Exploring these experiences with my conversants in an online class set up for this purpose enables me to investigate this experience as we experience it. Capturing this sense of the experience then leads to emerging themes that help to illuminate the essence of the experience.

Discovering Emerging Essential Themes

Essential themes emerge through phenomenological reflections on these lived experiences rendered through thoughtful examination, more questioning, and writing and rewriting. The word “reflect” is rooted in Middle English *re*, which means as a prefix “again and again,” and *flectere*, which means “to bend.” Thus, reflecting is bending again and again toward the phenomenological descriptions to see what they yield. Also inherent in the meaning of reflect is the notion that the understandings reflect something of the researcher as meaning-maker. Chapters one and two comprise such bending and reflecting on certain impressions of mine and the texts of others that lead to an unfolding of themes. In chapter four, I continue to explore the essential themes through more phenomenological reflection.

Themes are a distillation of meaning found in the phenomenon as we who live it experience it. As I examine and reflect on the text of my conversants, I look to bring meaning to the text through the words and phrases used and through the nature of the experiences described. As van Manen (2003) explains, themes represent the desire to make sense of some experience, and they represent openness to some new insightful

invention, discovery, or disclosure. They give shape to the shapeless and describe the content of the notion. Reflecting on these themes is “the way in which pedagogy tries to come to terms with self . . . while serving other” (p. 89). This relationship of self and other may express itself in terms of tensions.

Van Manen (2003) describes themes as stars that help us navigate and explore our universes. They are the foci around which we understand our lived experiences. Sometimes themes are familiar to others; sometimes they are unique to one person’s lived experiences. Sometimes themes seem not to be appropriate to the phenomenon. The uncovering of themes becomes a pedagogical moment, a lived experience in itself, among the researcher, the text, and the hermeneutic process. Thematizing is a process of capturing the phenomenon under study by the researcher. The goal of thematizing is pedagogical and describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience (van Manen, 2003).

Thematizing includes isolating individual statements and phrases; it also includes using a holistic approach by examining context or the larger arena of the experience, such as biographical elements. Another approach to thematizing focuses on a detailed line-by-line analysis to extract text carefully that resonates with the phenomenon (van Manen, 2003). Additionally, focus on the existentials of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations helps the researcher to fully reveal the lived experiences in a personal and human way. Thematizing is “a process of recovering of the theme(s) embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (van Manen, 2003, p. 78).

Consulting Phenomenological Literature

Consulting selected phenomenological literature offers the researcher a source with which to dialogue and explore the phenomenon in an interpretive manner. The literature also enables us to reflect more deeply on the phenomenon through the eyes and understanding of others who have the “personal signature” of human science researchers; through this process, a researcher may discover her own strengths and develop her own personal signature (van Manen, 2003).

Through the writings of others who have gone before us, we may be able to see our own limitations as well. As I examine the texts of my conversants to tease out themes and understandings, I consult other phenomenological sources with which to dialogue and study – but not before I have grappled with the phenomenon and the question under scrutiny first. In this way, I can test my insights against those of others and experience the “conversational partnership that reveals the limits and possibilities of one’s own interpretive achievements” (van Manen, 2003, p. 76).

Exploring through (Re)writing to Understand

Writing fixes our thoughts on paper and enables us to examine our thoughts and reflect on them. Writing enables us to measure the depth of things as well as the depth of our own thinking; it is a kind of self-making or forming (van Manen, 2003). Through hermeneutic phenomenological writing, we can create text that brings sensitivity to the authentic language of the lifeworld experience (van Manen, 2003). Writing seeks to externalize what has been internalized; hermeneutic phenomenological writing creates a “dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and

reconciliation” (van Manen, 2003, p. 127). By distancing us from the lifeworld, it also brings us closer to the lifeworld.

Through the process of writing, reflecting, rewriting, and questioning, we engage in hermeneutic understanding, a circular questioning of the nature of the phenomenon under study and the revisioning of the researcher’s notions and understandings about the phenomenon. Gadamer (1960/1999) explains the hermeneutic circle as the interplay of the movements of tradition and the interpreter:

. . . neither subjective nor objective The anticipating of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not the act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to the tradition . . . thus the circle is not a methodological circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding. (p. 293)

In chapter two, metaphor, narrative, and the dialectic with philosophers and texts reveals the essence of my phenomenon. In the thematizing chapters, I continue the revisioning dialectic conversation between myself and the textual conversations of my participants and the themes, always keeping the question in mind: **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?** Through writing, reflecting, and rewriting, the researcher can discover and reveal the essential nature of the phenomenon. In a final chapter, I address the pedagogical insights gained from this study that might inform policies relating to teaching online and faculty preparation for online teaching.

Interleaving Theory and Life

In researching the lived experience of teaching online, I am reminded that van Manen (2003) encourages us to find our voices as educators in the essence of why we are educators. The word interleaf carries with it suggestions of enfolding pages of a book together, just as I enfold theory and life in these written pages to explore my

phenomenon. Van Manen (2003) exhorts us to ask: “What research texts must we produce that are sensitive to the particular question of the nature of pedagogy?” (p. 150). He suggests that our text needs to be oriented, strong, rich, and deep (van Manen, 2003). Through our renewal of our interest in pedagogical matters, Palmer (1998), in his book *The Courage to Teach*, calls us back to question who we are, as teachers, so we can serve our students more fully in their pursuit of lifelong learning:

Who is the self that teaches? is the question at the heart of my own vocation. I believe it is the most fundamental question we can ask about teaching and those who teach – for the sake of learning and those who learn. By addressing it openly and honestly, alone and together, we can serve our students more faithfully, enhance our own well-being, make common cause with colleagues, and help education bring more light and life to the world. (Palmer, 1998, p. 7)

This hermeneutic research helps me to understand the ebb and flow of my teaching and living practices and how teaching, both as a calling and living, compels me to renew my commitment to teaching. Renewing, from the Middle English *renewen*, means to make new or bring into being again and again. To restore through this research suggests an enriching experience involving expanding my knowledge and bringing me back to myself as teacher.

Balancing for Transformation

The role of researcher requires that we be aware how our research may have transformative effects on those with whom we engage for our study as well as ourselves. We must be mindful of how we ask participants to share themselves and mindful of how we share ourselves as researchers. This ethical stance must be considered at all times.

Since textual presentations may be powerful and influential in our disciplines, we must be mindful of the possible effects of research methods on the participants involved in the study. Both researchers and participants may experience transformative effects.

Therefore, for the sake of authenticity, bringing these issues forward and exploring them through writing is important (van Manen, 2003). This form of research can result in deep learning that leads “to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness” within one’s lifeworld (van Manen, 2003, pp. 162-163).

This hermeneutic phenomenological study is grounded in the experience of teaching online within technological boundaries. The existential organization brings forward the experiences of teachers as they experience time, body, space, and relations while teaching online. While these existentials are useful guides to open up different ways to experience this phenomenon, they do not determine the themes that emerge for interpreting this phenomenon. Van Manen (2003) writes:

The methodology of phenomenology . . . tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. . . . The paths (methods) . . . need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand. (p. 29)

Engagement with the Phenomenon

My abiding concern in this research is: **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?** I chose experienced online teachers so that we could open up and explore how teaching within technology over time transforms one’s teaching identity and spirit, and to explore the experiences of online teachers as they relate to students through the interface of the virtual classroom.

The Participants

When I was ready to begin conversations, I notified teachers from two universities where I teach online that I was seeking participants for a phenomenological inquiry into teaching online. Ten teachers responded with interest, and we talked at

length about the time and writing commitment I would need to explore my research. Four teachers declined based on the time commitments.

I invited six online teachers, who are articulate and open to a study of their experiences, and who have been teaching consistently online for more than five years, to engage in conversations about their experiences of teaching online. I chose five years as the minimum online teaching experience because that amount of time is sufficient for teachers to have worked through the excitement of the novice and into the routine of daily teaching. Also, five years experience is sufficient for teachers to have begun to reflect on the challenges of teaching online. These participants have varied backgrounds and are representative of those teachers who are routinely hired to teach online from outside the primary institutions. All these teachers teach within institutions that have both extensive, well established traditional programs as well as extensive online programs.

These six experienced online teachers have breadth and depth of experience to add deeper insights and richness to the conversations. They have had at least two decades or more of teaching in the classroom at the university or college level. Each of these teachers has had more than five years experience teaching online with at least two or more different platforms. Five of the six teachers have been teaching online since the mid 1990s, when distance education was in its nascent stages. Five of the six participants have been nominated for teaching awards and received them. Five of the six have advanced degrees in the humanities; one has an advanced degree in business. Having three men and three women enables me to explore layers of understanding that might be revealed through gender and experience.

The participants have extensive engagements with distance learning technologies. All teachers have not only developed and taught their own online classes, but have taught classes developed by others. They continue to teach classes of their own creation, and two of the teachers enjoyed tenure status in their universities as well as adjunct status in large distance learning programs at universities with established traditional programs. Additionally, these teachers were all teaching before their schools provided faculty preparation for online teaching. Later, after they learned how to teach online through trial and error, they were required to participate in formal faculty preparation for online teaching. At least two of the participants have taught faculty preparation classes for online teaching. One participant is fluent in Spanish and has taught Spanish online for many years. Three participants have created their own websites.

Two participants are living out of country, one in England and one in British Columbia. One participant has recently returned to the United States from Japan. Two have administered programs in their respective universities and college. Three have taught in other international online programs outside the United States. I have known most of the participants at least eight years, two of them for fifteen years or more. I have never met or seen two of the participants in person, but have maintained a long-distance correspondence with them for many years.

Conversations

All conversations took place within a Web-based discussion forum, called BraveNet, that I created for this purpose. The BraveNet forum, a discussion board, simulates the teaching situation for these participants, where they never meet their students face to face, but get to know them, relate to them, and work with them strictly

online and by email. I had three telephone conversations with one participant who had developed carpal tunnel syndrome and was unable to type quickly enough to keep up. This discussion forum was available for eight months. During that time, I collected the conversations both electronically and as print. I viewed them on the screen as well as printed them out to read them from paper copy.

Initially, I sent an invitation (see Appendix A) to participate in my study to the six participants and asked each to sign and mail their agreements to become part of the study (see Appendix B for the Consent Form). Once I received the consent forms, I gave each participant a logon ID and a password to the forum. This forum was set up by me privately through my own resources. Participants were able to maintain anonymity this way because I assigned screen names to them as they wished. By way of introducing my study, I shared with participants my research questions and explained my study.

The conversations began with introductions. Then, I asked participants to talk about how they got into online teaching, and when, and to describe what that experience has been like for them. I explored both their initial impressions of teaching online and their current ones. We talked about how their impressions and experiences have changed over time. Additionally, I asked them to describe their experiences of relating to students through technology. They described what they remember as their worst experiences as well as their best experiences. They then discussed what a routine day in the online classroom is like. We conversed about relating to students and to their own course materials and discussed teaching in the classes they developed as well as the classes someone else had developed. The conversations grew at their own pace, just as they would in a class filled with students.

I began collecting print copies of the discussion right away and made back up copies of the forum discussions. Since time in an online class is marked by date/time stamp, I used a chronological method to tabulate the conversations. However, because of the asynchronous nature of the online class, I had to accommodate the “inserted” conversations where time may be less important than the topics responded to. The conversations can appear somewhat chaotic, so direct responses were placed in sequence using time and topics to organize.

To keep the chaos minimized, I organized the various responses within a binder, using the main topic and question as the major heading. Subsequent responses to the major topic dates were in time order first. Then subtopics and responses were included as subheadings under those categories.

All conversations were printed from the discussion forum as well as downloaded into electronic formats. As themes emerged, I made notes on my conversations. Sometimes I summarized the conversations and posted to the discussion board, for further discussion, what I perceived to be the emerging themes. Then, I sent a private email to participants to ask them whether they wished to add anything privately that they had not discussed in our forum.

As I collected the conversations in binders, I used highlighters of varying colors to highlight emerging themes. As I solidified themes through van Manen’s (2003) framework of initial thematic reflections and whole sentence formations, I grouped the themes, looking for overlapping themes, phrases, and meanings. As I summarized themes and insights for the discussion, I asked the participants for more comments. As participants responded to clarify their thoughts, I was able to find line-by-line interpretive

understanding to yield more hermeneutic renderings. I was able to ask more deeply, what is going on here in my desire to make sense of these experiences. Van Manen (2003) writes that themes “give shape to the shapeless” (p. 88) as they describe the content that “unlocks the deeper meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspects of the experiential meaning of a notion” (p. 88).

In chapter four, using the metaphor of knots, I explore the themes and questions about virtual teaching that my study and conversants bring forward. Guided by van Manen (2003) and others, I open my phenomenological question to discover the essence of this experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

KNOTS IN THE WEB: VIRTUALIZING OUR TEACHING BODIES

Knots in the Making

The virtual classroom is knotty, and the teachers who teach online are students of the knots. We teachers must imagine all the nooks and crannies of the virtual classroom where our students may be, all the twists and turns of their paths to their destinations in the classroom. Our students weave together to intersect in the many strands of the knots where students' words and presences may be hidden. Many places in the virtual classroom are hidden by the strands and the obvious knots. As we move our imaginations into the virtual classrooms, we must remember the pathways, the many strands, the knots, and the students. We must imagine, remember, and visualize if we hope to untie the knots.

Knots are made from many strands, pulled together in ways that hold or bind and create connections and bonds. So it is with the virtual classroom and the virtualized bodies who come there to teach and learn. Just as the knots can be made from many different types of strands of many different shapes and sizes, our teachers and students can come from all walks of life, from anywhere in the world, and from many varied experiences. As we meet in the virtual classroom, different patterns are formed. Just as the many different types of knots have different strengths for holding strands together, so do the many different teachers. Both knots and teachers can serve many different purposes. Virtual teachers and virtual classrooms, like knots, can be purposeful and even chaotic, seemingly thrown together to bind and bond in confusion, seemingly pattern-

less. What do virtual teachers share in this knotty, often chaotic, but profoundly transformative experience?

Knot is “an interlacing, looping. . . drawn tight. . . for fastening; a tangled mess, a snarl; a bond or a tie.” When I am in my virtual classes, I often find myself trying to see through the tangled mess of the many, many discussion responses that students post. Their responses are given a time stamp, but trying to see through the hundreds of responses to the essence of what students are trying to say often leaves me feeling overwhelmed, in a snarl of responses, drawn tight with tension and confusion.

In general, knots seem to be functional as a way of holding things together or binding them. However, we have many expressions that elevate the notion to metaphor. We say that a problem is knotty, meaning it is difficult or complicated; or that we have tied the knot when we get married, meaning we are now bound together in a way that is not easily unfastened or untied. We say that someone or something has us tied up in knots, meaning that we are completely confused or frustrated. Trying to unravel the knots of the threaded discussion often leaves me frustrated and tied up in knots.

The quality of knottiness does not have within its definitions any way of becoming unknotted, untied, or unconfused. The inference here is that we must learn to live with the knots or find outside ways to manage the knots. How do we in our virtualized teaching bodies unravel these convoluted strands and untie the knots? Where are the knots in the virtual classroom? Who ties these knots? Who unties them? Where are the knotty patterns and how do we solve the knotty problems? The individual experiences of each online teacher form a variety of complex and varied types of knots, both functional and metaphorical. These sometimes vivid, sometimes vague, knotty

patterns form the teaching experience through the tensions of craft and technology. When we look closely at the experiences, we can see the seemingly chaotic interlacing of strands, with the rawness of the fibers and the sometime chaos of the bindings.

Discerning patterns and purpose are often obscured. When we detach somewhat to view the teachers' experiences from afar, a mosaic of knotty patterns emerges as a landscape of lived body, time, space, and relation. What is the phenomenological rendering of these experiences within the tension of technology and artful teaching in the online classroom?

Teachers develop artful ways of knotting and unknotting the strands of teaching, learning, and subject matter to create connection and learning in the online classroom. Deftly I pull here, push there, cross these strands over and under, tighten here, loosen there, draw purposeful knots here, or leave seemingly chaotic strands hanging in other places. This is the artful craft of teaching, whether online or in the classroom.

This chapter explores the knotty nature of virtualizing our teaching bodies through themes developed from virtual conversations with the participating teachers. Illuminating this understanding is the metaphor of knots, tying them as well as untying them, through an imaginative engagement with the online experience. This hermeneutic phenomenological rendering focuses on the tension of bodies both here and there through exploring teachers' lived experiences of teaching within technology.

Knots in the Web

Experienced teachers of online classes have gone through many phases of learning to become comfortable in the virtual classrooms with their virtual students. While many come to feel at home in this imagined place of text, many never experience a sense of comfort or enjoyment as they struggle with the technology and the highly

structured, often rigid, notions of what a place of learning should be. How does the virtual classroom interface become a place for teachers to teach and for students to learn? Somehow, teachers and students come together in the interface to share this sometimes illusive and elusive experience.

How does the interface influence the body, time, place and space, and the relations among those who participate? This space can encourage interaction and learning, or it can discourage and isolate both teachers and students. Why do some teachers thrive in this experience, becoming more of who they are in some sense, while others feel diminished and frustrated and even angry? Somehow student text within the interface and our time spent in this imaginative experience transform the experience of being a teacher. In what ways does being online, on the line, alone with our imaginations, yet with the hope of presence, transform this knotty experience? What can we learn from untying these knots and who do these knots say we are?

Meeting the Teachers and their Text

Thomas has been teaching full time nearly 25 years for a university that has both a traditional bricks-and-mortar campus and an extensive online program, and lives in England, outside Cambridge. He began teaching online in 1997 when his university offered distance courses through email. At that time, students and teachers communicated lessons and discussions through group emails to one another, called listservs. Lectures, papers, and handouts were usually inserted into the emails or attached as files to the emails. With the limitations of sending large files and much text, the most successful way to send information was actually in the email itself. He admits to liking the convenience of teaching with technology since he had to travel 90 miles one way to his classroom.

“When I discovered that I could teach without leaving home, I rushed to try out this new method.” After buying a new computer to accommodate the new technology, he had to redesign the classes he had been teaching in the classroom for the online environment. Where previously, he would meet his students twice weekly for two and a half hours each meeting, online he and his students were in and out of class throughout the week for 15 or 16 weeks. He notes:

But if we had less breadth, we had more depth, as we could spend a week on a small passage and all contribute to seeing the many aspects of the passage or the idea.

He describes his home. He comes to his online classes from an English country house built in 1590 outside Cambridge, England. He has converted a stable at the end of the garden to his office with a kitchenette and bathroom, all heated by a wood-burning stove. He ended his introduction with his concern that he might not have much time to read all the postings and respond to everyone, and he wished our new community the best.

Homer is an adjunct instructor of humanities who started in 1996 for a private liberal arts school located in Missouri with both a traditional campus and an online school. He notes that he does not really remember why he got involved in the online classes, but suspects that he was fulfilling a need, making himself useful, and earning additional income. Because traditional, tenure-track professors were resistant to online learning, the administration was looking to open-minded adjuncts to become involved. He was persuaded by the lure of more income through the opportunity to teach more courses. He became involved through a special grant called the Annenberg Project. Later, in 1997, he took some preliminary faculty training to use the virtual classroom and

developed two online literature courses. The teaching opportunities opened up. He writes, “I was thrilled. As an adjunct, I was teaching 16 courses per year, 10 of them from my home office, and making more money than I had ever made as an adjunct.”

Over time, the online program became less “entrepreneurial” as it grew to be larger than its home campus. Policies were established that limited the number of courses instructors are permitted to teach each year. As an adjunct, he was hurt economically.

I may not be the typical online instructor, however. I make a little more money teaching online than I do f2f [face-to-face], and that is the primary reason I do it. I’m good at it, and I do enjoy it, but I crave the f2f environment. If I could be guaranteed a comparable income teaching f2f, I’d give up online without hesitation. (Homer)

Suzanne was next to log on and introduce herself. She began teaching online in 1992, using a listserv (a group of email addresses limited to specific subscribers who email their conversations to the entire group), while living in Japan and teaching full time for a university with campuses overseas serving military bases. She writes that she did not want to participate in online courses because she knew nothing about computers and did not own one. She was persuaded to give this a try to support the efforts of the university to establish online courses. She taught a mix of classroom courses and online courses using the listserv. In 2000, she left Asia for Hawaii and taught exclusively online from her home in Hawaii. The move to Hawaii cost her full-time status at her university. She then moved to South Carolina to help with some family needs. Her university did not permit adjunct faculty to teach more than two online courses a semester. She now teaches one course a semester for this university online from her home in South Carolina. She also teaches part-time in the classroom at a local university and, for several years, taught

English full-time at a local high school until recently when she left that job. She has taught for several online schools.

Maria introduced herself briefly by letting us know that she had carpal tunnel surgery on her right hand and was not supposed to be typing much. She was saving her hands for her classes. She pointed us to her website and the “Who We Are” page she and her husband have set up for their organic farm in central Pennsylvania. She sent me audio files with introductions and asked me to pass them on to the other participants.

Maria’s experiences started in the late 1980s when her traditional northwestern university began experimenting with bulletin boards, a type of discussion forum. Later in the early 1990s, she worked with the State Department to create distance education language courses for the Language School to be sent to the distant posts and embassies. With her fluency in Spanish and her experiences with online courses, she was hired by her next university to put Spanish courses online. She admits that she never taught any of the Spanish courses she developed, but did teach an occasional English literature course.

She does not remember when she first taught online or what the first course was. When she stepped down from her administrative position at the university, she became a full-time online teacher. She and her husband bought an organic farm in central Pennsylvania where they are happily farming and selling their organic products online. She writes, “I admit. I am an Internet addict. . . This is what I want to do the rest of my life. . . It’s the excitement [of the students] that is the biggest part of the teaching, when they really start discovering things.”

Shannon started teaching online in Germany in 1995 for an American university. She saw online teaching as an opportunity to “take my teaching with me to Canada where

I needed to take care of my mother who had had a stroke.” She taught from a log cabin on Vancouver Island and commuted every day to Victoria to visit her mother in the hospital there. With her “portable job,” she enjoyed the challenge and was able to expand her reach to several other universities. She consulted on distance education tasks at a Canadian university, developed online courses, and learned how to manage several different virtual classroom interfaces. Now she travels extensively to Canada, Europe, and around this country with her high-powered laptop. She focuses her time teaching online, giving feedback to students on their papers, and giving summaries of the weekly conference discussion topics. At one time, she hired an assistant to help with managing the online assignments and grading papers. Over the years, with experience, she has become more efficient in managing her online classes and values that.

Chuck, already tenured at a community college, came to online learning in 1995 when he was asked to revise a 6-credit distance learning course that traditionally had been managed at a distance through mailing materials and assignments. He admits to having been anxious about this since he knew nothing about computers or teaching online. He attended some conferences and took some workshops. He bought a computer and his son helped him learn to use it. Once he got started, however, he easily moved into mastering the online environment. For him, teaching online is about creating the learning environment and stepping back while observing students work their way through his instructions on what to do next. He takes a practical approach to teaching: whatever the university deems a full-time teaching load is reasonable. “It’s up to the faculty member to work out shortcuts and ways to be efficient so as not to burn out.”

“Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of persons and their experiences,” writes van Manen (2003, p. 6). In addition to being teachers, these participants are persons who have chosen teaching for its many rewards and have chosen teaching within technology for its creative and flexible experiences. They all seem to enjoy the flexibility, convenience, and control of using the technology as a window into the classroom and as an expression of their teaching selves. They all have richly creative lives beyond the classroom, some of which would not be possible were they “embedded” in institutional offices and brick-and-mortar classrooms. They seem to thrive on meeting the challenges of computers and software as they solve the knotty problems of being the best teachers they can be from a distance. They consider themselves lifelong learners, adaptive to new experiences. The essence of their experiences of teaching within technology reawakens and informs “the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (van Manen, p. 10).

Techne Embedded in the Teaching Knots

The idea of *techne*, the root understanding of technology, is vital to the understanding of teaching and using technology for creative and mentoring pursuits, the so-called tools of the trade. Taken from the Modern Greek, *techne* often refers to craftsmanship or craft. *Techne* suggests a rational, thought-through method for producing something tangible or even reaching a goal. Thus, *techne* can include the actual object created, such as a handmade quilt, and the rational, step-by-step processes used to make that quilt. For the quilt-maker, knowing how to create a quilt also means knowing how to use the tools of the quilter’s trade and understanding the complex signature and meaning of what quilts should be. *Techne* blends the physical and mental pursuit.

Knowing how to teach and be a teacher, as well as knowing how to use the computer to accomplish teaching, means knowing one's tools as well as one's trade. For authentic work to be done, one must know the endeavor as well as the tools of the endeavor. An activity like teaching online means knowing how to use one's computer.

Heidegger (1926/1962) writes:

'Seeing,' taken in the widest sense, regulates all 'procedures' and retains its priority. To whatever kind of objects one's knowledge may relate itself, and by whatever means it may do so, still that through which it relates itself to them immediately, *and which all thinking as a means has as its goal (author's italics) is intuition.* (p. 410)

The tension of this lived experience of teaching within technology, as both art and craft, is a tension between what a teacher envisions in her mind, intuitively and experientially, and the traditions in which the teacher finds her practice, completed through the medium of technology. Shulman (2005) calls these teaching traditions signature pedagogies, where novice teachers are taught to think, perform, and act with integrity as practiced in their professions.

One thing is clear: signature pedagogies make a difference. They form habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of the hand. . . .signature pedagogies prefigure the cultures of professional work and provide the early socialization into the practices and values of a field. (p. 58)

Complex as this is, the tensions of pedagogies in teaching traditions and practice combine with the craft of creating spaces for learning using a computer. Together, they render thinking, knowing, and doing as epistemological – both “knowing-that” and the “knowing-how.” Successful teachers become intuitive in the ways in which they move around the virtual classroom and practice their craft. What are the signature pedagogies associated with teaching online? Are they intuitive? In what way will these tensions transform the practices and values of the disciplines?

This intuitive sense of navigation in the virtual classroom is really a kind of mindfulness within the situation. Ted Aoki (2005c) describes it well:

Mindfulness of the situation allows the person in the situation to recognize that application [combining teaching practice and technology] is a hermeneutic act, remembering that being in the situation is a human being in his becoming. This mindfulness allows the listening to what it is that a situation is asking. (p. 155)

Teachers who become mindful in the virtual classroom resolve many of the tensions of “knowing-that” and “knowing-how”; they recognize the knots and know how to untie them. They have learned how to listen to what the situation asks of them. Of what are these experienced teachers mindful? What becomes revealed and concealed in this mindfulness, this seemingly seamless navigation of the virtual classroom?

Teaching online is described as intense, intellectual, and distanced from time and place. When we teach online, we are writing, thinking in writing, and writing to think. We create a learning environment out of words, managed through the software interface. Gadamer (1999) tells us that language is the medium of engagement, the way to be in the world by being in language, and the way we encounter ourselves and others. The writing is *techne* because we are using tools to create it. Creating the knots and unraveling the knots are parts of the *techne* in this mental and physical pursuit we hope leads to understanding and engagement.

Presumably, experienced teachers bring a thorough understanding of their *techne* with their “unique kind of knowledge associated with action or patterned practices” (Ihde, 1993, p. 39). By bringing together their knowledge and the patterned practice, they intertwine the knots that connect our minds and our bodies. What are the patterns of these knots?

Knowledge is recognized as being relative to an actual embodied person who is experiencing the world. Heidegger's famous example of the "hammer" is often used to explain this perceptual and concrete relationship of embodied knowledge.

One must know how to use the hammer, but once having learned, the hammer in use withdraws as an object and becomes the means of the experience itself. Were we to change the hammer example to a more contemporary artifact, we might use the word processor to illustrate the same point. (Ihde, 1993, p. 40)

Ihde (1993) continues to explain how, when we first learn to type on the word processor, we are aware of the machine itself as well as the typing, i.e., our action. But as we become experienced at typing, "Our intended actions flow through the machine virtually without notice and the machine . . . must allow this withdrawal" (p. 40). When our actions are disrupted, however, something else happens. We then experience objects as "other than." He notes the significance of this insight:

Technology plays a role in this primal human experience of an environment, but in such a way that it is taken-for-granted and in such a way that it may appear to be functionally (if functioning well) virtually invisible. (Ihde, 1993, p. 40)

The work of successful teachers, then, enables the "technology to take its proper place" and seamlessly connects the teacher with the virtual classroom and students, informing our teaching practice and resulting in *techne*.

Knots and Grooves

As I sit at the computer, entering my virtual classroom, I am aware that my being has become process, a dynamic transcending force manifest by my imagination. As a process, a dynamic force, I am open to various "effects." Effects are "something that is produced by an agency or cause; result; consequences" and have the "power to produce results; efficacy; force; validity; influence." To be both the agent and the result gives a dynamic morphing quality to my presence online. My words are the manifestation of both

cause and consequence. I have become my words online. My body has become word and the word becomes flesh.

Chuck writes that in the classroom, he feels like a verb, in action, self-conscious, but in the online classroom, “I’m more of a noun.” He experiences himself as static and as object. Noun includes words that act as subjects, objects, and states or qualities. The meaning of verb has even more knots. A verb is defined as “words that . . . typically express action, state, or a relation between two things.” Nouns as objects do not necessarily reflect relationship unless coupled by verbs. Chuck writes:

Sometimes I see myself as teacher as a verb. . . my interactions with students, writing posts to them, speaking to them f2f in my office or in the classroom, basically interacting through language and activities. And sometimes I see myself as teacher as noun. When I am teacher-as-noun, I identify myself as a teacher and then I sometimes do things that are about being a teacher, engaging in policy making about the classroom, create an exam.

Chuck’s relationship to students and his teaching have a dynamic quality when he is in the presence of his classroom and his students. He is moving around, speaking to students, writing to them, interacting through language and activities. He is also more self-conscious. However, in the online classroom, Chuck feels more static and perhaps isolated. He is thinking more about how to be a teacher and what teachers do. Because he has been able to spend time thinking about how he will create activities for learning, he can focus on “monitoring the responses. The real teaching has already been done when I designed the task” (Chuck).

Chuck’s key purpose, then, is to let his students learn. Heidegger (1954/1968) argues: “Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn” (p. 15). Some of the verbs Chuck uses when he writes about being online are dwelling, writing, thinking, and being online. As an experienced and successful teacher,

he understands that students must have space to find opportunities for learning how to become attuned and responsive beings. When he separate the activities of creating learning spaces and teaching, he opens the space in which students can become.

Knots in Time

Because our understanding of time has its roots in physical experiences, we often talk about time by using spatial language. Our metaphors link space and time. We speak of “taking a long time” and “moving the meeting forward one hour” and “being on time.” The special cartography of the virtual classroom imbues it with the variability of its own space and time continuum. We use the conventional language of time in our references to the day, week, hour, and month, along with the language of duration. Our human culture extends those time and space durations. In what way do we get our bearing in this dizzying overlapping of time and space? What do we experience as the multiplicities of time as we work in this virtual space that is both experientially here and there? Our remembering is what prevents temporal vertigo.

Thomas describes it this way:

You’d think there was more time to cover the material, but I discovered there was less time because what takes 15 minutes in the classroom can take a whole week in the asynchronous environment.

To make our experience of time more complex, we experience variations in duration of time, in synchronicity and asynchronicity, and in reflecting on our experiences according to the density of our experiences in any given unit of time.

Suzanne uses the hour as her measure of time for teaching:

. . . an hour a day answering student emails, about an hour per week responding to former students’ requests, about half an hour a day facilitating conference topic discussions, about four hours per week grading assignments, about ten hours per

course to set up the classroom, about six hours grading exams at the end of a course.

Flaherty (1999) notes, “Ultimately, it is the density of experience per standard temporal unit that determines variation in the perceived passage of time. . . . experience is shaped by variation in the magnitude of involvement” (pp. 138-139). Shannon reports: “I spend much time giving individual feedback on assignments [and] spend most of my time giving summaries of conference topics each week.” When we are bored, we are not engaged, and time seems to pass slowly; but upon reflection, the time was actually quite fast. When we are deeply engaged, we experience time as fleeting; yet upon reflection, time seems protracted. Flaherty (1999) writes:

The intensity with which one directs attentional resources to the situation at hand varies according to where that situation falls along a continuum from abnormally repetitive activity to abnormally problematic activity. (p. 138)

Levy (1998) helps us to understand how we experience time when we are virtualized. Virtualization creates pluralities of times and spaces and makes us nomads once again. When we are teaching online from computers in our offices and homes, we jump from keyboard to screen, from classroom to classroom, from interface to interface, from email to homework assignments, from class discussions in the discussion boards to private journals. We leap from our internal experience of time in the zone to the interface with its time-date stamps and then back to our external sense of time marked by the clock on the computer or the wall. We move from public to private and back to public, each with its own experience of time and space. As we enter the virtual world, in what manner do we customize both our sense of time and our experiences?

Levy (1998) describes for us this virtualization and the resulting knotty problem of the Moebius Effect described as “the transition from interior to exterior and from

exterior to interior” (p. 33). Virtualization blurs the boundaries between inner and outer spaces, place and time, and the boundaries of public and private. Synchronization, being in the same place at the same time, replaces spatial unity. We are there in the virtual classroom at the same time, but we are no longer in the same place at the same time. Asynchronization now replaces any sense of temporal unity as we can be in the virtual space at different times and still communicate.

Networking, or Working the Net

Networking (or connecting) with the other in the virtual classroom exists in (re)membering the person who has projected herself or himself into the words through the nuances possible in language and technologized words. The words left in the virtual classroom are filtered through our experiences, whether these words belong to our students or to us. We leave traces just as our students do. As teachers, we are known by our presence as well as our absence.

The word network means “intersecting or interconnecting filaments” and an “association of individuals having a common interest and often providing mutual assistance, information.” Net describes a “fabric consisting of a uniform open mesh made by weaving, twisting, knotting.” Work (as practice and creation) can lead us to craft. Our work is our craft as we network online with our students. What is the significance of instrumentalizing our teaching relationships and our craft? Where are we working when we work online? What is the nature of this work?

When we connect to our students through their words, we are forced to create a body and presence that comes first from the word rather than the body. In our face-to-face encounters, we use body language, tone of voice, the richness of our previous

experiences with people, and our memories in helping us to interpret the meaning of what is being said. In the online classroom, we have the screen page that holds the words and gives them shape. We have the shape of our words nested within the words of others and within the interface itself – our context. We also have the framed monitor screen through which we peer at our context. What surrounds a word “influences its meaning and effect” and shapes the context. Thus, working the Net involves our interacting with the words that represent our students and our imaginations that make possible our construction of a visual image so that we can visualize our students as students, not just words.

In what manner does our experience of the context of words as person shape our relationship with students and define how we teach? What do we need to do to stretch our teaching beyond the words to (re)member and (re)cognize our students online? In what way does the context influence my lived experience of my students? Recognize comes from the Latin *re*, denoting “action in a backward direction,” and *cognosceri* from which we get cognizance means “awareness, realization, or knowledge; perception; the range or scope of knowledge, observation.” Through our memories and the context, we re-cognize or rethink the person.

Recognizing our students online, a gradual process, not an instantaneous process, may have phenomenological significance. Casey (2000) tells us that dawning recognition needs a context. So when we first enter our virtual classrooms, we may have dim recognition that lacks completeness. We may see through the glass darkly, impartially, and without certainty. Teachers often describe this process as confusion and lack of awareness. But experienced teachers develop ways to speed up the process of getting to know their students.

When a student calls me, if I am not at my computer, I'm lost. What course are they in? What was their circumstance? Are they the one with the missing textbook, or the one whose mother died It occurs to me – is my memory that bad that I don't know one student from the other without being able to search my files? Probably not. In f2f classes, the image of the face and person becomes the “file folder” for those contextual details. In the online class that “file folder” is “Michelle Jackson” or was it “Hannah Jackson” or “Evelyn Jackson.” (Maria)

Casey (2007) reminds us that we have forgotten what memory is and what it can mean. He is concerned about our reliance on technology for remembering, or not remembering.

. . . we have turned over responsibility for remembering to the cult of computers, which serve as our modern mnemonic idols. . . . Human memory has become self-externalized: projected outside the rememberer himself or herself and into non-human machines. (p. 2)

What does it mean to our being teachers to self-externalize our memories of students and our teaching experiences? What are the consequences of our relegating these memories to file folders and software?

For our online classes, we rely on memory to discover and rediscover our own using and learning our technology and even our discipline content. Perhaps, memory helps us to become better at creating our learning environments in technology. Heidegger (1954/1968) suggests this is possible as he sees thinking rooted in memory: “Thinking is thinking only when it *recalls* in thought . . . the unspoken, the duality of beings and Being” (p. 244).

Are we able to see the humanity in our students as we remember them in a self-externalized way? As we get to know our students, we add characteristics that help us remember them. We give them context in the classroom, within their words, and even context within the interface. For Maria, she files her students within named file folders. Interface designers help this along by providing places in the interface to make this

possible: student-named assignment folders, drop boxes, grade books, workbooks, and journals. However, Casey (2000) warns us:

. . . computers cannot remember; what they can do is to record, store, and retrieve information. . . . Computers can only collect and order the reduced residues, the artfully formatted traces, of what in the end must be reclaimed by human beings in order to count as human memories. In this respect, *our memories are up to us*. (p. 2)

What do we teachers do to make our students “count as human memories”?

Online we remember our students and come to know them through the context of their words and through the filter of the functions in the online classroom. Our memories start when students become file folders, handy ways to group and isolate information about a student. But we also come to know them by their life events, their stories. We remember the students who had deaths in their families, who were deployed to war zones, whose children were hospitalized. We move beyond our bodily experiences of knowing students in a lived experience way to knowing them as they are in the context of their lives. The technology has extended our sensory experiences through our perceptions and cognition to the networked relationships with our students, but what have we gained and lost?

When I am in the face-to-face classroom, I ground my thinking in my perceptions of my students in the context of their lives, not sitting in their seats. I watch for responses, questions, confusion, and understanding. I suffuse my visualization of a student’s face with the characteristics I learn about the student to create a memory. I have merged the perceived and the remembered into a memory. In what way does this suffusion of students’ stories with file folders and functionality transform my teaching impulses and my identity as teacher?

Faces within the Net

In our virtual environment, we are not forced to recognize and acknowledge our students immediately. We can “forget” who the student is until we wish to address the student. Casey (2000) looks to Nietzsche to suggest that our motivation for “amnesia concerning memory” (p. 2) is to avoid assuming a “crushing burden” (p. 3) and that this forgetting is “necessary to our well-being and a basis for being-in-the-world” (p. 307).

Chuck exhibits this forgetfulness by directing his students through his virtual class in some abstract and detached way, themselves becoming abstracted and detached. His face-to-face students have names, but his online students are often forgotten as he remembers his learning environment, the course within the computer technology.

In my [online] business writing classes I seldom have a sense that I know who my students are; whereas in my f2f business writing classes I usually have a sense that I know them (at least superficially). In my online classes the effect of not knowing who my students are is that I see myself as directing a course that has many benefits for students because it will help their business writing. In my f2f classes, I have a sense that the course will be good for Nancy in her job at the county government and Yolanda in her job as secretary to an accountant, and not much good to John in his job as foreman at a nursery where he does very little writing. (Chuck)

Chuck experiences his relationship to his students as mediated through the actual class he has created within the technology. He has a sense that he is not with his students, but that he is “directing a course” that will benefit his students. He sees himself, meets himself in the online classroom as he directs his class, making that experience quite personal for Chuck. His course becomes a kind of mirror of himself. Heidegger (1971) tells us “Dwelling. . . is the basic character of Being” (§ 44) and thinking belongs to dwelling. By thinking himself into his class, Chuck experiences dwelling in the directing. Rather than seeing the faces of students and perhaps seeing his teaching reflected on their

faces, he is detached and removed from the personal embodied teaching experience that we usually have with a class of students.

We teachers usually think of our teaching as directing students rather than the course itself. However, the online course does have a life of its own and is moving while we are steering. This raises questions about whether it is possible for Chuck to lose control of the course, or whether the students could get run over by the course. Who determines whether the course is going in the right direction? How does one steer the class and what are the directions? Who names these directions? At what point do we remember our students?

When a course has a life and direction of its own, we question whether our presence is really necessary to learning. Some teachers might even question whether our students' presence to us is necessary for teaching. These are complicated questions to answer and lead us to question whether we teach and students learn when we cannot get a sense of them and when our experience of them is mediated through an interface that separates us from each other. Homer is not sure whether he is teaching when he cannot see his students' faces.

I don't see the quizzical look on the face of the student in the back of the room, the one who will not ask the question running through their mind. (Homer)

How is it that we do (re)member our students? If we are unable to see our students' faces, unable to (re)member them through bodily impressions of them, unable to (re)cognize them, we are forced to make connections with them through their words. The online classroom facilitates these connections by giving us places to exchange words and ideas. Our words become representations, even icons, of who we are. We see and are seen through the glass darkly. We are known through this complex landscape of

technologized words and our memories, where, as Ong (1982) suggests, writing restructures our consciousness and we become literate. Do words suffice to create these connections with our students and help us (re)cognize their faces in the net?

Face derives from the Latin *facies*, which refers to visage or appearance. Face can mean the “surface of a thing; front part of the head, from the forehead to the chin.” Face is also used idiomatically in expressions to mean “to accept the consequences of one’s actions” and to confront as in facing the music. Appearance derives from the Latin *apparere*, which means to be seen and to be visible, as well as “the sensory aspect of existence.” Appearance suggests coming into existence by way of becoming visible. A face needs to become visible to take on aspects of existence and meaning. How do we give meaning to our students’ existence without the face? What do we manifest as face in place of our students’ actual bodies?

And it’s so much harder to get a sense of the students online, so much harder to remember who’s who. In person at least you can remember someone by hair, accent, gait. My field – literature – assumes as its basic premise that language has the power to bring out all the complex nuances of personality. But our students are such inexperienced writers (that’s the polite way to put it) that their writing often conveys almost no individual character at all. (Thomas)

Thomas uses the phrase “in person” to describe the face-to-face experience of someone.

We are, indeed, “out of person” when we are online.

Without some way of naming, the Moebius nature of experience can leave us disoriented, light-headed, and even bereft. One way the virtual classroom assists us in this recognizing is through creating fundamental functions for our teaching activities.

Students can neatly be filed by characteristics other than their authentic countenances, characteristics of performance and textual presence in the online discussions and activities. They become who they are by what they do and write.

I find that within a couple weeks of a class's beginning most of the names come to mind readily and an impression of the "personality" of each student has been set in place via his or her language and its tone and the frequency of posts and choices about posting and nature of responses and, especially, manner of replying to email exchanges between her or him and me. The scheme by which I recall them, intuitively, is to order them (mentally) according to a rubric featuring qualities such as maturity level, language skill, type/size of knowledge base, means of relating to others, expectations, and probably other features that don't come to mind right now. (Suzanne)

The experience of not knowing someone's "real" name has phenomenological consequences. In particular are the consequences to our sense of identity as teacher and the students' senses of identity as members of the virtual collective. Not knowing students by name affects our ability to be in relation to them. Naming witnesses the existence of another. Being named gives existence to our identities.

Bas Levering (Online forum, October 29, 2000) writes, "A name is directly connected to one's identity. . . . our name functions as a sort of summary of the way we would like to be addressed." Naming our students calls them forth and brings them into our presence. Our name is our narrative to some extent. When we have difficulties learning students' names, we often forget the context we have for them. We may no longer remember them. We may have to relearn our relationship to the students. In some online classes, we work within a virtual interface where a machine renames students, assigning them a logon identity that might be some combination of their initials, names, and even numbers. It may be unique, but the name is not personal, not what the student would choose for himself or herself. We are then forced to establish a new (con)text by which we come to know the students, birthing these temporary names and contexts for our online classes.

Calling someone by his or her name, learning names so that we actually experience the name and the person together, even in our virtual contexts, addresses the uniqueness in the other and enables us to be addressed by the other's uniqueness. How are our teaching relationships influenced by the difficulties of remembering names or by the practicalities of creating file folders in which to "stuff" our knowledge of our students? We often experience our students through some reverse order, first learning them as files, or categories, and then creating faces and voices for them. How does this matter to our teaching?

Emoticons: Knotty Icons of Emotion

A lively discussion about using emoticons (abbreviations, symbols, and graphical images of faces that express various emotions) came up naturally in our forum. One participant asked me why I use emoticons in my messages and questions to the forum. He notes that he knew me as a more serious person and wondered why I would use something as silly as emoticons. That engendered a discussion about using emoticons to express the teacher's face, feelings, and intended meaning when he or she communicates virtually in the online classroom and whether such use of silly symbols gives our teaching the gravitas it deserves.

The word emoticon comes from a combination of the words, a *portmanteau* of the words emote or emotion and icon. The word icon we know to mean a picture, image, representation, or even an actual figure that represents something. Icons are not one dimensional; that is, they usually have a narrative to accompany them. We have religious and spiritual icons, artistic icons, musical icons, and other representations that contain within both symbolic meaning and narrative.

The word emoticon evokes an interesting notion that emotions are symbolic and contain narratives. That makes them more than simply messages. For example, the smiley face attached to a message to students might mean that the message is meant to be taken lightly or as a joke. Or the smiley face might mean that the speaker intends for the reader to imagine her face smiling as she delivers this message. Without clarification, the emoticon may refer to the writer, the message, the intention, or all three.

A variety of studies have shown that only 7% of interpersonal communication is verbal (words); the remaining 93% is non-verbal. All we have . . . [online] is words. . . I use emoticons, mostly smilies, to provide clarity when my comments can be taken multiple ways and I am intending to convey humor, sarcasm, or simply to indicate that I am not being harsh with a comment. . . The presence, or absence, of the emoticon can make a significant difference. (Homer)

Homer understands the limitations of words that are delivered in the absence of physical presence. He relates a story about how he edited one of his comments to a student and unintentionally deleted the smiley face. Several shocked students sent him a note to “call him to task” about his harsh comments. He had to explain the error in his communication. His deleted smiley face seemed more important to his message than the revised wording.

Shannon’s comments about using emoticons reflect her concern for her international students as well as her own concern for gravitas in her classes. She has found a way to personalize her messages without using the common language of emoticons.

I rarely use emoticons now because I think students may not understand them and become too familiar with me. I noticed that I lose authority when I use them with my students. I have gotten more formal during the years but spend more time in personalizing messages to individual students rather than the class as a whole. (Shannon)

By personalizing messages, she focuses more on the individual messages than group messages. These personalized messages enable her to become more connected to her students so that she can rely on being known and accepted in a certain way.

To further illustrate the point about using emoticons, Chuck adds some levity to our discussion by writing: “Real men don’t use smiley faces or eat quiche.” Homer responds, “Real men do whatever they * * * * well please, including eating quiche and using emoticons IF they are called for.” Later, Chuck explains that he posted that comment without emoticons to illustrate that sort of comment often needs some sort of explanation about intent. He intended to show us that without emoticons, this statement would likely not be understood. He made his point when Homer responded. Homer did not use emoticons either nor did he explain his not using them. He used another symbol in his response, * * * *, which we all understood quite well. We seemed to understand the emotional message in the symbols for the missing words. I know Chuck to have a wry sense of humor and accepted his comment as wry. Since I did not know Homer personally, I was not sure of the intention of his message.

Thomas remarks that he saw the inadequacy of using emoticons as symbolic representations of human emotions. In fact, he has a very personal reaction to them.

I’m afraid that the smile[y] gives the voice the feel of some sort of cutsy [sic] American cheerfulness . . . – in other words, invites me to turn away from the words, lose the focus of my mind, and join in the gleeful world of happy citizens. I’m particularly sensitive to this sort of voice, I suppose, and recoil quickly from it. . . . The smiling voice is related to students’ notion that being earnest and intending the best is all they need to get an A. . . . What really comes across is the sense that you are putting on some sort of false front. . . . (Thomas)

Thomas rejects the idea of showing emotions through symbolic representation because of his own personal reaction to what he believes diminishes the gravity of teaching but also

increases student misconceptions of intention. But his perception that the emoticons lead us to believe that we are seeing a false front has some phenomenological interest. Is there any authentic front that we can put on for our students? Is any persona we select for our teaching authentic, or do we merely select one of many personas as we see fit? Is this not true for the traditional classroom as well? Are we not always symbols for something else in our classes? Since we all struggle to know how much we actually communicate with our words and our gestures, it seems that our text represents us online. Yet, Thomas questions whether we can know our students when they are challenged to communicate in text online.

For Thomas, mastery of language and the ability to communicate are the most authentic ways of being oneself and communicating intent. Coupled with Chuck's and Homer's exchange, we can probe some aspects of representation of emotions in virtual communication as a way of reaching out to students and making our messages more intentional. We can also demonstrate our own mastery of language to our students as a way of showing them how to be authentic through language, a worthy goal for writing experiences.

Our connections with others online depend on our own lived experiences and our abilities to understand one another. When we do not have physical memories to draw on to remember another, we must rely on other bodily cues. We must also rely on our basic intentions and preconceptions about others as well. How can we understand emoticons as ways to extend our expressions and intentions across the virtual divide? Emoticons are standardized and conventional; we cannot see the specific ways in which one smile or

smirk may differ from another, how the raised eyebrow, the one-sided grin, and the softness of the facial expressions send welcoming and affective messages.

For many years, I did not use these graphic symbols myself, instead relying on explanations. I would sometimes give a warning about a message (Now I'm about to say something that will seem harsh), or after writing a message, I would add a note about how I intended the message. I relied on my words. What I liked about the emoticons was their colorfulness, their way of graphically breaking up the text, and even decorating my online class messages somewhat. For me, they were ways of creating hospitality in an otherwise desert of technologized text. They helped me achieve tone, voice, and color in my own mind. When students used the emoticons, I was more easily able to create a tone and voice for them. As Thomas notes, "Our students are such inexperienced writers (that's the polite way to put it) that their writing often conveys almost no individual character at all."

Is this really true? Or do we stifle their expression with our gravitas? How do we relate to our students if our own writing is not individualized, and we must rely on these conventional symbols and clichéd emoticons to convey our intentions about our messages? Our using emoticons may distance us from our students' understanding of our messages and who we are – or they may bridge that distance. When students' writing lacks certain individuality, we can recognize this and help them develop their own voices through our understandings of how writing works to discover self.

Parker Palmer (1993) writes that the learning space may sometimes be painful for students, and having an element of hospitality helps students to linger. He says that hospitality is not an end in itself but offers encouragement and permission.

A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur – things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. (p. 74)

Emoticons may be one way to achieve this welcoming, perhaps to keep us laughing in the midst of our pain. If we can achieve this lightness of being, perhaps we can reach across the distances to support our students through hospitality. Teachers seem to have a sense of their own power over students and wish to give the often stark text a sense of playfulness. These icons of emotions may help us do that. Without the presence of our actual faces, we can represent ourselves with words, actions, and emoticons. We may not have our bodies to reflect the unspoken tone and intention, but we can connect our intentions, playfulness, and teaching in emoticons.

The Ontological Knot

...the normal subject can immediately ‘come to grips’ with his body. He enjoys the use of his body not only in so far as it is involved in a concrete setting, he is in a situation not only in relation to the tasks imposed by a particular job, he is not open merely to real situations; for, over and above all this . . . he is open to those verbal and imaginary situations which he can choose for himself or which may be suggested to him in the course of an experiment. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 108)

In discussing the spatiality of one’s own body, Merleau-Ponty (1964) places the body at the very center of ontology and experience. We exist because we have a body, and we perceive the world because we have a body somewhere, in a place. The body locates us someplace. Our tasks place our bodies as well, whether in real or actual situations or within imaginary situations, such as those we find when we teach online. Our imaginary situations can be virtual, or they can be created through our words.

The Body Knots

When we speak of body in the virtual classroom, we speak of the body from which we enter the virtual classroom and the body that is represented by the technologized words in the virtual classroom. When we are absent, we are, virtually speaking, no-body and no-where, or no-place. Our no-body and no-where become knotted. We may have a sense of being there. Ironically, although we are not experiencing ourselves as “being there,” others may be experiencing us as “being there” through the representation of our technologized words. Does the teacher need a sense of body to connect with students online? Does the student need a sense of body to learn? If so, whose body – the teacher’s or the student’s? What role does the body play in learning online? What role would “no-body” play in the virtual classroom, which may be seen as “no-where”?

Van Manen (2002) warns us about what may be lurking behind our using everyday language from our traditional classroom experiences to talk about the virtual classroom experience. He asks, “What does it mean to “attend” a class online, without being physically present?” (p. 222). The teacher’s personality, attitudes, classroom identity, and personal voice and style are simply not there. What new languages and vocabulary do we replace these words with? What do these new words conceal and reveal? Friesen (2002) concludes “We have to recognize that an online class is, in many senses of the word, a place where there is no “body” (p. 235). Where are the body and the mind?

. . . . online teaching happens in my head – a feature of the experience which I like. (Chuck)

“I live online,” I often tell people on the phone or in person. “This is just a temporary download,” I explain about my voice and physical appearance. (Maria)

Online teachers risk forgetting that we are really not in the presence of our students; we risk our teaching experiences becoming something quite different, something solipsistic.

When the presence of students is not felt in the online classroom, teachers often become disoriented and uneasy. They experience the absence of students as being alone. The teacher becomes “no-body” and the virtual class becomes “no-where” – just as a student who does not attend the class regularly leaves no traces and may become “no-body” to the teacher. Teachers may experience the loneliness of the “no-place” classroom just as students do. Except for one teacher in this study, all teachers enjoyed the experience of being alone in their online classrooms while coming to class from home. They viewed the time alone in the virtual classroom as reflection time, time to think about their teaching and what students may be learning.

Our physical bodies are located in-place. Casey (1993) reflects that Being-in-place as a lived body involves five aspects of being directional, or being located in dimensional space: 1) the body localizes complex sensations to a place; 2) the body’s orientation in terms of up/down, front/back, and right/left connects the body to some place as a reference; 3) the concreteness of the body is matched to the concreteness of place; 4) the body presents itself here in this place; and 5) the porosity of the skin shares the openness of the place in a “common flesh of the world” (pp. 22-23).

When teachers are asked to describe their bodies when they are teaching online or in their online classrooms, they often describe themselves sitting at the computer, not lying down, not standing up (although I often stand up to work online to relieve my back

stress). The body's sensations are localized to the chair in front of the computer screen and oriented to the computer screen. The body is here in place in front of the screen.

Then I sit back while things process. . . Now I'm leaning forward, my elbow on the desk, my chin on my hand. I come out of the screen-induced abstraction from my body and notice the backs of my legs are cold, and so is my shoulder. . . . [As I anticipate finishing] . . . I pull my head back and tilt a little upwards, looking to the side stretching the muscles, breath deeply, turn back and close out. (Thomas)

Thomas speaks of the "screen-induced abstraction from my body." Abstraction is "absent-mindedness; inattention; the act of taking away or separating; withdrawal." This experience of withdrawing from the body and separating from it can be understood as a way to background the body while the mind is focusing on something else. If our bodies and our bodily senses are the location of our experiences, how can we understand the experience of our minds better when our bodies are not present to the experience? Even more so, how do we understand this experience as exhilarating, as many teachers report (Whitesel, 2001), when our bodies are in actuality hurting and knotting up?

Just as turning our backs to the computer screen as we "close out" may be a sign of disregard and dismissal, sitting may carry some significance as well. Also, regarding relationships and communicating, the posture of sitting as the physical orientation may have some phenomenological significance.

First thing every morning (after brewing coffee, naturally), I sit here to check in on classes in progress and to answer my email. (Suzanne)

I [sit] so that I see the city and the twinkling lights below. It helps me think and focus on the students and where they may be located. (Shannon)

The word sit, from the Latin *sedere*, means "to be located or situated" or "to dwell or abide" and even "to pose" (Webster's, 1996). Thus, sitting in relationships and in communication suggests that we are situated in a pose, perhaps an artificial position. Are

we *poseurs* when we pose as teachers in front of the computer screen? Inherent in the definition of sitting or posing is the suggestion that we are posing for someone who is capturing our image, such as an artist or a photographer. Can *poseurs* be authentic teachers with authentic relationships with students? And does this matter to learning? What might posing be a search for or a substitute for?

Perhaps we teachers are posing in hopes that somehow our still images will be “seen” by the students or even captured by the technology. We sit very still before the computer screen, only our fingers typing away on the keyboard and our eyes moving across the screen as we follow the cursor and the appearing words. In what way can we get into the class simply by sitting here? We sit before the knotty problem and hope for an untying or, at the very least, a glimpse of the strands in the knots.

However, the glass of the computer screen itself captures our image and reflects it back to us, an apt metaphor for the described experience of meeting one’s own mind online. Additionally, our words are “captured” online in the virtual classroom, becoming our image. We are what we write. Capture can mean “to take by force” and become a prisoner, to “gain control over or exert influence over.” The suggestion here is that we are dominated by our technology as it captures both our reflection and our words. Does the experience of being-there as captive to the technology and captured by it affect our teaching? In what way do we teachers experience this domination of the technology in our teaching?

Heidegger (1952/1977) writes that our modern technologies drive us to behave in ways that expand productivity for its own sake and ultimately lead to self-concealment.

In his discussion of modern technology as an “ordering revealing,” a self-revealing as standing-reserve (p. 19), Heidegger (1952/1977) suggests that this

Enframing is fundamentally a calling-forth. It is a “challenging claim,” a demanding summons, that “gathers” so as to reveal. This claim *enframes* in that it assembles and orders. It puts into a framework or configuration everything that it summons forth, through an ordering for use that it is forever restructuring anew. (p. 19)

We teachers have become part of this standing-reserve and the enframing configuration beckoned by the technology. We hope to be recognized by our absent students and sometimes desperately want to be seen as teachers, as people, rather than as technology resources. Indeed, some of the teachers in this study are self-conscious about how they looked when they are ready to go to their online classes. The computer technologies provoke them to find many ways to address the knotty business of teaching in the absence of students and being teachers in spite of the students’ absence.

Ellsworth (1997) writes about the power of address and of teaching as action in the absence of a positive reference [such as students in a class]. These acts of representation [such as posing or dressing up to teach] start out as

the intention to mirror the other, refer to the other, understand the other; but end up referring to the self, to the act of representation itself. . . . [This act of representation is] self-reflection that returns to the self without meeting the self. (p. 143)

Ellsworth continues by explaining that we may think there are no consequences to this representation, but the representations are meant to make something happen, something we define as learning. “Learning happens when the very question we asked in order to seek a learning has been displaced by the return of a difference” (p. 147). The difference may be that the student reaches an understanding about the subject matter. As Maria notes, “Not seeing my students does not make a difference to me. I can see where they

are [in their learning] and can take them to where they need to be.” Homer echoes this sentiment when he writes, “If they [students] interact with classmates, they will cover the topic, and I don’t really care HOW they get it done.”

The Dys-appearing Body Knot

Sitting down is also a gesture of acceptance and equality as we often sit together to converse, to negotiate, and to show acceptance of hospitality. Sitting has both a sense of interacting through communication in a democratic way, as well as a sense of being static, in one place. When I sit at the computer to enter my online classroom, I am sitting to connect to my class and my students. The implications are that we are sitting together in an equality of relationship. In what way do we convey that message to students who cannot see our sitting, but only see the hierarchical nature of the interface? This sitting posture, then, becomes one for being together, communicating our relationships to one another. Each of us enters the classroom and conversation as seeming equals. What “stands” between my students and me are the computer screens, the keyboards, the interface, and even my own reflection. What does it mean to mediate our relationships and communication, reach across time and space to share our thoughts, with the technology “standing between”? In what way does a dominating technology also offer the opportunity for equality and what sort of equality is this?

Suzanne describes her body in a different way, not mentioning any body parts to describe her physical sense of self. But clearly, she is referring to her body when she writes:

[I am] heavier. I’ve gained probably 15 pounds over the past 10 years for the sedentary style of online teaching. I’m 10 years older. I’ve become practically reclusive by what seems like preference.

This sense of heaviness is not unusual in online teachers' experiences. Teachers talk about how sitting still for long periods of time fatigues their bodies, but often energizes their minds. I experience fatigue after long periods of sitting still. My body aches and feels heavy. Why do some teachers experience this sitting as fatiguing and others experience the sitting as energizing? For Suzanne, being heavier also means being older and being reclusive by choice. She feels shut off and alone, apart from the rest of the world. Perhaps the problematic of body awareness can help explain.

Leder (1990) writes that feelings of well-being rarely inspire us to the "interpretive quest" for understanding our bodies the way our discomforts do (pp. 78-79). Discomfort and pain are reflections of disease and dysfunction, a response to a disappearing body. Our bodies seem to know that our absence from the class and from our bodies, even temporarily, reflects a dysfunction of some sort. Our absent bodies are crying out to be acknowledged, brought forth, and called to gather. "Aspects of this heightened body awareness," Leder writes, "can be understood according to the model of dys-appearance" (p. 90). The body emerges when it senses a state that is different from a desirable state or what it ordinarily experiences. The body is then "experienced as away, apart, from the 'I'" The presencing of the body in dys-appearance is still a mode of absence. . . . away from direct experience" (p. 90). Thus, the dys-appearing body emerges through the sensations of heaviness and fatigue to tell us of the unusual state we are in. We have the knotty paradox of having our bodies too much with us in spite of our mental absence from the body.

Some teachers also experience teaching as heavy and describe it in terms of a burden of sorts. Thomas writes:

I never minded teaching two online and two face-to-face classes at the same time. The pace is so different that it becomes manageable. Larger loads [online] can get rough when marking time arrives, but having a lighter load the next term . . . refreshes me.

Thomas is commenting on the weight of the load of online teaching and the weight of marking time. Simply marking time has a tedious quality to it. Many teachers experience teaching online as more time-consuming and, in some ways, more physically demanding. On the one hand, Thomas mentions the balance that is brought to his teaching “load” by having two online courses and two courses in a classroom. But when he is teaching more online classes, the load gets rough at “marking time.” Marking time can make our bodies feel burdened and heavy as we are overcome by the sameness of seeing technologized words online. Without the signature handwriting, students’ papers often look the same. Thomas does not feel this burden when marking physical papers with pen and ink.

As we sit at the computer, the weight of our bodies is interpreted through the senses; our bodies are oriented by our senses. Our senses tell us where we are and who we are as we exist in space. Even our absent bodies, our dys-appearing bodies, tell us something about who we are and where we are. In Heidegger’s (1952/1977) understanding of how technology alters our being, this bodily experience of heaviness might be warning us that we are becoming “standing reserve.” What is the meaning of this paradox?

Our senses often are used as the bridge to the world within our imaginations as our brains interpret our sensory images. Our senses reflect our bodies to our brains and help us define our bodies and boundaries. What senses do we use to interpret our bodies in online classes, to go beyond the boundaries of our physical bodies to interact and communicate with others online? In what way do we unravel the knotty problem of

exquisite enjoyment in our imaginations and discomfort of discovering we have been absent from our bodies?

Where Do the Knots Go?

For this study, the question of how experienced online teachers so successfully background their bodies to energize their minds may reveal some insights into how the experience affects our intellects and emotions. Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes that the virtual body exists in reflection and subjectivity. My sense of body can be where I imagine it to be. With my imagination, memory, understanding, meditation, and technology, I can project my body out of my immediate physical surroundings. As an experienced online teacher, I can background my body or diminish its importance and easily imagine myself moving around my online classroom. Is being out of body extending the boundaries of my body, or is it limiting my body's boundaries? In what ways does being out of body both extend our experiences and limit them?

Most of the teachers in this study, when asked to describe their bodies, do not directly even mention their bodies. However, they do mention aspects of our bodily understanding beyond just the body's position.

For me, the experience . . . is highly intellectual. . . It's all fantasy of course, but I concentrate, focus, imagine, anticipate. This is fun for me. . . I'm in a groove, in a zone. I have little awareness of my environment except the keyboard and screen . . . In a classroom, I'm more self-conscious . . . I'm tired when it's over. (Chuck)

Chuck easily makes the leap out of his body to the intellectual groove known as the zone. He has backgrounded his body and moved into the fantasy. The computer is his pathway to this experience. He does not need students waiting for him to enjoy the ride. Maria concurs as she insists that she "does not feel any absence at all."

Again, Leder (1990) helps us to understand why we may not be experiencing our bodies as absent while we are in a groove, in a zone. This self-effacement takes us away from our actual bodies and produces a self-concealment, called *focal disappearance*. We are invisible to our own eyes. A second example he terms as *background disappearance* is distinguished from *absence*, which “refers to all the ways in which the body can be away from itself” (p. 26). Thus, disappearance refers to that which is out of our visual field but which has not vanished altogether. We have not vanished, but we may be out of touch temporarily.

Shannon is quite in touch with her body and orients herself through her senses. Her senses tell her who she is when she goes to class and how she feels. Her bodily senses are closely tied to her preparations for going online.

I dress comfortably and often sit in my nightclothes and usually bare feet. A tea pot with earl grey tea and a pretty cup is refreshing if I plan to stay at my desk late into the night.

Shannon’s senses help her to know who she is and help her to know who her students are, to reach out to them so that she can inspire them. In what way does she extend her senses to create that sense of body that she projects beyond the confines of her concrete body? The rituals of hospitality here are the metaphoric bridge to take her online to her class. Her senses propel her forward to that intellectual place of learning. For many teachers, our senses help us to bridge the gap between being there and not being there through bodily sensations of having left that online place. When we want to return from our online classes, we come to our senses and find ourselves back in our chairs. Where are we when we are in-between these places? Who are we in the tensionality and intentionality of this gap?

Knots Here and There

Having our bodies both here and there is both complex and vibrant. We pulsate with vigor and energy, feeling a life force in this dynamic motion. Not only do we imagine projecting ourselves through using our imaginations into the virtual classroom, but we extend our body's presence through our fingers on the keyboard, which assists us in this journey of crossing over online. How do we dwell in this "in-between the knots" of having our bodies both here and there? What is this tension like? Who are we in this gap between our fingers on the keyboard and words in the virtual classroom? Tensionality exists in all the ways we can be in-between the living world and the virtual world.

Ted Aoki (in Berman et al., 1991) elaborates on how we can experience this tension and what we can understand from it. He suggests that this in-between place is a dwelling place that can be its own place rather than just a bridge or gap between places.

When we dwell within the place of tensionality, we speak of "closing the gap," "leaping across," "bridging banks," "crossing from here to there," "stepping across." . . . But what if we reversed our understanding, in a sense allowing the leaping or the bridging, etc., to be itself? (p. 132)

Having our bodies here and there, our fingers poised above the keyboard or on the keyboard, is the place of tensionality and our own seeking of "human attunement" (p. 132). Our strings are not dead, but vibrant, alive. To be in tensionality is a way to be alive. To imagine this suspension in dwelling space between leaves me breathless! ". . . to be in comfort," writes Aoki, "is to be standing with strength within tensionality" (p. 132).

Ihde (1990) describes how our human-technology relation is ultimately an existential relation with the world. Just as our eyeglasses extend our eyes and our fingers

extend our writing minds, we experience alterity relations with our technologies. He questions how it is possible to view our technology as *other*:

Within embodiment relations, were the technology to intrude upon rather than facilitate one's perceptual and bodily extension into the world, the technology's objectness would necessarily have appeared negatively. . . . The bodily-perceptual focus *upon* the instrumental text is a condition of its own peculiar hermeneutic transparency. But what of a positive or presential sense of relations with technologies? (Ihde, 1990, p. 97)

In what way do we understand our technology as other and as tool? What is the meaning of being present before our computers, and what is the sense of relation with our technologies? Borrowing from Levinas' (1969) sense of the term alterity, Ihde (1990) positions our technologies as other, or as quasi-other. Our relation to our technologies is a kind of ethical, face-to-face encounter, just as we would have with another human or with the ultimate other, God. In some way, perhaps we anthropomorphize our technologies and personalize their artifacts. Certainly, teaching online, with our words and imaginative projections and embodied experiences, enables us to personalize the artifacts of our encounters with students. Do we have artifacts of our imaginative encounters with the zone, that elusive self-absorption that actually takes us away from our bodies?

Levy (1998) takes this relation to the ultimate and describes the projection of our bodily image through our imaginations' telepresence, where our "tangible bodies are here and there" (p. 39). He does not use the word physical body, but uses tangible body. Tangible means "capable of being touched; discernible by touch." How are we touched online? How do our imaginations enable us to be touched? Who touches us? Why do we wish to be touched in this way? Robinson (2000) writes,

When I am in-touch, a part of my body touches. To touch-in evokes an image of reaching inside to touch—touch something deeper. To be-in-touch with is to

deliberately extend my touch into—searching deeper. To be in-touch-with a concept is to reach into it for a deeper meaning. (p. 211)

What deeper meaning do we search for in our desire to be touched and in-touch-with?

Levy (1998) helps us to understand this experience through his imaginative rendering of what it means to virtualize our bodies, project them into our online classrooms. He describes how our bodies are projected to another location through our physical voice (as with a telephone) or our technologized words (online with our computer technologies) and how our bodies are virtualized. Thus, he is able to write:

. . . the virtualization of the body is therefore not a form of disembodiment but a re-creation, a reincarnation, a multiplication, vectorization, and a heterogenesis of the human. (p. 44)

By projecting our bodily image online through our imagination, we recreate ourselves, not separate our selves. We reincarnate our selves and in some sense actually unite our selves, making our selves greater. In this process, we become one with the other, our technologies, and we become one with our seemingly separated selves. Our virtualization enables us to become more than we are in our physical, tactile world. How do teachers experience this virtualization, and do they sense the unifying experience? In what way do they learn to teach without the bodily connections?

When I sit at my computer and transport my mind online to my virtual classroom, I have a sense of being in a place. (Maria writes, “I live online.”) When we answer student emails about the class, we often refer to the virtual classroom as though it were a place. We direct students to go here or there. We refer to the experiences as “being-in” the classroom. We are even aware of the two places at once.

It is important to me how my desk is situated and what I look at. My room is decorated with pictures that carry great meaning for me and remind me that the world needs good people to carry the future. I remember why I teach and how this

can help influence the future. I also like to post funny stuff in each classroom Cyber Café to lighten the day for me and my students. (Shannon)

When I smoothly transition to the classroom, the walls disappear, the furniture disappears, and the boundaries seem to disappear. I am there. When I do not want to be in the virtual classroom for one reason or another, the classroom becomes other, and I experience it as “over there.” It is a place that needs a path to get there, and sometimes the path seems long. Then, I am here. Someone observing me might think that I am both here and there, but for me, I am either here or there. If we understand Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the experience of flow helps us to understand this virtualization.

Vectorization, as Levy (1998) pronounces, describes the projection of the processes that our bodies use to travel to this location. Vectoring suggests movement in flight with both force and direction. Having force and direction suggests destination. Our body’s partaking of this process means that our body is open to a variety of effects related to movement, change, and representation. What, or where, is the destination? What is the meaning of our bodies becoming word in our online classrooms? What facilitates the sense of relationship and connection in online teaching? My mind vectors my virtual body to my virtual classroom, thrusting me from here to there, where I land in words.

Untying the Knots: Imagination

Our virtual bodies exist, according to Merleau-Ponty (1964), subjectively, as we sense our bodies, and in reflection, as we think about where we are. As I sit at the computer and travel online to my class, I have a sense of being there in the class with students’ thoughts and here in my chair. The level of my engagement and immersion in my online classes determines at that moment whether I experience being here or there. When I am getting ready to go to class or sitting in front of my computer and reading my

students' responses, I am here outside my computer sitting at my desk. When I am immersed in the conversations online, I background my awareness of my body and become immersed-in. Then, I am there. Levy (1998) insists that I am always here and there, and virtualization of the body is what makes that dual nature possible.

Since being out of our bodies or beyond our bodies enables us to go beyond the physical limitations of the body, we can be in more than one place at a time. The physical body may have restraints, yet the virtual body or the body that is represented in the imagination or by the imagination may live free of these restraints. The knots unravel as we look toward the imagination to project us through the interface and into the presence of our students' words and thoughts.

What is this phenomenon we call imagination, and what can we learn from a study of it that will help us to understand how experienced teachers become comfortable teaching students online by way of a computer? Greene (1995) sees imagination as helping us to

. . . assemble a coherent world. . . [that] makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves. . . [and others]. Of all the cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. (p. 3)

In her admittedly utopian vision, she writes that our imaginations may reshape our narratives of pluralism and heterogeneity. When we make ourselves present through our computer technologies and our imaginations, we make this reshaping possible.

We experience our imagination subjectively as we flow seamlessly into our virtual classrooms. We experience the imagination reflecting itself in the words we leave for our students. We meet our students through their imaginations reflected in the words they leave online. Our imaginations as extensions of us and our bodies are projected

through the interface of our virtual classrooms. Our keyboards let us extend our thoughts. How free of the restraints of the body are we really? Can we have “continuous and authentic personal encounters” (Greene, 1995, p. 155) that will lessen the instrumentalizing that our online teaching may invite?

Imagining

A theme or phenomenon that engages my own imagination in this study is the phenomenon of imagination itself. Teachers speak with joy and reverence about their imaginative forays into the online classroom where they meet with students. Ironically, they also express their joy at being alone while they experience this zoning in and zoning out. What can we know about the act of imagining that would help us understand this experience?

Bachelard (1994) writes, “. . . imagination augments the values of reality” (p. 3). He explains that within each of us, created by our imagination and memories, is an “oneiric house, a house of dream-memory that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past” (p. 15). This is the house in which we were born. Long after this house is gone, “centers of boredom, centers of solitude, centers of daydream group together to constitute the oneiric house” (p. 17). This dream-house memory is my source of inspiration and imagination. Just as “a tree becomes a nest the moment a great dreamer hides in it” (p. 97), the virtual software and interface become an inhabited classroom the moment I enter it through my imagination. Shannon experiences her classroom as an oneiric dream house: “I often sit in my nightclothes and barefeet . . . [with] a tea pot . . . and a pretty cup . . . if I plan to stay.”

Casey (1976) describes the challenges of relying on the imagination to study imagining in his phenomenological study of the imagination. When we speak of imagining, Casey writes, we are speaking of the “act phase of imagination” (p. xv), that is, we are performing an act of imagination. When we imagine, we image something, the “imaginative-act-*cum*-presentation” of imagining (p. xv-xvi). The imagination is the only way we have for reflecting on imagination. Casey describes imagining as having different presentations of itself.

The origin of the verb to imagine helps us to understand part of this experience. Casey (1976) writes that the word derives from the Latin *imaginary*, “which is akin to *imitari*, “to copy.” Similarly, *imago*, the root of “image” and “imagination,” means an imitation, copy, or likeness. Thus, a mimetic function is implicitly ascribed to the group of English words founded on the *imag-* stem” (p. xvi). This etymology suggests that when we imagine, we are resurrecting images and likenesses from within our brains and that we are somehow not performing an authentic act, but an imitative one. Imagine is defined as a way “to form a mental image of (something not actually present to the senses)” (*Webster’s*, 1996). I understand this to mean that I may create images in my mind where my senses are not present to help me interpret an experience, and that the images I create in my mind must come from previous experiences. This solipsistic creation suggests that we may have no new images and experiences, but we are evolving these images and experiences of our students through our imaginations. From where are these likenesses and images being resurrected?

For those of us who are experienced teachers, we draw on the hundreds of students we have worked with over the years to help us imagine our virtual students and

to give them voices and personalities based on what they tell us about themselves. We draw on our own experiences of people in the world to help us construct the virtual people with whom we work. Can we ever imagine a unique individual in our students or only copies of former students? Does this matter, and is this experience any different from seeing our students face to face?

The Zone

Another phenomenon closely related to imagining is one described as “being in the zone.” In fact, teachers describe their imagining journeys as being in the zone, an optimal experience, “a circuitous path that begins with achieving control over the contents of our consciousness” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 2).

Suzanne describes her imaginative crossing into her classes this way:

I have that [a sort of meditative experience] also. Mostly it’s a matter of being in the zone where activities within the house and outside register but don’t disturb my concentration. Exhilaration occasionally comes in discovery of a more meaningful way to guide a student toward better assumptions or composition or great appreciation of the literature. . . . The zone is a place I like to be – a lot.

Suzanne believes that being in the zone keeps her from being distracted by her surroundings. She finds the experience meditative. Once she enters the zone, activities around here recede. She can travel to this place of imagining and discovery. When she is able to focus, Suzanne often finds that she is able to achieve her teaching goals of guiding “a student toward better assumptions or compositions or great appreciation of the literature.” And she enjoys the zone, a place she likes to be, a place of exhilaration. The word exhilarate means “enliven, invigorate, stimulate” and also “animate and inspire” (*Webster’s*, 1996). Suzanne also describes this experience as an addiction: “I’ve also become quite dependent upon my online daily fixes.”

Chuck describes his experience of teaching online in much the same inspired way:

It's all a fantasy of course, but I concentrate focus, imagine, anticipate. This is fun for me. . . . I'm in a groove, in a zone. I have little awareness of my environment except the keyboard and screen. Music is playing but I'm not aware of it. . . . When I'm in a groove (a highly desired mental state), I'm unaware of the music playing or when it's stopped. (Chuck)

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has much to say about this zone. He calls it flow and refers to it as optimal experience. He describes how we come to control our consciousness, why we find this experience enjoyable, and, ultimately, how we create meaning from it. For him, it is a knotty problem as our ability to achieve this optimal experience has its roots, paradoxically, in our discontent and disillusionment. As Thomas, who describes himself as cranky, writes, "This attitude of mine must arise out of some psychological damage when a child, also from a kind of Frank Zappa hostility to that bland world that we rebelled against when students."

The experience of flow, of being in the zone, may have some phenomenological significance for understanding the experience of teaching online. What are the conditions of flow? Do all experienced teachers experience flow in the online classrooms? How does this happen? It seems that, because of our solitude, we are inspired to inspire our teaching when we achieve this zone experience. In Ted Aoki's words, to be inspired is to experience "a quality of body and soul intertwining in their fullness" (2005a, p. 359). In what way does the experience of flow make it possible for teachers and students alike to benefit from online classes? We see online teachers "animating, quickening, exalting influence . . . arousing feeling . . . and infusing with spirit or life."

Thomas describes his traditional classroom teaching as being in performance mode, always having to be alert and reactive to what is happening or should be happening

in the classroom. However, the mental requirements of reaching to his online students cause him to wonder whether we do not extend ourselves more fully in the virtual classroom. Thomas writes that once he is in the online classroom, he becomes

very still . . . and then I am in a sacred space and open up very well to the students. . . . [We] are invited to move beyond representation [of students' words as icons] to the spirit present. . . . We should do more with the concept of DE [distance education] as a spiritual exercise.

We often question whether our virtual experiences lead to animation and inspiring, a kind of breathing life into something, infusing it with soul and inspiration. Can we actually ensure this somehow? How are we to understand this flow zone? Can we create the conditions of flow?

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) tells us that this flow experience must have certain conditions to happen. First, we must have clear and unambiguous goals. When I go into my class, I go to read student conversations, evaluate whether students have understood the readings, answer questions, and grade papers, among other teacher tasks. Or I may go into the classroom to add readings or learning activities. All the participant teachers describe having clear goals for going to classes.

. . . the amount of time I spend [in the online class] will depend on . . . how provocative the assignment subject is [or] how long the reading is . . . each week I turn the course around with a new Announcement and new conferences. (Thomas)

[I go to class for] administrative tasks, [such as] proctoring issues, technology issues, attendance, grade submission . . . homework. (Homer)

Second, we must be able to center our thoughts and focus what we are doing. To do this, we teachers have our rituals to prepare us to enter this zone of concentration. Bell (1997) describes ritual change:

The relationships between ritual and its context can generation a variety of changes in the structures, symbols, and interpretations of ritual activities some analysts now see ritual as a particularly effective means of mediating tradition and change. (p. 251)

Chuck plays his music. Shannon prepares her tea. Suzanne makes her coffee and shuts herself in her office. Maria checks her email. Each of us has the ritual act that signals our bodies and minds that we are about to enter this mental state. These rituals are our rites of passage from one place to another, and we repeat them rather consistently again and again. They mediate our virtual selves, connect our real selves with our virtual selves, and give us a traditional root in times of change.

Third, we must feel we have diverse options from which to choose and the freedom to make those choices. The range of activities for online may be many more than what are available to a classroom teacher who may not have available technology and may have to include 25 or more students in an activity. In our virtual classrooms, we can choose activities in any order we wish since we are usually there alone without encountering students directly. Each of us has our favorite activities to do first. I check the virtual office for questions and look forward to joining the ongoing conversations with my students. Chuck's favorite activity is creating some learning activity for his students and then watching to see how well they meet his goals for them. In each of these cases, we feel free to make the choice we most cherish at this time. When we are free to choose, we are also free to commit.

Heidegger (1926/1962) addresses the notion of human choice when he writes that choice gives us opportunities to create unexpected responses within our contexts. For Heidegger, we are limited within our historical context of past, present, and future. That is, our choices come from our context. Sartre (1956), on the other hand, sees the only

meaningful choice as freedom of choice, in this case, the freedom to choose what the meaning of our historical context and experiences are for us. What does it mean for online teachers somehow to feel this freedom of choice through their imaginations and through the freedom to create narratives through their online teaching personas?

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) addresses the fourth condition, which is commitment, a sense of trust that enables us to become unselfconsciously involved in our activity. Since we come to our classes from our homes, we bring to this commitment a sense of trust regarding our safety and comfort. We play the music most conducive to relaxing and focusing. Chuck writes, "I choose [music] for its appropriateness to my task and mood . . . usually small instrumental jazz groups." I listen to Tai Chi meditative music when I want to concentrate. Some of us position our computers near windows with the distant views that enable us to look within and think, as well as look without and imagine. Shannon writes, "I adjust my chair [in front of the window] and prepare to enter the web classroom with my persona shining." She believes that her shining persona has a reflection in her class.

Last, when we are challenged, a condition for optimum flow, we enjoy increasing complexity in our activities and even seek complexity for our enjoyment. Chuck, as many of us do, enjoys the complexity of preparing the online class ahead of time with the learning experiences he hopes his students will have. This is his idea of pedagogical problem-solving and creating learning opportunities for his students.

I imagine the varieties of responses my words will elicit; I direct the mental paths students should take in response to my task instructions. I carefully design an open-ended question because that is what I want or carefully write instructions that will closely guide the student writing alone, dealing with my questions/instructions. It's all a fantasy, of course, but I concentrate, focus, imagine, anticipate. (Chuck)

Participating teachers describe many challenges they face as they learn new technologies and new ways to manage online teaching; they learn to hear their virtual students better and guide their learning by creating worthwhile learning opportunities. They help students navigate the nooks and crannies of the virtual classroom. Imagining all the knots is challenging and sometimes even frustrating. Understanding these knots, however, helps us to create learning experiences for our students as they learn to find and untie knots in this complex teaching environment. Although experienced teachers can anticipate many of the knots in the learning experience, they are challenged by finding new knots and twists, the untying of which keeps them creative and in the flow.

Some of the teachers who describe flow experiences associated with teaching online reflect these conditions in their rich descriptions of going to class online. For them, preparing an online class and teaching it means studying the knots to learn to untie them. Shannon describes her first experiences with online classes as “marginally successful but [they] crashed often. . . . But teaching online got better each year.” Thomas describes his efforts at adjusting to the “heavy term” and “long readings . . . larger loads can get rough when marking time arrives.” They have specific goals for going to class: grading papers, checking the discussions, “adding a new Announcement and new conferences” (Thomas). They can focus in spite of distractions, describe feeling present with their students’ thoughts, and enjoy the complexity of working with technology and guiding students toward learning the content of what they are teaching.

Knots in the Flow

Homer prefers to be in a traditional classroom where he can see students’ faces and feel their presence. While he enjoys teaching online, he has an affinity for the

physical classroom and the presence of students, where he can “see the quizzical look on the face of the student in the back of the room.” Homer describes his virtual experience in a slightly different way. He feels the contrast of being online and being away from his virtual classes. He describes what happens after his classes are over, an interesting way to contrast the experience of being-there and not-being-there or being-after. The experience overwhelms him as well. Homer does not really enjoy being in the zone alone:

The first few days after a[n online] term is over is like running into a brick wall. I feel like something is wrong. I want to check to see if my internet connection is down, or if the university system is down. It actually takes me about three days to adjust, to interacting in the physical world again instead of online.

Homer feels the compelling engagement of being in the virtual zone. Coming out of this zone, pleasant or not, seems to be difficult and dramatic, if not slightly traumatic. Homer is feeling the disorientation of being in the zone for long hours and then returning to his day-to-day life. What is his disquiet in this place of silence and solitude?

Perhaps Koch (1994) can help us understand this disquiet in solitude:

What compound of space and self and silence and time is this that forms experiences so profound yet so humble, so reflectively rich yet so obliviously immersed in nature, so exhilarating yet so peaceful? (p. 1)

Homer’s sense of being gone and being alone in this space has a profound effect, specifically since he returns with such force to his day-to-day reality. This is consistent with his desire to be in the traditional classroom where he can see his students and relate to their expressions and physical presence. He may be comfortable in the solitude, but he cherishes and desires to be in the physical world with the physical presence of others. Yet, coming from the zone to the reality he cherishes still feels like hitting a brick wall.

While Koch (1994) describes the experience of solitude as symmetry of engagement and disengagement, Homer does not feel his solitude in the virtual classroom

as symmetry. Heidegger (1926/1962) offers insight into our understanding of how Homer might feel his virtual solitude when he describes the relationship of Being-alone to

Being-with:

Being-with is an existential characteristic of Dasein even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived. Even Dasein's Being-alone is Being-with in the world. The Other can *be missing* only *in* and *for* a Being-with. Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with. (pp. 156-157)

Perhaps Homer experiences this disengagement existentially as a type of dying, or not Being-with his life. The zone calls him as it does others, but it does not comfort him or provide him with pleasure.

The brick wall he feels is his return to life, much like a return from dying. He is bereft of that all-absorbing flow. His virtual life draws him to the edge of Being-with in the world where he is looking into the abyss of Being-alone. He describes the last week of working in his online classes, before the classes actually end, in this way:

Nobody even speaks to me during the last week, because they know I'm likely to bite their head off. After I submit final grades, my wife takes me out to dinner and tells me what has happened over the past 8 days. (Homer)

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes what he calls the pain of loneliness, the most depressing condition: "when one is alone and nothing *needs* to be done" (p. 168). He explains that the bottom-line reason is "that keeping order in the mind from within is very difficult" (p. 169). One cannot only survive solitude but thrive with solitude as long as one finds ways of "ordering attention that will prevent entropy from destructuring the mind" (p. 174). The author suggests that, left to our devices in solitude, we must develop rituals, an ordering of attention, to keep us in control of our consciousness. Once Homer is no longer engaged in goal-directed tasks online, his disengagement seems to be the experience of being yanked from the zone into the brick wall of his temporarily

disorienting lifeworld. Once he refocuses on his wife, he recovers. She and their ritual of going out to dinner help him restructure his attention.

While Homer is alone, he is not entirely alone. Online teachers often respond to this solitude by developing rituals, such as preparing tea and coffee, dressing in certain ways that make them comfortable, playing music, and situating themselves in ways that focus their minds forward to the tasks at hand. Both Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Koch (1994) remind us that solitude is a necessary, desirable, but challenging state for reflection and renewal, and mastering flow activities.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) characterizes those who move easily in and out of flow as being autotelic, those who “seem to enjoy situations that ordinary persons would find unbearable” (p. 90). These personalities find within themselves the ability to control their own consciousness and enjoy themselves no matter what happens around them. They seem to have an instinct for turning negative experiences into positive ones. Looking at the etymology of this word helps us to understand a more fundamental experience at work. The word autotelic means “having within itself the purpose of its existence or happening.” The word is created from the Greek prefix *auto*, which means “self, same, spontaneous or automatic” and the Greek word *telos*, which means “the end term of a goal-directed process.” Thus, those who are autotelic, who enjoy being in the zone, seem to be self- and goal-directed, have control over their own consciousness, and enjoy what they do for its own sake. While some people are born with this “neurological endowment,” this ability is “open to cultivation” [and] is a skill one can perfect through training and discipline” (Csikszentmihalyi, p. 93).

Experienced online teachers who overcome their fears of solitude and disorientation when they begin their own practice of teaching online seem to develop this enjoyment of being in the zone and in control of their own consciousness. More than that, enjoying this creative solitude seems to suggest an ability to balance engagement and disengagement, the symmetry of solitude and reflection. The poet William Blake (1919) brings insight into this notion of symmetry as sacred. His poem, “Tiger, Tiger,” immortalizes the “fearful symmetry” and intones the fire of creative passion as exemplified in the wild creature of the tiger. Blake attributes creative passion and fearful symmetry to the gods.

Tiger, Tiger, burning bright
 In the forests of the night.
 What immortal hand or eye
 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Chuck confirms the creative connections when he describes how listening to music helps to create the flow experience, even as he takes the leap into the zone, leaving behind the faint echoes of melody.

Casey (1976) describes the ways in which guided imagery techniques have led to the “meditative zone” of experience to “relieve a multitude of psychological and even physiological ailments” (p. 217). He suggests that “*imaginative indifference*” leads to a “being unconcerned with the kinds of commitment other mental acts entail. . . . To refuse such engagement is to refuse to participate in what Heidegger calls ‘the worldhood of the world,’ that is, in that network. . . which structures the life-world as a domain of concern and solicitude” (p. 189, 190). Greene’s (1995) insights help to explain the unique attraction of our imaginative lives:

It is imagination that draws us on, that enables us to make new connections among parts of our experience, that suggests the contingency of the reality we are envisaging. (p. 30)

How can we help teachers experience and learn to appreciate this flow zone? Is it possible to untie the knots of disquiet some teachers have? The utter solitude and loneliness of being online can lead to distractions and panic, keeping a teacher from ever moving to the more complex level of mastering flow and entering into a satisfying relationship with solitude and creativity.

In addition to the sensory experiences of music, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) writes about the flow of thought. The flow of thoughts in language that trigger zone experiences may have some phenomenological implications here.

Some of the most exhilarating experiences we undergo are generated inside the mind, triggered by information that challenges our ability to think, rather than from the use of sensory skills. . . . Just as there are flow activities corresponding to every physical potential of the body, every mental operation is able to provide its own particular form of enjoyment. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 117)

In the online classroom, the primary experiences are just that: reading the thoughts of students who have manipulated the symbols of language intellectually to create ideas and concepts and engaging them in intellectual conversations about these concepts. What an extraordinary opportunity for creative flow and making meaning within these words and thoughts! To echo Greene (1995), our imaginations enable us to experience “the felt possibility of looking beyond the boundary where the backyard ends or the road narrows, diminishing out of sight” (p. 26).

Thus, virtualization of the teacher and her imagination may actually give new life to the teaching identity and the teacher’s awareness of her physicality. Heidegger (1969/2002) asserts that identity is a belonging-together, a synthesized unity

characteristic of the “Being of beings” (p. 26). He writes that thinking and Being belong together and emphasizes that thinking is “that which man is” (p. 13). Humans have created technology from thinking in the form of the Logos, and our technology has mediated identity. When teachers create or recreate their online selves, what parts of their identity do they take with them and what parts do they leave behind? In what ways are identities recreated each time we go online, as we develop our identities over time, ever changing, ever creating? Levy (1998) would say we evolve the same body over time to create new, evolved bodies, a host of bodies, from our many vectorized journeys through the computer technologies.

Where is “there” – where are our bodies being-in-place when we imagine leaving our computer stations and going online? Where is on-line anyway? Where are the horizons and boundaries of our imaginations? Our virtualized bodies can find freedom and creativity through this experience of teaching online. As we take our bodies and minds on journeys into the virtualized world, we may find opportunity to develop the creative passions for transforming our place into meaningful space.

The Spatial Knots: Freedom and Boundedness

Space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. . . . Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human beings require both space and place. . . . In open space one can become intensely aware of place and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence. (Tuan, 1977, p. 54)

Tuan sees space and place in dialectical motion, comprising a holistic concept that defines healthy human needs. These dynamic forces of space and place, constantly

interacting with one another, give us insight into our experiences of space and place as we teach with/in technology. In the open space, we become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of place, the vastness of space becomes a haunting presence.

Heidegger (1952/1962) sees space as having physical and existential dimensions. The physical space is what we can see and describe and is most familiar to us. We often describe physical space as though it were an object. Existential space is lived space, that which we create by living and experiencing our lives. In Heidegger's early career, he theorizes place as existing only in the world of work and in the use of equipment. Later, he associates place with region, where we know a place not by rigid boundaries but by how a place is sensed as place.

Heidegger (1926/1962) writes that we also know a place through *Dasein*. *Dasein*'s primary orientation (Being) in the world is 'care' (Heidegger uses '*sorge*,' the German word for feeling as well as sorrow) – a kind of being-with Others and Being-in-the-world. Care is the Being of *Dasein*, the nature of human Being and the structure that scaffolds every human existence. *Dasein* is located in the actual and embedded in the socio-cultural context. Heidegger writes, "In our description of that environment which is closest to us – the work-world [our online classrooms] of the craftsman [or teacher]" (p. 153) is the everyday world in which we encounter the equipment [computer technology] used and Others [our students] for whom the work is intended. Both are present-at-hand and ready-to-hand. In this sense, then, *Dasein* has a spatiality of Being-in-the-world, which belongs to it – *Dasein* discovers remoteness and distance, categories whose nature is not that of *Dasein*. *Dasein* enables orientation with regard to someone or something else [to our computer technology and our students]. "*Dasein* lets any entity be

encountered close by as the entity which it is” (p. 139). Thus, a study of *Dasein*, both as Being-in-the-world and Being-with Others, enables us to look at what *Dasein* encounters for what it actually is. Heidegger (1926/1962) states, “Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in *Dasein*; in the ‘there is’” (p. 26).

Heidegger describes our interactions with our environment as “dwelling” and our belonging to our surroundings as “being-in.” Since our recognition of our surroundings and the beings in our environment give us a sense of “being-in,” he associated our experience of place as our communal sharing of place and equipment. As an example, our dwelling in the online classroom or interface means little if we are not engaged in teaching relationships with others. Dwelling is the way we are on this earth. “To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 147). Dwelling is attained only by building. Everything we build is built to sustain our dwelling. In what way can the virtual classes sustain our dwelling if we do not build them? In what manner does the built interface, built by non-teachers called instructional designers, sustain our dwelling? What must teachers do to sustain their dwelling in the interface?

Our teaching technology can be viewed as both place and space, and our teaching enables us to dwell in place and space synchronously. As I sit at my computer in my home place, I am reminded of Tuan’s understanding of place as “a calm center of established values” (1977, p. 54). When my mind crosses into the interface to join the words and “voices” of my students, I experience another place as defined by the classroom interface. However, that interface and my virtual class exist in the vastness of

virtual space, unbounded and open, with trodden pathways that I must make myself as I link uniquely through the classroom. My linked pathways help to make this space a dwelling place. Once the abstract space has personal meaning and is connected to my lived experience, the space becomes a place.

What is the meaning of coming to dwell in a place where our words reside but not our bodies? In what way is our “being-in” the technology as we teach a way of dwelling? Where do we dwell when our bodies are in different places? In what manner does this “being-in” technology shape or shift our sense of space and place?

Thomas describes his journey to this place, how he moved there. He suggests that his home dwelling is where he wanted to be, and that he could dwell at home and be in that other place. The place contains the so-called location, web-based, and the experience, teaching. Combined, the location and the teaching are hardly separable. Teaching is both place and method, even a new method.

When I discovered that I could teach without leaving home, I rushed to try out this new method. In those early days we taught through a listserv. When we moved to web-based teaching, I had to buy a new computer to accommodate the new technology. When I began, I had to take the classes I had taught in the classroom and redesign them for the new format. (Thomas)

For Shannon, teaching means a portable job. She lived in Germany and then took her teaching with her to Canada to be with her mother.

I started teaching online from Schwaebish Gmuend [Germany] campus in 1995 and saw it as an opportunity to take my teaching with me to Canada where I needed to take care of my mother who had had a stroke. . . . a wonderful opportunity with this new “portable job.” (Shannon)

The word portable means “capable of being transported or conveyed; easily carried by hand.” This suggests a dwelling place for teaching that is not permanent and teachers who are nomadic and who carry their teaching by hand. Are we more tactful as teachers

if we carry our teaching with our own hands? If we divide the word portable into its two parts, we have port and able. The meaning of port as “a geographical place that forms a harbor” is appealing and revealing. Adding -able as a suffix suggests “having the necessary power, skill, resources, or qualifications to do something.” Van Manen (1993) describes pedagogical tact as “the sensitive ability to interpret inner thoughts, understandings, feelings, and desires from indirect clues such as gestures, demeanor, expression, and body language” (p. 125). The word tact derives from the Latin *tactus*, meaning sense of touch, effect, and suggests touching to produce an action or effect. The implication, then, is that we teachers can create harbors for learning with our tactfulness and perhaps even give the impression of a geographical place for learning. Perhaps we teachers also seek to create harbors for ourselves.

Portability, then, carries with it some connotation of permanence through authorship. Yet, many online teachers speak of themselves as nomads. A nomad is “a member of a people or tribe that has no permanent abode but moves about from place to place, usually seasonally and following [a] traditional route or circuit.” Many online teachers have a history of travel and have adapted to the nomad life (Whitesel, 2001). In some ways, we do see ourselves as part of a tribe of wanderers who follow the circuitous route of going to class by logging on through our portable computers to enter our classrooms and be with our students. We even call this kind of learning “anytime, anywhere” learning. We virtual paladins think it is “anytime, anywhere” teaching.

Techne dwells within the teacher and accompanies her wherever she travels. But where does the teaching environment dwell? How is it transported with the teacher? I have an image here of packing up a cyber classroom, perhaps folding it over, tucking it

under the arm, and carrying it in hand to another place, always already, just another suitcase. Whose belongings does it transport or convey? Who owns it? What is in/side and with/in? The notion of *techne* here is associated with technology as well as teaching.

Irwin (2002) links *techne* with authentic relationship in her study when she asks, “Who or what is the other in this *techne*?” While the art and craft of teaching may dwell within the teacher, can the teacher have an authentic relationship to her craft if she does not know how to use her computer or her classroom features? Transporting her teaching through her imagination transcends that space between the online classroom and the students. As with Irwin’s editors, authentic relationships grow from embracing the art and craft within the context of mastering the technology, an “engagement of art and craft with the mind through the body” (p. 209).

Transcendent Spaces

Technology not only virtualizes the body and enables us to be here and there, but also enables us to extend our reach beyond our arm’s length. Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes about how we extend our bodies in his example of a blind man who extends his sense of touch through his walking stick. Ihde (2002) describes how we extend some of our senses through our use of technologies. Levy (1998) considers the extension of our voice and the presence of sound through the telephone. McLuhan (1964/1994) focuses on the extended reach of computers as extending our nervous system externally into the complex system of networked relationships.

Our transcendence in the online teaching experience may be a manifestation of that reaching beyond ourselves to what we imagine to be the mind of an individual student. All the minds in a virtual space become our network of relationships. We are

there in the network even when we are absent from class because our text is available in the class. What facilitates this association and enables us to bridge the gap between our minds and the minds of our students to create this network? What facilitates the leap from being on-line to being-on-line to being-online? Where does the space close? At some point, our beings become a dynamic process that moves us beyond our static sense of our bodies.

Shannon experiences the virtual classroom and her students as this place of values. Indeed, she is inspired to behave in a moral way by her visits to the online class. She writes:

I mentally reach to [the students] and try to find the words that will encourage, inspire as well as direct them with my words. . . . I see teaching as responsibility as well as a gift – sometimes it is close to being sacred. (Shannon)

Eliade (1959) writes about the sacred in modern experiences. He describes the sacred as “the opposite of the profane” (p. 10), being “wholly other” and “the manifestation of something of a wholly different order” (p. 11). In his explanations of what constitutes sacred space, he writes that we experience our familiar, everyday world as neutral. Thus, when we enter a sacred space, like a church, we experience the sacred space as being wholly unfamiliar. Does the sense of the sacred diminish with familiarity, then? What happens to the sense of sacred when one experiences the same sacred space over the years and no longer feels the space as other? Perhaps experienced teachers feel an intimacy with the other as they enfold the sacred into their teaching selves.

Eliade (1959) explains that we develop rituals or rites of passage to help us keep the freshness of the sacred even when quite familiar with the spaces. However, some of the participant teachers continue to experience the sacred when passing through the

virtual portals of their classrooms. The teachers with the most experience (Chuck, Thomas, Suzanne, and Shannon) have rituals for entering this space, while the teachers with the least amount of experience (Maria and Homer) do not have any particular rituals associated with going to class online.

Parker Palmer (1998) opens up the sacredness of teaching through his understanding of his experience of reality as sacred:

I believe that knowing, teaching, and learning are grounded in sacred soil and that renewing my vocation as a teacher requires cultivating a sense of the sacred. (p. 111)

While Palmer writes of community in the physical presence of one another, the participant teachers do not believe that presence is required for them to feel the sacred in their callings to teach. Ironically, Palmer believes the desacralized education landscape is “utterly flat, bereft of texture and tangle, color and flair” (p. 112), a possible description of the virtual classroom. Yet Thomas feels the spiritual journey online and wonders whether, indeed, the solitude and quiet of the virtual classroom and distance teaching call us to extend ourselves in such a way that we, as a response, have created this sacred space:

I wonder if we’re more likely to extend ourselves via DE than in a classroom. There is so much going on in the [face-to-face] classroom, and we are usually on performance mode. Sometimes I have found myself very still in a[n online] classroom, and then I am in a sacred space and open up very well to the students.

Diane Ackerman (1991) reminds us that the affair of living and learning begins “in mystery, and it will end in mystery, but what a savage and beautiful country lies in between” (p. 309). Experienced online teachers appear to travel this landscape, excited about the possibilities of new terrain and taking risks with their teaching and their

relationships to students. From a distance and through the glass darkly, they have bridged the gaps in the virtual divide.

Dwelling in Distance

Experienced online teachers do not seem to have any difficulties believing they are reaching their students, communicating with them, and teaching. For the experienced online teachers, they have bridged the distance gap and, to some extent, answered the questions about the efficacy of online teaching. Their experiences have also raised questions that have not been asked before. All the teachers in these conversations find communicating with students at a distance, whatever the challenges, to be fulfilling, and all believe themselves to be successful. The teachers dwell comfortably in the distance and are at home.

Heidegger (1971) examines the way in which bridges are dwelling and gathering places. Bridges are built things that connect both sides. These sides exist in relation to one another because of bridges. Teachers are bound to their online classrooms and their students through the bridges they build. The bridges are the tensions that connect teachers with their online classrooms and their imaginative foray into this virtual world. Within the tension of this bridge, teachers dwell and build relationships.

They find the experience of teaching online to be satisfying and, in fact, often exhilarating. These teachers “know how to do it.” They have achieved a level of practice that is satisfying and fulfilling, often exhilarating, through “free surrender or submission of the body” (Levin, 1985, p. 215). They have learned to build the bridges and to dwell within the distance as their teaching home.

This experience is the result of more than *techne*, “a skill, an articulatory *capacity*: something then, that we can measure by considering both the character of our effort and the nature of that which this effort makes appear” (Levin, 1985, p. 125). These online teachers find fulfillment in challenging the boundaries of their imaginations to reach out to students, to show the way. The online classroom has in a sense changed the teacher-centered classroom to student- and learning-centered, or has offered us the opportunity to do so. Heidegger (1998) described this as “letting-learn, where learning comprises bringing our life into the correspondence with what grants itself to us in its essence” (Gregory, 1998, ¶3). Such experiences unravel the knots of teaching with technology.

Today’s virtual classrooms have become even more complex as we search for multi-media ways to present lessons. We gain more time to watch our students in their learning even as we lose more time to learning how to set up our complex classrooms. In the virtual classroom, we have made many places for students to learn. The boundaries are created by words, and the many rooms are inviting. Perhaps in the distance we place between ourselves and our students we have given them more room to let learn.

Thinking like an online teacher is living existentially in relation to computers. Teaching with computers involves artfulness with our tools and our language and a sense of belonging in this virtual world of words and distance, where we can vector to faraway places and spaces. The work of the online teacher occurs in the imagination and heart, as well, where teachers gather their minds and spirits to create a path for learning. Successful teachers embrace the distance and dwell in it the way we dwell in our homes. They understand how to weave the knots of teaching with care and concern for students

and find ways to “make something appear, within what is present, as this or that . . . a letting appear” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 159). This understanding of teaching as imagination connects the knots of who we are as online teachers.

Who do I think I am as online teacher? Will my new understandings of imagination affect my perceptions and experiences of myself as teacher? Will I have more respect for the dwelling I call my imagination? Will I be a better teacher? I hope that my questioning has built the way. Pedagogical research must “connect with the pedagogic challenges which inhere in the human experiences to which it has oriented itself” (van Manen, 2003, p. 162) to make meaning and create insights.

In chapter five, I reflect on the tensions in the distance and how they might help me gather a new understanding of what it means to teach online with computers in distance learning classes. How might this study inform our understandings of who online teachers are and what they experience? Van Manen (2003) reminds us, “The tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience” (p. 22). This tension between here and there, our lifeworld and our imaginations, is where our online teaching selves dwell.

CHAPTER FIVE

PEDAGOGICAL TENSIONS: TRANSFORMING THE KNOTS

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share. (Green, 1995, p. 1)

They said, "You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

And they said then, "But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar
Of things exactly as they are."

(Stevens, 1937/1964, p. 165)

When I began this pedagogical journey, I had many questions, most of which had to do with what was happening to teachers in the online classroom and why some teachers experienced exhilaration and others despaired of the dramatic changes in teaching brought about by distance education. I knew something was happening as I reflected on conversations with other teachers about this experience. However, I had no way to get beyond the questions to the essence of the experiences. This "blue guitar" changed many things for teachers as we played the pedagogical tunes that moved us beyond who we were as teachers. Personally, I felt exhilarated by these changes and wanted to understand this experience. I experienced many of the same frustrations as others as we overcame the hurdles of learning to use new technologies and software. However, we moved beyond the challenges of becoming familiar with the technologies; we learned how to teach with/in the technologies. We redefined what teaching meant to

us and asked ourselves questions, perhaps for the first time, about who we are as teachers and what it means to teach.

We also questioned how online teaching would affect our teaching lives, our students, and their learning. We had questions about how these new experiences would play “upon the blue guitar.” How would the “blue guitar” change our teaching selves and our relationships to our students in their learning? What would these tunes be, these “tune[s] beyond us, yet ourselves”? How would technology and virtualizing our teaching play upon the blue guitar of our lives? Thus began one of the most challenging and rewarding journeys of my life as teacher and researcher as I asked: **What is the lived experience of teaching with/in technology?**

Heidegger (1952/1977) reminds us, “Questioning builds a way” (p. 3). Through these questions, I have opened up other questions and found a way to explore the experiences of these six teachers and to understand my own experiences. Through hermeneutic phenomenology, I have found a way to explore the questions that called me originally to return to graduate school and become a hermeneutic researcher. Heidegger (1952/1977) writes that exploring the essence of the question keeps open the possibilities. I ask these questions from the heart of my concern and my insatiable curiosity about my experiences and those of other teachers. Becoming a phenomenological researcher has called me to “live this question” and to “become this question” (van Manen, 2003, p. 43). This question calls forth the essential questions of our teaching lives as we trade our lived lives in the presence of our students for the virtual lives in online classrooms. In what way do we reflect our teaching identities in these virtual places? What is the meaning of

building places for teaching, and dwellings for our students, our content, and our teaching selves? Will we still be teachers?

In chapter five, I reflect on the conversations and themes of the experienced online teachers who participated in this study. The pedagogical renderings emerge from the ways in which the individual teachers have played “upon the blue guitar” and have been played as well. In what way might this study inform policies related to teaching online and the creation of online courses? In what manner might this study inform pedagogy about teaching online and illuminate ways to enrich teacher preparation for distance learning? Can pedagogy and policy be separated? In the following sections, I reflect on the themes that emerge from my study and the ways these understandings might inform policies for teacher preparation and course design, and pedagogical concerns about teaching practice within the online classroom. These reflections emerge in an organic way and are included within the discussions of themes.

Technology – Knots on the Teaching Margins

The knots of teaching within technology often seem difficult to untie as online teaching is still enframed as teaching on the margins, in spite of the ubiquity of online education. Enframing, Heidegger (1952/1977) writes, “is a mode of revealing, a destining of Being” (p. xxxiv). Enframing causes some things to be concealed and others to be revealed, even focused upon. Enframed in technology, online classes are often viewed as substitutes for “real” classroom-based instruction, and the research often uses classroom-based teaching as the standard, comparing online classes to traditional classes.

Because most of the online programs are geared toward adult learners and courses are taught by contingent faculty, online teachers are often seen as less than professional,

not “real” university teachers, and certainly not real researchers. Contingent, used to describe full- or part-time faculty who do not have permanent teaching positions, job security, benefits, or voice in their own governance, carries meanings of dependence and uncertainty, “conditional; happening by chance or without known cause; accidental.” Are we accidental to our teaching selves and to educating our students? Conditionality and dependence often create unsettled minds for contingent teachers. Unsettled minds often drift and feel homeless. According to some teachers, the uncertainty and fragmentation lead to anxiety (Whitesel, 2001; Whitesel & Donohue, 2009) about jobs, professional places, and teaching identities. In what way can we give voice to the silent, anxious online teachers who have no benefits and teach on the margins?

The teachers in one study (Whitesel & Donohue, 2009) describe teaching full-time for part-time pay, teaching as many as eight courses a term, and feeling they needed to keep their teaching lives secret. They have no voice in their departments or programs and often do not even have preparation for teaching online. Some teachers even think it is better not to draw attention to themselves as they fear they will be exposed and lose their jobs.

Secrets lead to compartmentalizing, and compartmentalizing their online teaching was a common experience for them. They are unable to earn sufficient living wages teaching in only one school and feel the need to teach at many schools or hold other kinds of jobs. Most online programs limit the number of courses given to part-time teachers in order to pay part-time wages and avoid giving benefits. Homer describes the vulnerability of adjuncts at his university.

Adjunct faculty tend to be viewed as a group who need to be watched and monitored, not empowered. . . . Now approaching half of the teaching force in

higher education, the marginalization of adjunct faculty has created a self-fulfilling prophecy – they DO need to be watched, or higher education will suffer. Tighter control and more stringent observation seem to be the way things are headed. (Homer)

Homer sees himself among these marginalized, even as he uses an abstract plural term “adjunct faculty,” creating the identity of “other” for teachers. In his doubts about his own place as a part-time teacher, Homer has returned to graduate school to seek another master’s degree in organizational communication in order to be considered for full-time employment. Who do the watchers think we are? How does being watched alter our teaching behaviors and language? Where is the tighter control applied?

Knotty Secrets

As professional contingent teachers seek refuge in their secret lives, they create safe places for themselves. What happens when the place of our teaching identity is split into many rooms and isolated from one another and our lived lives, without windows or doors to ease passage? Palmer (1998) writes, “This “self-protective” split of personhood from practice is encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth” (p. 17) and that the academy privileges the objective way of knowing reflected in the “real” world of “real” classes. This way also privileges the “workings of power and social positioning in the pedagogical relationship” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6) rather than the personal truths in the social construction of knowledge, where teaching gets deeply personal. Who do these power relationships say we are? In what manner does this marginalization address the community of online teachers and students?

Pedagogical orientation, according to van Manen (2003), requires actions “in the lives we live, side by side with our [students]” (p. 149). Not only do we have the masking effects of being online in our different personas, we have our secret selves in our

departments (and in our homes) where many of us remain marginalized or invisible. “Secrecy represses identity,” van Manen (1996, p. 50) writes, and has pedagogical significance because secrets “create multiple layers of self and inner/outer space that contribute to the formation of personal identity” (p. 8). Thus, for many teachers who teach online and experience contingency, their online classrooms and home offices become a secret place, the place where they experience their secrets and their secret selves. Palmer (1998) points out that “teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability. . . . [and] is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life” (p. 17). He writes that “feeling naked” (p. 17) can happen just by exposing ourselves and our knowledge to our students who may or may not be paying attention and that this intersection can feel like “crossing a freeway on foot. . . . we make ourselves vulnerable to indifference, judgment, ridicule” (p. 17). Online teachers often lose their sense of community and purpose in this intersection and, in losing their community, lose their personal and public selves as well. Ellsworth (1997) writes:

A pedagogical mode of address is where the social construction of knowledge and learning gets deeply personal. It’s a relationship whose subtleties can shape and misshape lives, passions for learning, and broad social dynamics. (p. 6)

Marginalizing the online pedagogical mode of address can, indeed, misshape lives and passions for teaching. Many teachers have refused to learn to teach with/in technology for fear of alienating their sense of teaching identities. Others sacrifice their authentic teaching selves to online teaching as a way of earning a living. For the teachers in this study, some adapt to this secret life by finding mystery and imagining spiritual connection to their students. Others reduce the vulnerability by disconnecting from

students and from the online classroom. Suzanne describes becoming less vulnerable to students in order to become more comfortable in her teaching.

I actually prefer the less personal relationship for academic purposes. . . . I rarely speak with students by phone. . . prefer not to. Phone time takes more time, invites divergences, generates an alternative set of features for the phone caller from that by which I know others in the class. (Suzanne)

Suzanne prefers the secret solitude of compartmentalizing her teaching and her students.

In what ways have the experienced and joyful online teachers learned to use compartmentalizing to create a secret self with spiritual feelings and experiences? Have the despairing teachers imagined the dark self and the sense of homelessness this anxiety brings? This existential anxiety and homelessness come to define the teaching self and create a dark and “orphaned self [that] is the secret self that has lost its home” (van Manen, 1996, p. 53) and fragments our teaching selves. Indeed, contingent teachers often become orphans in their professional and personal lives.

These fragmenting experiences of teaching become magnified in the “adjunctification” of contingent online teachers. As Palmer (1998) asks, “How can we take heart in teaching . . . so that we can, as good teachers always do, give heart to our students?” (p. 17). A recent survey of contingent faculty in basic and developmental writing programs (Whitesel & Donohue, 2009) reflects this anxiety and sense of displacement by teachers through marginalization, lack of preparation for the courses they teach, relatively little sense of how they fit into the department’s mission, and an “over the shoulder” monitoring rather than a “face-to-face” respect for their professionalism and contributions. Displacement carries a sense of being compelled to leave home and even to be replaced or supplanted – again, that feeling of homelessness that can create anxiety.

In fact, the labor issues surrounding adjuncts have darkened the journey for many online teachers who seek legitimacy for their teaching. While teaching online has been relegated to the margins of teaching and learning research, teaching with technology has helped to create this underclass of university teachers as well who are often dwelling in the darkness and secrecy. The labor issues surrounding their exclusion from the mainstream teaching force create secret layers of their teaching selves.

Knotty Exposure

Technology has a way of revealing as well as concealing (Heidegger, 1952/1977). Our classrooms are no longer sacred to us, protected by the classroom walls and the doors. Now, anyone with a password and administrative access can enter our classrooms unseen and without our permission, to peer into our personal and pedagogical relationships with our students. They become lurkers, a pejorative word used to describe those who watch unseen, do not engage, nor show themselves. They lie in concealment, secretly and furtively, waiting to ambush. Our relationships with students are no longer private. Our classes are no longer private, with a closed door to signal “Do not disturb.” They are no longer places where we can create a private and safe place for our students. The teachers in this study discuss this feeling of having unseen people monitoring their online classes. Thomas wonders whether we should even be speaking about it in our forum and adds, “I realized that I often self-censor in [online messages] – more than in other media” (Thomas). Maria responds: “It’s not just about spying on us.” We are led to question academic freedom, as we and what we have written stand naked to administrators and unseen visitors as well as our students. What are the lasting effects of

self-censoring on teaching within the disciplines? More research will reveal insights into the subtle lasting effects on teaching and learning.

Curriculum in a Virtual Key

According to Grundy (1987), curriculum is what happens in the tension between the teacher, content matter, and the students. Within the tensions of these actions, we find the curriculum, which reflects the beliefs and values the institutions and educators have about people and the world. To understand what kinds of knowledge these educators value, we have only to look to the institutions and their values. Homer resides in a university that has two standards for teachers, one for tenure-track teachers and one for contingent teachers. Even tenure-track teachers dwell in the in-between world of curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived (Aoki, 2005b). Contingent online teachers may dwell somewhere outside the in-between and the curriculum. Where is this place? What does this mean for pedagogy, students, and learning? More research is needed to explore the experiences of these teachers and the meaning this has for students and for learning. More research is needed to understand the experiences of students who have classes in this place beyond the in-between.

Technical Interests

Within distance learning, the technical interest has guided most course development, software and interface development, and teaching practice. We have phrases such as “best practices,” “classroom management,” “learning objectives,” and “course objectives,” phrases which focus on learning outcomes. Grundy (1987) asserts that these interests are technical and focus on control: control of teachers, control of

learning, and control of outcomes. She notes that this is “rule-following action based upon empirically grounded laws” (p. 12):

The objectives model of curriculum design is informed by a technical cognitive interest. This means that implicit interest in controlling pupil learning so that, at the end of the teaching process, the product will conform to the *eidōs* (that is, the intentions or ideas) expressed in the original objectives. (p. 12)

Curricula driven by interests of control address both teachers and learners as objects in the educational environment, something to be studied whose learning behaviors can be empirically verified. To ensure standardization across all courses, the learning objectives and outcomes are standardized. The technical interest is grounded in “control and the exploitability of knowledge” (p. 12). As Grundy notes, “Ultimate power resides with the one or ones who formulate the objectives (that is, who control the *eidōs*), for it is the *eidōs* which determines what ought to occur” (p. 30). In distance learning, those in control of the learning objectives are the instructional designers.

Some participants in this study were comfortable with this technical approach to teaching and learning. Maria writes:

My strategy was to look at the skills that were needed – reading, writing, listening, speaking [in Spanish] –and then look for a way to handle each. . . . I don’t compare online courses with f2f classes. Rather, I compare them with the learning objectives of the course.

Maria has no difficulty believing that she is teaching and students are learning in this environment because she can connect the behaviors and outcomes to the course objectives. She does not have difficulties teaching courses that are designed this way and is quite comfortable with the technical interest. What may she be overlooking here?

Grundy (1987) reminds us that the *eidōs* in a technical curriculum is characterized by “exact specification . . . the inspiration for the ‘teacher-proof’ curriculum” (p. 31).

This curriculum elaborates the step-by-step plan of how the teacher intends the objectives to be achieved, guaranteeing success if one just follows the plan. In these pre-designed classes, the teaching is often external to the act of teaching. Both teachers and learners become reactive. Just as the teacher may not have any power over the teaching, the learners may not be able to determine their own learning objectives and directions. They become reactors in their own learning, not actors. Programs that rely on behavioral outcomes are not teaching learners what they do not know; they are teaching them to behave as they do not behave.

Teachers must have a voice in the creation of the online courses they teach. They must have an investment that leads to commitment to teaching. They must be given enough freedom to create other learning paths beyond the course objectives. In what way does teaching with these technical interests deny teacher satisfaction and degrade teaching skills? The institutional research offices in online programs and schools have the responsibility to explore the experiences of teachers who teach in programs that rely on technical interests.

Aoki (2005b) sees teaching as “living in tensionality – a tensionality that emerges, in part, from indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences” (p. 159). Although courses are designed with learning objectives in mind, the teachers are the ones who must choose between passive, teacher-proof strategies and active relationship presence/presents with students.

Most participants experience the technical interest as part of distance education and believe that they are teaching successfully and students are learning successfully in

their evaluation. Maria notes that she has never thought about learning objectives when she is teaching in a traditional classroom. She just knows where students need to be and how to get them there. For teachers like Maria, what had once been intuitively and bodily known in terms of learning (face-to-face classes) was now pushed toward being measurable and certain because of learning objectives. I am reminded of Freire's (2001) insight that "oppressed" people often embrace the habits and beliefs of their oppressors. Further phenomenological exploration may be relevant here.

As participants talk about how they learned to teach online, it is evident that they had participated in workshops that taught them how the virtual classroom worked. What little pedagogy they received came from suggestions for "best practices" in using various functions in the classroom. Over time, they seemed to develop their own teaching styles within the various interfaces they used. Technical workshops cannot prepare teachers for a lived curriculum; instead, they prepare teachers to become "installers of the curriculum" (Aoki, 2005b, p. 160). We can make the curriculum "lived" in spite of the controlling nature of instructional design and encourage teachers to reflect on their practice in spite of being "trained" in the ways of "doing" (Aoki, p. 160).

Signature Pedagogies

In the case of teacher preparation, the online technology may be creating new "signature pedagogies" (Shulman, 2005). The word signature suggests a personal touch, one's name signed in one's own hand. In traditional teacher preparation in higher education, teachers often learn teaching styles, content, and methods associated with their disciplines through their own experiences in graduate school or with mentors. They develop a signature teaching style characteristic of others in their professional disciplines.

In the courses designed by instructional designers, the signature of technical interests is reflected in the classes. The instructional designers homogenize the courses they design, leaving a rubber-stamped signature.

In teacher preparation for online classes, workshops are focused on learning the technology and a variety of teaching strategies in a way that assumes we all learn the same way and we all teach the same way. These standardized teaching preparation workshops focus on technical interests and are designed to remove individual signatures in teaching. This is actually the goal of these courses – to remove the teacher as a variable in learning. Since courses that are designed around learning objectives make teaching external to the classes, experienced traditional teachers may lose their teaching wisdom brought with them from their embodied experiences. As Maria demonstrates, even traditional teachers may lose their intuition and bodily awareness of teaching as they embrace teaching by learning objectives. Teachers who are not comfortable teaching to these pre-designed objectives should also be aware of them so they can make choices about the kinds of online programs available and their teaching experiences. In fact, two of the participants made such a choice by leaving one of the largest online programs worldwide. As online programs are established, program directors need to be aware of these effects and prepare research that explores the nature of these pedagogies that happen outside of the teacher interaction.

As contingent teachers are assimilated into online courses and programs in various departments, their teaching styles will necessarily collide with the signature pedagogy of online teacher preparation programs. The power and labor issues will invite silence and secrets. Additionally, the long-term effects are that online teachers can lose

identification with their professional colleagues, further marginalizing them. Over time, the distance between classroom practices online and signature pedagogies will widen. This is certainly an area for more phenomenological studies as contingent faculty now comprise over 70 percent of all higher education faculty (Arana, 2009). The potential effects on higher education are staggering.

Interface Pedagogy

Online teachers and administrators in higher education must constantly review the technology and interface they are using for their classes. Since technology often changes every few years or teachers take their portable jobs to other institutions, teachers must learn new ways to create their online materials so they can adapt to new interfaces whose functionality often changes with the software. The teachers in this study seem to be able to transfer their nomadic teaching, but they write about how much time they spend recreating their materials for different interfaces. The interfaces change for different reasons, but rarely do interfaces change because teachers and instructional designers have deemed that a new interface will promote better teaching or learning. Instead, new workshops are created to help teachers learn more efficient ways to teach with interface changes. Courses and programs for instructional designers should include insights into the limitations of these technical interests and the experiences of teachers who must teach in these courses.

The teachers in this study are familiar with many different interfaces, perhaps as many as twelve within this small group. As they became familiar with their first models, they easily adapted their teaching to different interfaces. As teachers increase their teaching loads to five or more classes a semester, they often do not take the time to

recreate their materials for a new interface. The standardized paradigm for a teaching interface (consisting of discussion boards, grade books, assignment locations, email, and study groups) has created a “signature interface,” a one-size-fits-all interface, with functionality assumed to be common across all courses and disciplines. The underlying assumption across these interface designs is that all teachers and students use the same language for teaching and learning. Interfaces and functionality rely mainly on writing and text. Instructional designers rarely view teachers as dwelling in the interfaces they design for instruction. In fact, they generally do not know about the art of teaching except in terms of observable learning objectives. Their focus is on learning outcomes and creating activities they believe assist students in reaching these outcomes through specific types of behaviors. More research is needed to explore the effects of the “signature interface” on signature pedagogies.

The interface is the face between the computer workings and me. The interface as such is designed around a functional metaphor that creates coherence and illusion for those of us who dwell together to share our learning. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest:

. . . metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (p. 3)

In what way are we limited by the class interface metaphors? What do our texts become metaphors for? What is concealed and what is revealed through these metaphors?

Research in the areas of the meaning of learning through interface metaphors might bring new insights into educational interface design.

According to Johnson (1997), most virtual classroom software is designed with an individual user in mind. Yet, the software does not have the flexibility to enable the

individual user to create a dwelling place, either for teacher or for student. Especially for the teacher, an interface with a metaphor for dwelling, one that enables the chairs to be placed in a circle, opens possibility for creating the hospitality of which Palmer (1998) writes. Such software exists now, for example, in the Second Life interface where the individual user can create a living room, an office, a library, a traditional classroom, even a garden where chairs can be put into circles and avatars can “stand in reserve” for students and teachers alike. In fact, Second Life seems to combine simulation and simulacra, providing us with a virtual world “standing in reserve” for our use.

As our new media like Second Life integrate themselves into our educational world, we face the dangers of not knowing what is real and what is representation. The metaphor of Second Life to name this world is suggestive as we think about what it might mean to learn in a Second Life. It is possible that we will no longer distinguish between our mediated/media senses and our unmediated/non-media senses. This media context leads me to ponder whether it is time for a phenomenological study on the lived experience of avatars.

Although students and teachers alike come to the interface from their individual lives, the class interface is a meeting place, a dwelling place for us to collaborate on learning. Because of the textual nature of our virtual gathering, students and teachers may create communities of learners. We know that where students can form a sense of community and feel the hospitality of others, they may be willing to take the risks involved in learning. This same idea seems to be true for the teachers in this study. Rather than speak of “doing” in community with students, they spoke of “being” in the presence of a student, one student, who can be helped to learn along this solitary journey.

Presence in Distance, Presence in Place

What is the distance in distance education? What is presence in distance? What is absence? Leder (1990) contends that our machines have taken over the work once done by our muscles:

Technologies of rapid communication and transportation allow us to transcend what used to be the natural limits imposed by the body. Operations are mediated by the written word or the computer calculation, where once a living human presence was required. (p. 3)

The body always projects outward from where it stands. The absent body is the body that is away from itself. In order to reveal the online class, my body must be absent from itself intentionally. The body can never be fully gone from my experience, even if my online class has made it absent from being in class. As Suzanne mentions, she has become heavier since she started teaching online. Teachers who move to online teaching might be encouraged to develop physical interests such as yoga or T'ai Chi, movements that improve muscle memory. Leder (1990) believes that our increasing dependence on technologies has fostered a return to more physical activities, such as dance, yoga, walking, running, and hiking.

Mount's (2008) research explores the nature of presence in distance in forming a faith community online and cites several empirical studies that have explored the roles and relationships represented by presence mediated by technology. She concludes that the presence in distance "facilitates learning and challenges knowing to go beyond the physical and sensual to the realm of the transcendent where distance becomes a powerful presence" (pp. 360-361).

As a teacher in distance, I am called to reach to my students through a technologically determined learning environment where I hope to meet my students. In

this place I have created, I hope that my students will successfully learn what I teach. I hope that my students will feel my presence in some way in the activities, in the text of my lessons and responses to them, and in the special way I have of putting the chairs in a circle.

“Good teaching,” writes Palmer (1998), “cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (p. 10). We might say that good teaching comes from the integrity of the teacher’s identity. A strong sense of personal identity is necessary for teachers to connect students and discipline content, and create an inviting, hospitable learning space. This integrity of identity reflects itself in wholeness of selfhood and passion for one’s content.

Teacher preparation workshops must help teachers create authentic relationships in their online classes by giving them room enough to reflect their enthusiasm and passion for their content. This keeps the classroom dynamic with presence. Online classes must have space for the teacher identity and integrity to blossom. Instructional designers can design virtual software to enable this bringing forth of teacher selfhood and passion.

Presence in (Transactional) Distance

Most of the virtual software used for online classrooms has been created to enable a kind of interaction between teachers and learners that Michael Moore (1973) describes as social interaction facilitated by our technologies. Known as the theory of transactional distance, Moore’s model for social interaction between teachers and learners has informed the policies and practices of distance education in interface and course design, teacher preparation, and what teaching presence means. Moore (1996) defines the “distance” in distance learning this way:

There is now a distance between learner and teachers which is not merely geographic, but educational and psychological as well. It is a distance in the relationship of the two partners in the educational enterprise. It is a 'transactional distance'. (p. 200)

While the details of the theory address the various typologies of learners, educational programs, and cognitive theories of learning, they also address the structure, dialogue, and interaction of the individuals involved (Moore, 2007). However, they do not address the experiences of the teachers, or the students, for that matter. They describe teaching presence in terms of transactions with students, but they do not describe teacher presence. Moore views these educational experiences as procedural and structural, with an emphasis on the extent of presence in the virtual classroom as measured by textual responses. He suggests that teaching can take place in the absence of teachers as long as teachers have left their "teaching" in the form of learning activities that invite student presence. In other words, teachers are seen as teaching when they create learning activities that follow certain steps and meet certain expectations measured in terms of textual interactions with students, which he calls dialogue. Dialogue suggests conversations between two or more people where issues are discussed and resolved, where agreements can be made. What is concealed in the teaching experience focused on social interaction? What is revealed?

Building on Moore's research, Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005) suggest that the number of interactions with students is not sufficient to reveal teaching presence. Placing emphasis on teacher presence places importance on concern for meeting interaction requirements and needs, but misses the dynamic action of teaching. Teacher presence is not the same as teaching presence. As Chuck notes, "In my [online] class, I feel like a noun." Chuck's comment captures the sense of being an object in his online

classes once he has created the learning activities and shape of the class. Derrida (1982) would say that he has achieved “univocity” (p. 247), “having only one meaning, unambiguous,” a single voice with a single sense, and the “*telos* of language,” the end purpose of language. Teaching presence, on the other hand, is captured by the dynamic quality of content in the responses and the guidance of the teachers as they assist students to create their own texts. Teachers must first have teacher presence before they can have teaching presence. Teacher preparation programs may help teachers understand the difference between these two notions, which may help to separate teacher identity from learning objectives. This may help teachers become more comfortable with online teaching and move beyond social presence.

Moore (2007) writes that transactional distance is lessened by less structure, as rigid structure tends to limit interactions between students and teachers. Typically, however, online classes have a great deal of structure, with many pre-conceived activities and discussion topics for the students. The more activities in the class, the less teaching presence may be needed. This understanding is reflected in course development and teacher preparation. Teachers often feel tension when they are caught between too many activities and no spaces for their teaching selves. Many times, teachers are asked to teach in classes created by committees and instructional designers who believe that teaching happens when students have many learning activities.

Some teachers report that they feel as though they are not teaching when they are left to manage someone else’s class or a class where activities dominate the student-teacher relationship (Whitesel, 2001). While Chuck, Homer, and Suzanne made decisions not to teach in classes that were developed by others, most contingent online teachers do

not have much choice about classes. Classes that are designed with the absence of the teacher in mind leave a class without a guide. We may ask, Is there a teacher in this house? When another person has created the learning activities, teachers sometimes have difficulties understanding their roles in helping students complete the activities. Although ideal course development would include the teachers who will be teaching a class, the economic reality is that courses will continue to be developed by others. However, teacher preparation programs can include helping teachers find a voice and role in such “teacher-less” classes.

Presence in An/Other Place

As online educators, we are called to create our classrooms in the virtual interfaces designed by technologists and instructional designers who believe that teaching can be reduced to technique. We are given the shape of the classroom and the various functions by which we will create this learning place. In other words, the instructional designers have decided for us what our teaching relationship with our students will be as well as who we will be as teachers. Teaching identity is not considered to be part of teaching in our online classes. In what way does this structured interface address us in the space where our personal self and public self meet, where “[our] brain, [our] body, [our] heart, [our] sense of self, of the world, of others and of possibilities and impossibilities” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6) constitute our teaching identities? Heidegger (1952/1977) warns that this ordering of self and our teaching realities by technology “gathers [us] thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve” (p. 19). Our “bringing-forth” our presence (p. 11) enframes us and reveals the truth of our technology as identified with who we are. In what way can we manifest our presence when we are seen as technology and

technologized text? As virtual paladins, we become knights defending the noble cause of technology and distance education in a vectored and electronic world, even as the interface submerges our identity.

Courses are created with many rooms and much textual information, where each of the classroom functions (e.g., conference, study group, journal, syllabus, course content, and resources) is rigidly named and often filled with materials designed by someone else. Teachers and students alike are “taught” to place their materials in these virtual places according to the function their course materials serve. Some teachers who teach in these online classes, highly structured by a committee to meet standards relating to administrative goals, often experience a sense of homelessness and existential anxiety. They are strangers in a strange land, often unable to move comfortably within the particular personal construction of learning of another teacher. Instead of feeling in the flow, as Chuck, Suzanne, and Shannon describe their experiences in their own classes, they feel the anxiety of being in someone else’s perception of teaching. Not feeling at home leads us to want to flee our own classes, which leads to alienation of the self, secrets, and less engagement with students in the online classes (Whitesel, 2001). We risk becoming “other” in our own teaching experience. Teachers can be prepared to face these possibilities even as course designers can design space and provide tools for teachers to build their own rooms and customize courses to suit their needs, personalities, and teaching styles.

Understanding unfamiliar landscapes is not limited to remembering and imagining. When I am in a class created by another teacher, I often feel as though I have the wrong map. It takes me time to create a new map and get oriented to a new way of

thinking about the subject matter. We can reflect; we can look for underlying structures and meanings. We can attempt to come to grips with the meaninglessness and the anxiety of new terrain, transforming this into an adventure and personalizing the experience. Unfamiliar terrain need not be “other” to us for very long. We can concern ourselves with understanding rather than procedure.

Presence in Memory

The memory of teaching is what makes it possible for online teachers to be inspired and to explore teaching as part of the technology as well as part of how they understand their art. We bring our memories of what it is like to teach in a classroom to the experience of virtual teaching. We bring our memories of the satisfaction of the experience, the understandings that called us to teaching decades before. We transform these notions as we create new memories and develop a history of the virtual classroom as “history of locales” (Casey, 1987/2000, p. 194):

This very importation of past places occurs simultaneously with the body’s ongoing establishment of directionality, level, and distance – and indeed influences these latter in myriad ways. (p. 194)

The past places of our teaching narratives must come with us as we try to bridge the distances with our students, but we bring these narratives with our teaching presence. On the other hand, some classroom software enables the “importation of past places” by enabling us to import past classes, or parts of them, into our current classes. This convenience encourages a kind of teaching amnesia, a forgetting that each class has its uniqueness and that our students are unique.

When teachers are not called to create their own classes, they often do not have memories of locales with which they may have histories. They may not have the

memories of what inspired and impassioned them to be teachers. When they teach a class fully developed by another teacher, they may experience the strangeness and vertigo associated with “sleeping in another’s bed.” They feel alien in their own classroom and even begin to view themselves as “other” in the classroom created by another teacher. They may forget what it means to be inspired and to explore their knowledge and, thus, become comfortable enough with the technology to background it. In what way do we help teachers, new to online learning, remember what it means to be present to their students? Preparing teachers to address these issues may mean helping teachers reflect on their teaching identities and styles. It may mean that we discuss ways to help them become deeply engaged in spite of the tensions caused by the fragmentation of their teaching identities and integrity. Without some recognition of these fundamental anxieties, we may face a sense that our teaching lives are meaningless. Most of the experienced teachers in this study turn to their imaginations and solitude to find the unity of identity Heidegger (1969/2002) describes as the “basic characteristic in the Being of beings” (p. 26).

Most of the teachers cherish their solitude and imaginative forays into online teaching, especially as they are setting up the classes and able to create the learning environment they imagine. Not all teachers enjoy solitude, however. While Koch (1994) defines solitude as a balance of engagement and disengagement, we are left to question who determines the balance of each and who defines what engagement and disengagement are. Most online teachers are expected to be in their online classes several times during the week. The transactional distance gets measured in seat time, much like being in an office or on an assembly line where workers are paid by the hour to be

present. When teachers are not in control of the symmetry, they experience both solitude and presence with anxiety and loneliness. Program administrators can encourage policies about teacher presence that respects the solitude teachers need. Teachers must question these attendance policies. As Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005) note, simply interacting is not enough. Teachers must understand the differences between meaningless interactions that lead to busy work and the discourse of learning. One way to achieve this kind of sophisticated learning model is to have teacher preparation workshops for each discipline and even for lower level and upper level classes.

Because teachers can turn over some of the memory to their computers, they are able to sink more deeply within their own imaginations to envision the online learning experience they want to create for their students. As Casey (1987) notes, “We have turned over responsibility for remembering to the cult of the computers, which serve as our modern mnemonic idols” (p. 2). But is this a bad thing? The computer cannot remember what it means to teach and be a teacher; only the individual teacher can do that. In fact, allowing computers to remember some details can free us up to explore the deeper meanings of our teaching and what we want to teach. Maria expresses this sentiment in a slightly different way:

It is also possible that the speed and fleeting nature of f2f conversation makes it easier to avoid being pinned down to remembering specific details that are more necessary in online communication.

Avoiding this pinned down feeling and finding the balance is what experience can teach us. This may result in more creative play within our imaginations, resulting in more creative learning environments. Being able to focus on our teaching seems to result in more flow experiences, thus more satisfying teaching experiences. Some virtual software

has been designed with memory folders for student names, homework assignments, and readings. Teachers can give thought to what they would like to leave to computer memory before they have to teach their classes. Even workshops on creating our own materials would be helpful as we think about what we would like to leave to computer memory. Giving teachers paid time to prepare for their classes and think about them would also help them think about these decisions. Memory and reflection may harbor the “gathering of recollection, thinking back . . . everything that appeals to us as what has being and has been in being” (Heidegger, 1954/1968, p. 11).

Presence in Solitude

Learning is a solitary practice for both students and teachers alike. This solitary practice can create immediacy and intimacy for the writer who has achieved flow and comfortable solitude, that symmetry of engagement and detachment. Friesen (2002) notes that this writing in online classes enables a different kind of classroom experience:

The fact that it is written makes it an experience that is, in an important sense, solitary, lapidary, and removed from concrete lived context. The fact that it is a disembodied experience reduces the types of participation that are possible in and through it. (p. 233)

For interface design, then, he suggests a way to bridge the experiential gap for students and teachers alike. Online forums should provide a place for a “listening silence that does not appear as purposeful concealment” (p. 234). The online class should give everyone a way to be present without the necessity of actively writing messages. While some classroom software does enable this silent observation, teachers are not prepared for the significance of it. In fact, the teacher preparation programs often encourage the teacher to use the “awareness” function to intrude upon the reflective silence of the student.

Using, or misusing, this awareness software has significance for the learning experience. Teaching involves thinking, but whose thinking do we privilege here?

Thinking is fostered in “letting learn” and in reflective solitude. Koch (1994) writes:

Here the quiet open time of solitude is used to assemble before the mind all the elements of some object of concern, gathering them into a well-related and meaningful whole. (p. 127)

Heidegger (1954/1968) reflects on teaching as more difficult than learning because we teachers must “let learn” (p. 15).

And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than – learning. . . . The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they – he has to learn to let them learn. (p. 15)

Teachers need to experience the “letting learn” when they come to class. When our teaching becomes an act of “letting learn,” students and teachers alike may be open to learning in “a variety of ways, not the least of which results from a productive aloneness: self with self . . .” (Taylor, 1991, p. 352). “Letting learn” provides for a different kind of tension in the relationship with students. Preparing teachers to be the ones learning in their classes will likely feel unfamiliar to them. Teaching as “letting learn” will go beyond teaching in service to learning objectives.

Having time to “let learn” means time to reflect on what we are learning about our students and may give teachers a sense of being at home in their classes and with their teaching. This presence in solitude and absence may be one of the most important ideas to impart to other teachers, and it may mean redesigning online courses without the learning objectives. Certainly, it will mean letting teachers create their own strategies for best practices and to take responsibility for their own learning about teaching online:

“One must let oneself learn,” writes Taylor (1991, p. 354). Thomas writes: “Sometimes I find myself very still in a[n online] classroom, and then I am in a sacred space and open up very well to the students.”

Preparation for online teaching inevitably includes showing teacher presence by tapping students on the shoulder when we observe them in the online classroom quietly present. Students are encouraged to tap teachers on the shoulder, as well, to ask questions or express concerns. The learning knots may untie more easily with time for solitude and reflection. As Thomas notes, teaching online takes much more time. Instead of reflecting, however, we often spend the time “doing.” Having time for solitude and reflection may lead to more flow experiences and to teacher satisfaction.

Where participants wish to be “heard,” many virtual software interfaces also provide participants with text editors that allow individual and colorful expression through fonts, colors, and graphics. We can create our images as we like, and we can invite others to view us as our virtual selves. We can create avatars to represent us and place them into multimedia where we can be seen and heard. Our avatars can represent our attitudes or perspectives or even offer us the opportunity to be playful with our identities online. We can use emoticons or other graphics to suggest our emotional intentions and mood. We can permit the unique properties of social presence and social absence influence our teaching and learning. This may require learning new multi-media software and having programs provide access and preparation for using the software. Given time and support to learn new software, teachers can willingly accept the daunting task of creating presence through avatars and graphics.

Being heard through the interface involves creating voice and being heard in one's own distinct voice. New online teachers must be prepared for the task of discovering their online voices through experience and reflection as they struggle to teach their first classes. Then they must learn to project their voices into their online classrooms by using all the technological tools available in the software. They must be encouraged to be present through their narratives and stories because good teaching comes from identity and integrity that enables connectedness and relationship (Palmer, 1998). Teachers must be prepared to use their best textual voices to reach their students. Those of us who prepare teachers for online classes can include ways to encourage a unique voice, distinct from the voices represented in textual lectures and by instructional designers. Teachers may appreciate time to reflect on ways multi-media software can create a teaching voice, especially when they are overwhelmed by the voices of course developers, instructional designers, and other teachers. Again, room for dwelling can be made in the software for teacher presence.

Presence in Text

Without the presence of text in the virtual classrooms, we would feel completely alone. Writing, and thus our text, is really quite suited to communicate at a distance, to address others who may or may not be present to us. Experienced teachers have found ways to encourage students to leave their text in the classrooms, both through interacting with their students and encouraging them to interact with one another, and by creating activities the completion of which reflect the students' presence. The texts and possibly the voices in the classroom become, to a certain extent, our bodily presence. The learning environment we create reflects our bodily presence and our memories. Casey (2000)

writes, “Even when the text is written and not spoken. . . the body is solicited” (p. 245). Each of the activities we personally create for our students is a personal invitation that reflects our emotional and intellectual investment in our teaching identities. When we are not permitted to create our own learning activities, we are nobody in our own classes. We are, in effect, absent.

In most cases, if teachers are aware of the need to be present to students, they may be encouraged to develop their own rituals before they go to class. As Shannon notes, when she makes her tea and takes time with her appearance, she brings her “shining persona” to her class. Teachers may supplement their classes with additional activities to stimulate intellectual discussion. They may express their identities and presence in their responses to students within the discussions and through written comments to students on their assignments. Chuck brings his teaching identity to class through the activities he creates for his students, his pathways to learning, and his guidance of them as they are engaged in the activities. Teacher preparation workshops may need to make teachers aware of the ways in which teaching and teacher presence are reflected in classes.

Ong (1982) reminds us that reading and writing, the primary activities in the online classes, are different experiences when we compare them to the traditional classroom. In the traditional classroom, reading and writing are generally activities that students do alone privately at home. In the traditional classroom, speaking and discussing are the primary activities. In the online classes, reading and writing prevail as the primary mode of interacting and learning. Speaking and discussing are usually performed somewhere outside the online classroom, usually within a completely different context. Online, the only context for words is more words, in the context of other words in the

form of messages and responses. Thus, we relate to our students' presence through their words, whatever the consequences. Thomas questions:

Why is it so hard to catch personality and voice from DE students? Well, easy. They are not adept enough in handling words. Or another way to put it is that they have not yet found their voice on this medium. Nor are they likely to during the time we know them since it takes so long to develop one's voice. But we help them along the way, just by giving them practice in communicating complex ideas through the written word.

When teachers are silent in the classroom, we often assume their absence. Perhaps teachers have the same difficulties finding voice through language in the online classes. More research is needed in this area of absent teachers and limited language skills in the online classes, especially where classes have been structured in a question-and-answer format. When our students are silent in the class, we may assume they are simply absent. Perhaps those absent students experience the same language insecurities. This is especially true as our students become more diverse. More research is needed to explore what voices are created for online teaching and learning and the meaning of learning when voices are dim.

As students handle their words through their keyboard and hold the words up to the light of observation, teachers must listen carefully for budding voices, for quiet whispers of students' voices, even for meaningful silences. However, Ihde (2007) warns that reducing sounds

. . . to mere acoustic tokens of an abstract listening . . . fails to hear the *otherness* revealed by voice. A phenomenology of sound and voice moves in the opposite direction, toward full significance, toward a listening to the *voiced* character of the sounds of the World. (p. 147)

Robinson (2000) notes the complexity of the language of conversation online: we have chats, discussions, and informal and formal discourse. Students tend to conversational

discourse and often write as they speak, often not realizing that conversation and writing can be quite different. Conversation has the power to involve the speakers or writers in personal relation in order to keep the conversation intact, thus giving it a hermeneutic thrust in the search for meaning-making. In learning to find their writing voices, students may learn the power of address in writing with its ability to address those who are absent. Teachers need to be aware of this interpretive quality of conversational discourse and the significance of helping students find their voices. To do this, teachers must be present in their text and intertwine their text with their students' texts to create a tapestry of collaboration and mentoring. Teachers must enter these conversations and engage the students' language, meeting the students where they are and gently guiding them to where they can be. They must be tactful, as van Manen (1993) encourages us to be, where tact is mediated through example.

Gadamer (1960/1999) understands the hermeneutic nature of written text as a way of calling forth new relationships. Rather than see text as limiting because its context is more words, he sees text, free of "the contingency of its origin and its author" (p. 395) free to invite new relationships. For teachers, our online text may help us guide students to deeper levels of cognitive thought and awareness. Both Mount (2008) and Friesen (2002) speculate on the power of text to invite us to enter relationships through textual collaboration. Where speech is fleeting, text calls us to engage the ideas and thinking represented there. What other relationships may be called forth?

The iterative nature of online text enables us to have these new relationships. What we write may be read, reread, and rewritten, and, in the case of hypertext, even included in the text of another. These new relationships may reflect deeper levels of

cognitive thought and awareness. Mount's (2008) research on forming a faith community online leads her to write: "Written text calls out the presence of the writer whose text addresses the reader and, in the response of the reader, new relationships are formed" (p. 319). We might begin to imagine new relationships for our pedagogies in this virtual place that requires us to move toward what is not yet.

Presence in Performance

When we think of teaching as a performative act, we think of being watched by someone. Online, we are being watched by students as well as administrators who are lurking in the classroom. We expect to engage our students with our performance, but what happens to our expectations under surveillance? Teachers in this study are aware of being watched by administrators online and comment on it. Thomas wonders whether we should be speaking so frankly in our classes with others listening in. Maria even comments on how administrators were spying on us, but they are only interested in keeping track of the class for evaluation purposes. Other participants in the study express concern for this kind of looking over the shoulder. This situation raises questions about the nature of academic freedom under these conditions as well as questions about what exactly is being evaluated. I question how free we are to shift our focus to open conversation when we know we are being observed. We do change our behaviors, as both Thomas and Maria note. Most online classrooms have ways to track student and teacher presence in the class in terms of how many times each is in class and how many words are written. These actions reinforce the technical education model Grundy (1987) writes about and may shape the types of interactions, responses, and relationships that we

develop in our online classes. More research is needed for us to understand the effects these observations have on teaching and learning.

These “enfolding worlds” (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 186) of online teachers prevent teaching from becoming a simple set of skills and procedures that use computer technologies. Knowing the pressures to make online teaching a technological process, we must contemplate what it means to teach teachers by way of the technologies they will use in teaching their classes. As Irwin (2002) writes, “Technology pressures one to focus on skills, processes and check lists for optimal usability that emphasizes instrumentality” (p. 362). Educators need to find ways to teach the necessary skills of the software with its growing complexity and still have time to mentor faculty in these new teaching experiences.

Knotty Questions for the Future

As I reflect on the questions that surface in this research and the resulting themes and understandings, I am reminded of many questions that call to me but were unable to be addressed in this research. As van Manen (2003) reminds us, we can never exhaust all the possible questions we may ask. Online programs are ubiquitous now, and the workforce for these programs consists mainly of contingent faculty, technically trained online to use various technologies and interfaces in the service of manipulating a prepared set of instructions and activities. These classes are designed to push students through certain kinds of learning with no interference from the teacher. I continue to be called by wanting to understand the experiences of these contingent teachers as they teach on the margins of mainstream education using technology. One question that comes

to mind is: In what way do their experiences inform and transform their teaching identities?

Another fascinating area for future research is the area of signature pedagogies that are emerging as a result of teacher preparation for online teaching. These pedagogies are no longer identified with various disciplines, but are homogenous in many ways. In what way does this interface pedagogy transform teachers and signature pedagogies? What is the nature of this interface pedagogy and how does it inform teaching and learning? We have only begun to question what interface pedagogy means to teachers and learners alike.

One of the most intriguing elements for me was the idea of the media/mediated and non-media/non-mediated self. Not only are we entering an educational era where teaching and learning are possible in mediated places like Second Life, but we are now able to create avatars to represent us in these places. Students may do this as well. I ponder what the possibilities are for hermeneutic phenomenological studies about the lived experiences of teaching and learning in these brave new worlds. I am fascinated by the questions we might ask about the lived experiences of avatars.

Transforming Pedagogy

Teaching is not normalizable. It happens in disjointed and yet enfolded conceptual and social spaces . . . Its in-betweenness and all-at-onceness corrodes the engine of system. Where, when, and how teaching happens is an undecidable. This is what saves it from being a skill or a technology. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 193)

This hermeneutic phenomenological journey has been disjointed and in-between and all-at-once. I have learned a way to ask my questions and explore my experiences and the experiences of others through hermeneutic phenomenology, which is but one way. As van Manen (2003) reminds me, there is more than one way, more than just these

experiences, and more to say about these experiences than I can ever say. As I reflect on this journey, I am reminded of the questions that impassioned my research and promised to revision my teaching. I have lived those questions, as van Manen (2003) suggests, and have played them upon my own blue guitar, my own way of understanding the world. They have enfolded my teaching presence online with my identity and integrity as teacher. My desire to help new teachers and students alike become comfortable in the online classrooms takes me to in-between places where, in disjointed steps, I find my own authentic and informed voice as a researcher and teacher. I have both stayed home and arrived home in this questioning of teaching with/in technology. The knotty questions have become melodic tunes played upon the blue guitar.

This dissertation has been a discovering of what it means to be an experienced online teacher, to have gone beyond the concerns of the computer technology, but not to have forgotten those concerns altogether, as Heidegger (1977) has warned us to do. Heidegger writes, “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [West] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens” (p. 13). As we become more comfortable with our computer technologies, we often forget how they become our blue guitars and how our life and teaching tunes are changed. We may forget the dangers of becoming “other” in our own virtual classrooms as well as in our teaching lives.

As I ponder the dwindling role of the imagination in education, I can see how technology might open possibilities for teaching pedagogies and provide new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, and being with students. Our imaginations may be rekindled through the technology and virtual classroom experiences. As we metamorphose our

teaching imaginations to create new teaching experiences, we may find ourselves forgetting our traditional classroom presence. Barnhart (1998/2001) tells us that metamorphosis is a transforming, a “changing of form.” The prefix meta- carries with it a sense of “beyond, transcending,” and morpho- means “form or structure” (*Merriam Webster’s*, 1996). In the process of my teaching form changing and becoming transcendent, I remember Heidegger’s warning of letting technology become too familiar. Yet, the paradox is that the more familiar I become with my teaching technology, the more focused I can be with my students’ text and, through their text, their thinking. To keep me grounded and to prevent this amnesia, however, I will attempt to teach in a traditional classroom from time to time.

My journey as scholar-teacher has been one that has opened my inner voice and expressiveness and given new life to my teaching. I have lived with these questions for many years now, and they continue to evolve in my mind and my life as a teacher. Through these questions and this research, I have untied many knots and discovered many more. Each time I go to class, I bring with me a greater sensitivity to student language and listening as their texts speak to me. I am more aware of my presence and silences in the class and can encourage my students to partake of the solitude they may find there.

As scholar-teacher, I am bidden to reflect on my practice and now keep a journal for all my classes as I ponder my teaching presence and teacher presence. In spite of the technology and technologized text, I have renewed my commitment to students as individuals, remembering that they, too, can become “standing reserve.” Connecting theory to practice has been a scaffold, as the phenomenological journey suggests

questions and ideas about practice that lead me to question both theory and practice. I will continue to trouble Moore's notion of transactional distance as that theory is not finished with me yet.

Gadamer (1969) and Heidegger (1952/1977) remind me that my engagement with others brings an ethical and moral responsibility to my actions both in teaching and outside of the classroom. My participants in this journey have taught me that learning is a social practice that encourages collaboration with others to clarify our experiences and examines our beliefs, questions, and concerns. Understanding more about what other teachers experience online has transformed my work with teacher preparation workshops and mentoring. Where I can, I will help others search out and respect their own needs for comfort and hospitality in their online classes. My new understanding of this complex experience may make a difference in a teacher's adapting to the online classroom. Mentoring within these enfolding and knotty places may also bring awareness to others about the complexity of teaching online, that this is not just a traditional class in another place. As Maria writes, "I don't compare my online classes to f2f classes. They are just different." The sooner we begin to recognize that online classes do have their own presence and phenomenological complexity and need not be compared to traditional classes, we are free to explore this experience more fully.

Epilogue: A Cautionary Tale

This research has opened up questions about our evolving engagement with online learning and identified several areas where distance education programs may be called to question their policies and practices. These can be seen as cautionary tales. This research reveals places in distance learning programs where our technologies and the

practices that emerge call us to reflect on the ways that we teachers may become “standing reserve” in service to our technologies. As teachers assimilate themselves into the technologies of our university classes, we risk losing what calls us to teach. While cautionary tales are often told to warn about dangers around us, they are also told to reinforce conformity and respect for authority, and to create and reinforce stereotypes. Just as Heidegger (1952/1977) warns that our technologies both reveal and conceal, our cautionary tales do the same.

Technology has brought into question and disrupted our traditional ways of envisioning learning, learners, the authority of teachers and institutions, and any supremacy we may feel about our own educational systems, culture, and academic practices and disciplines. Virtual worlds, also called immersive technologies, have disrupted our traditional thinking and practices about what it means to live, dwell, work, communicate, educate, and be. What promises do these virtual learning worlds of the future hold? How might we craft a vision of the distance learning program of the future? What cautionary tales might we need as we think about our future distance learning programs?

When an academic program is established, we might invite a team of practitioners, academics, multi-media designers, and virtual world designers to come together to create a vision of what this learning experience will be like. Among them would be a hermeneutic phenomenologist ready to bring to bear the philosophical encounters with lived experience. These collaborators, working both online and in person, would imagine the practices as well as theories they wish to impart. They would decide what combinations of learning outcomes and experiences they wish to provide and

what type of interface and technology might best work to help learners achieve this. This design would include a place for learners to develop their own learning goals, individually and through collaboration. This team would envision a learning environment and course design where learners can immerse themselves in practice and develop theories about their learning and the discipline areas. Because we know that language reaches deep into our psyches and experiences, the learning environment would offer places for reflections in language on the immersive learning experiences.

The teachers of this team might need to have a reward system commensurate with the expected level of commitment to this program. Teachers who engage in scholarship and lifelong learning would be supported in their efforts. They would have periodic sabbaticals every few years in order to keep up with the fast-changing technology world and to pursue their research. This research would be returned to the team so they could benefit from the new insights. The teachers might need reflection time and places to assess their process and progress at periodic intervals during program development.

What we have called teacher preparation might become lifelong learning in collaboration with others who are teachers, designers, practitioners, learners, and researchers. Since immersive technologies hold promise for learners to be able to create their own learning pathways, the notion of “best practices” as we currently understand it would be disrupted. Rather, we would focus on guiding students in their journeys to find their own paths. We would become mentors and guides along the way, understanding that we will be “letting learn.” The immersive learning experiences in the synthetic world are so real that we risk learning experiences that may produce homogenized thinking. The challenge for mentors and guides would be to cautiously listen to what learners are

learning and lead them toward original thinking. We would find ways to encourage the supremacy of their own experience and teach ways to reflect on their experiences.

As part of teacher preparation, teachers would be encouraged to become scholars of their own practice, and they might be supported in attending conferences to present their work. They might be encouraged and supported in collaborating on projects and sharing knowledge that sustain their intellectual pursuits. Program administrators would support their efforts at “letting learn,” and they would join the legions of lifelong self-motivated learners.

Scholarship would become collaborative. Scholars would include those who have not been peer-reviewed by those who hold power in the university. We would have knowledge organizations that could peer-review new knowledge and scholarship, including knowledge that has been “crowd-sourced.” Crowdsourcing is the neologism that describes sending a task usually performed by an employee or contractor to a group of people whom you may not know and who may not know one another. Wikipedia is such an example. Crowdsourcing has the potential to develop new knowledge and scholarship by including experiences and understandings that reach way beyond the immediate scholarship community to entire world. Through crowdsourcing, knowledge can be created and disseminated across the world, and ownership of knowledge will take on new meanings. In what ways will this change our teaching roles? However, we face the dangers of becoming homogenized in our thinking and losing some of the richness of our individual experiences. We risk the experience of group-think, a concept that captures thinking by consensus rather than analyzing and critiquing. A hermeneutist would find this consensus thinking a rich area for exploration.

Immersive technologies and the Immersive Internet open opportunities for learning in ways we have not previously imagined. They enable immersion in an engaging and near accurate learning experience. These immersive learning environments can be experienced separately or integrated into existing distance learning programs. Perhaps including immersive learning in humanities programs would rejuvenate interest in understanding our human experiences. Imagine learners being able to simulate an archeological dig and attend an historical battle or event. Imagine learners being able to work on international teams that travel in space, unravel the DNA sequence, and participate in an organ transplant operation. These are the kinds of learning experiences that immersive technologies promise. Here, the role of imagination and flow will have phenomenological significance, especially as we search for ways to help teachers and learners engage the flow experience.

Where we might find ourselves generally collaborating with those who are like us, we might now collaborate easily with those who are not like us, those we may have called “other” before the world became small. We would be able to communicate through translation programs with others whose languages we do not speak. Where we once had an entrepreneurial teacher designing and teaching her own class, we will have teachers who will work with other teachers, practitioners, and learners to create the virtual learning world they deem best suited to the learning experience. Rather than following a set blueprints of learning based on our traditional teaching and learning experiences, we will be crafting questions about what we want to learn, how we want to learn it, and how we can make that learning happen collaboratively. Remembering the need for solitude, we also want to make places for those who thrive in solitude.

Learning institutions will collaborate with industry and other institutions so that learners may engage in lifelong learning in a seamless way. These immersive worlds will blend work and learning in such ways that learning will be part of what we do each day in the world we now call work. We are experiencing today the economic results of our learning organizations not being able to change as rapidly as the environments in which they exist. These immersive technologies have disrupted our very conception of what our universities will look like in the future. As our universities struggle to meet the needs of today's learners and tomorrow's college students, they will be forced to change their business models. Those who cannot change rapidly will risk institutional obscurity or death.

As teachers become more deeply embedded in immersive technologies, this brave new world will need hermeneutic phenomenologists to help us understand our rapidly evolving experiences. This cautionary tale calls me to remember the power of phenomenology to explore the ways in which technology shapes our experiences and determines who we are. Hermeneutic phenomenology reminds me that we are persons, no matter which virtual world we have immersed ourselves in, and as persons, "we are incomparable, unclassifiable, uncountable, irreplaceable" (Auden, 1964).

Appendix A

An Invitation to Participate

Cynthia H. Whitesel
whitesel@zoominternet.net

April 2006

Dear Online Teacher,

I would like to invite you to engage in a study that explores the lived experience of online teachers at the university level. I am conducting this study as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren.

Although there has been a great deal written about how to teach online, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of teachers online as they encounter the technology, the interface, and the students. As I seek to understand this experience, I am inviting you to participate in an online discussion forum, especially arranged for this study. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences and engage in selected written reflections and conversations online beginning in May 2006 and extending through August 2006.

To respect the confidentiality of your participation, the forum will be set up privately through my own resources. You will not be identified by name in the published findings or in oral presentations unless you choose to have your name revealed. You will, however, be invited to adopt an alias for the purposes of my writing. After the research is complete, you will be invited to review the results.

This study will make important contributions to the understanding of the lived experiences of teachers who teach with technology at the university level. The research will be considered successful if someone who has never taught online reads the narratives you provide and understands the challenges and insights, the success and disappointments, and the special connections that come with teaching online.

I will be contacting you to set up a logon and password for the discussion forum and to begin the conversations. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me. Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in this experience with me.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Whitesel
Doctoral Candidate
Education Policy and Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix B

Consent Form

Project Title: Virtualizing the teacher: A phenomenological study of the lived experience of teaching within technology

Why is this research being done?

This is a research project being conducted by Cynthia H. Whitesel at the University of Maryland, College Park. You are being invited to participate in this research project because you are an online teacher serving university students. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of teaching online using computer technology. We hope to understand the experiences of teachers who teach online with computer technology.

What will I be asked to do?

As a participant, you will be expected to participate in an online discussion forum in both conversation with others and alone three months during summer 2006. These months will occur consecutively, but you are not expected to be in the online discussion forum daily or weekly. All conversations will be printed and bound in a binder for convenience of the researcher. You will be asked to reflect on your online teaching experiences, your self-concepts as teacher, your relationships with students, and the ways in which teaching with computer technology transforms your teaching. Example questions might include the following:

- When and how did you first begin to teach online?
- Describe what it is like for you to experience your teaching in the absence of students and in the presence of the computer.
- How has teaching online transformed your notions of being a teacher?
- Write about a troublesome experience/an exhilarating experience when you were teaching online.
- Write about where your computer is when you go to your online class.

Project Title: Virtualizing the teacher: A phenomenological study of the lived experience of teaching within technology

What about confidentiality?

This research project involves having online transcripts of conversations in a password protected, online discussion forum. The transcripts will be printed out and bound in a three-ring binder to explore themes. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, all printed transcripts may have a screen name on them and will be kept in a locked file cabinet and coded. No actual names will be used when we write this research project. Participants will be identified with a screen name throughout the text to provide confidentiality. If we write a report or an article about this research project, the identity of participants will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. All transcripts will be stored and protected in a locked cabinet.

I agree to permit my online conversations to be printed out for the purpose of this study.

I do not agree to permit my online conversations to be printed out for the purpose of this study.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known risks associated with participation in this research project.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the investigator hopes to learn more about the experience of teaching online with computer technology for pedagogic understanding. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the experiences of teaching online with computers.

Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You may also refuse to answer any questions at any time during the interviews.

Project Title: Virtualizing the teacher: A phenomenological study of the lived experience of teaching within technology

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Cynthia H. Whitesel at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: Dr. Francine Hultgren at 3112A Benjamin Building, or call her at 301-405-4562, or email her at fh@umd.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742**; email irb@deans.umd.edu; or telephone at 301-405-0678.

This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park, IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent

Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Signature and Date

NAME OF SUBJECT:

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:

DATE: _____

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