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## RESEARCH

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# Who Am I Here? Disrupted Identities and Gentle Shifts when Teaching in Cyberspace

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*Teacher identity has most often been studied in reference to preschool through grade 12 (P-12) teachers' professional development (Day, Kingston, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Trevitt & Perera, 2009; Watson, 2006), pre-service teacher development (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Franzak, 2002; Freese, 2006; Hoban, 2007; Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Sachs, 2005), and literacy and teacher identity (Moje, 2008; Spitler, 2009, 2011). Little research on teacher identity and professional development at the higher education level exists. This study addresses the disruption in teacher educator identity that four teacher educators went through as they moved from physical, on campus identities toward a more virtual presence. Drawing on four reflective case studies, the authors document various identity shifts each faculty member experienced while learning to teach in online formats. The study concluded that it is advisable and worthwhile to challenge our sense of identity, question ourselves as teachers and learners, and re-conceptualize what it means to be an educator—regardless of, or perhaps in light of—instructional delivery.*

Teacher identity has most often been studied in reference to teacher candidates (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Franzak, 2002; Freese, 2006; Hoban, 2007; Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; Sachs, 2005), in the area of literacy learning and its connection to teacher identity (Moje, 2008; Spitler, 2009, 2011), and in regards to teachers' professional development (Day, Stobart, Sammons, & Kingston, 2006; Trevitt & Perera, 2009; Watson, 2006). The research on teacher candidate and in-service teacher identity exists in contrast to the dearth of research on teacher identity in higher education, which has created a gap in establishing teacher identity issues across all forms of educational experiences. With the move to more online learning in higher education (Daughtery & Funke, 1998; Kazar & Eckel, 2002), specifically in the area of teacher education, studying the identity of teacher educators as both instructors and as literacy learners is an area of research that requires attention. Addressing identities in an online environment allows for a greater understanding of teachers' relationships to

the modality. In essence, do the tools teacher educators use impact their identities as teachers within a classroom or course? By exploring the use of technology and its impact on our relationships with students, the authors of this paper embarked upon a yearlong self-study as a reflective community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In this article, we share our self-study process and current understandings about what it has meant to move from our physical, on campus identities toward a more virtual presence with students. We begin with an exploration of what it means to teach, what the concept of "identity" might mean, and what the world of online teaching has become in the realm of higher education. We end this article with a discussion of the impact our disrupted identities have had on our program and the reflections we continue to ponder.

### IDENTITY AND TEACHING IN CYBERSPACE

Identity is a complex concept, often framed according to the purpose of the research (Beauchamp

& Thomas, 2009). Widdicombe (1998) suggested that identity is more about what we do, rather than an attribute we have. Olsen (2008) asserted that, in teaching, identity is a lens for examining aspects of teaching and the influences instructors utilize in conjunction with their practice. Combining these concepts of identity in our own practices as teachers in a shifting context, correlating with Gee's (2001) concept of identity as "a certain kind of person in a given context" (p. 99), allows us to embrace the idea that sub-identities exist that operate in a variety of ways in particular contexts. Identity is an important aspect of the teaching persona as its dimensionality includes elements that are both personal and professional. Sachs (2005) explains:

Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of "how to be," "how to act," and "how to understand" their work and their place in society. Importantly, teaching identity is neither fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience. (p. 15)

Given the open parameters of experience and the notion that each person interprets a similar phenomenon differently, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) contend that understanding the concept of identity is complicated by its ability, and the language used to describe this ability, to shift or to be developed, constructed, formed, created, shaped, built, changed, or disrupted (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Flores & Day, 2006; Olsen, 2008; Parkinson, 2008; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Watson, 2006; Young, 1988). Changes in any work place often impacts continuity of self, which can result in identity disruption (Young, 1988). With the shift in job requirements, the "doing" of identity can create gaps in what one might associate as the self as the person transitions from old behaviors to new ways of doing and being. These gaps, these discontinuities, have the potential to disrupt one's sense of identity that may or may not play out in educational environments or between educator and student.

With respect to the shifting nature of teaching within the current political, social, and economic environment, the call for online delivery is outpacing its face-to-face counterpart. Teacher educators are faced with the need to examine their own literacies and teaching identities. If identity is shaped,

developed, or changed in response to lived experiences and expanded literacies (Moje, 2008; Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009), then moving from a face-to-face setting to a virtual environment, which requires new literacies and new task demands, as well as new teaching experiences, will necessarily create a shift in teaching identity. In essence, online learning environments can influence teaching manner, which is an element of teacher identity. However, what indeed changes? How do we respond to these virtual environments and to the new demands we may feel from our students, from technology, and from our sense of who we are as teachers?

Davis's (1989) technology acceptance model addresses the affective response of a user, which is based on the perceived usefulness and ease of use of technology that has the greatest impact on the person using the technology. While this model is useful, and indeed, may have had an effect on the participants of this study, it was the actual use of technology that created the opportunity to investigate changes in our identities. Vygotsky (1978) asserted that the cultural tools utilized within a society have an influence on the psychological tools available to those within a society. Just as those physical tools change, so, too, does the psychological. Do our identities, which we conceive to be teachers, change as well, or does change occur only in our response toward technology?

## METHODS

To address our need to construct new literacies for online teaching, three members of the literacy faculty in a large Midwestern university worked with a fourth faculty member on the transition to online learning during the 2010-2011 academic year. Meeting as a community of practice, we worked with Maggie (all names herein are pseudonyms), who was well versed in teaching online as well as an acolyte of technology and its use in curriculum and instruction. Maggie guided Paula, Loreen, and Anna, literacy faculty members, to help them build engaging and dynamic learning environments for their students.

Additionally, as we were creating new literacies, we agreed to examine, reflect upon, and document our current teaching practices and philosophies of teaching and learning, as well as what technology meant to us and how we viewed the transition to

an online environment. We met monthly as part of our reflective community to discuss relevant issues pertaining to our individual online practices and concerns, and we subsequently generated guided prompts for further written reflection. For example, as we were discussing our teaching, we realized that we held different conceptions of teaching, and thus we decided to individually write about our teaching philosophies to share with each other in our next meeting. In addition, we decided to investigate how each of us utilized our online environments and examined the aspects of our identities that might be present in those environments. We reviewed each other's online courses and constructed peer feedback on the design of those courses. We then reflected on current trends in quality online learning in light of our current experiences.

To develop our case study, we gathered approximately 40 pages of reflective data, four peer evaluations of online course design and instructional approaches, and a substantial number of informal notes from our discussions, which became our data corpus. Using constant comparison (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006), we read the content of our written responses and oral discussions and inductively generated themes addressing "identity," "technology," and "change," from which we were able to examine more closely the disruptions we were feeling in our heretofore under-scrutinized teaching identities. This analysis led us to reconsider our teaching philosophies, our identity shifts in respect to our online work, and our relationships with students both in online and face-to-face environments. Based on our analysis of the data, we identified four distinct identities with respect to our online teaching. We used those individual identities to develop an embedded case study (Yin, 2014) with four primary units of analysis. Each unit of analysis within the larger case study is described below in the form of a profile, one for each instructor.

### PROFILES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Although our names appear as authors of this paper, given the sensitive nature of some of our data, we chose to use pseudonyms to describe the challenges we faced and the identity disruptions we experienced during our transition to online instruction. The profiles below reflect our attitudes toward and motivation to use technology in our online courses, the manner in which we incorporated

specific technologies into our instruction, and the disruptions we experienced in our teaching identities. Our profiles create instantiations of particular occurrences in our journeys as instructors moving to online delivery. These profiles bring into view a continuum of teacher identity that moves from self-as-teacher to absent instructor, which is replicated in our relationships with technology, and in many respects, our comfort with change. Whether or not these profiles endure as static remains a question related to one's concept of identity.

#### PAULA, THE DOUBTING PERFECTIONIST

As is the case with many faculty members who are unfamiliar with the online world, Paula was driven by the demands of a changing classroom and needs of higher education. Paula, a faculty member in the literacy program who had served as program coordinator in the past and had been at the university for 20 years, talked often during the early stages of our study about her "guilt in needing to make things right." This guilt was due to dwindling enrollments in the graduate program, which she felt was her fault, because she had resisted the move to an online program when she was program coordinator. As part of her ownership of the program as a prior leader and current faculty member, she felt she needed to "jump in" due to her commitment to seeing the program move to an online format to help build student numbers. Paula also acknowledged that while she saw the necessity of her role in moving to an online environment, she was reluctant. When approached by the current coordinator about going online, she agreed "partially out of guilt and a sense of needing to make things right for our program."

In the face of resistance, Paula also acknowledged the importance of understanding the design and use of technology to aid learning. She would ultimately need to become the 'student' once again since she explained that "I knew my content and I had strong pedagogies for face-to-face instruction, but needed [what Mishra & Koehler, (2006) called] technological pedagogical content knowledge." Paula acknowledged the "fun" and "challenge" that came from the faculty online course development group, but viewed others in the group as "already using sophisticated technologies, especially those outside [her] program." In her autobiography concerning technology, she focused only on her teach-

ing with no connection or mention to personal experiences (personal phone, laptop, childhood experience, etc.). It is possible that Paula limited technology to tools she could manage, such as “a cell phone, a computer, MP3 player.” Once engaged in online work, however, where technology became the barrier to her identity as a strong teacher, technology had a stronger presence in Paula’s life, but it remained largely professional in nature.

Paula also talked often about her need “to rebuild a sense of self-efficacy and agency as an instructor.” Paula’s reflection on teaching and learning brought her to question whether she was better matched for face-to-face instruction than online instruction. She reflected on her “struggle with [her] fear of failure...of not being a strong instructor in online delivery.” Throughout Paula’s reflection, technology emerged as a barrier to her sense of identity as a teacher. She stated, “Teaching online has changed all that and caused me to question both my competence as well as my definition [of being a good teacher].” Paula also reflected on her identity as a “perfectionist” and her need to do things well online. Although contradictory, she pointed to the benefits of the reflective study to “highlight for me that there is no one right way.”

While there is occasional mention of students as a focus point of Paula’s reflection, the predominant theme within her data was her need to be recognized as a “good teacher” and the external motivators that created a need to move online (i.e. economic demand, administrative expectations, etc.) Although her attitude toward technology and teaching methodology seemed to remain the same, there was some evidence of a shift from fear to comfort in teaching in the online environment. As with others in the study, the greatest shift was in the use of technology as a tool for teaching, not necessarily a tool to promote student learning. This created a gap in her relationship with students, disrupting her concept of herself as a “good teacher.”

### **LOREEN, THE CRITICAL FACILITATOR**

Consistently cheerful and willing to give anyone the benefit of the doubt, Loreen functioned as coordinator of the literacy program. An associate professor who had been at our institution for three years, Loreen recognized the importance of offering coursework online but maintained a critical stance toward online delivery. Loreen endorsed a

student-friendly stance while also balancing program rigor and firm traditions insisted upon by program faculty members. She had taught online once prior to this self-study. She had 35 students in the course and felt overwhelmed by the experience. Loreen, as a critical consumer of online coursework, took that stance to her online work. Her first response was typically, “How is this better than [the existing technologies like paper and pencil]?”

Loreen’s teaching manner was such that she worked in tandem with students and often was pushed or led by them. As she noted, “Students have always been my impetus to push into uncharted territories.” Working with students, however, meant being with students, and online teaching created a distance between them in her eyes. She felt her rapport with students and building community with them was one of her strongest teaching attributes, and thus, being online created a barrier that would not readily allow her to create the environment she typically created in her face-to-face courses. While she believed effective teachers “don’t mind changing what they’re doing if they see it isn’t promoting student learning,” she was not necessarily willing to “change for the sake of change.” Because Loreen felt that effective teachers “actively engage and maintain spaces for learning that are personally and intellectually safe, engaging, stimulating, and challenging,” her lack of knowledge about technology created further barriers to her ability to facilitate student learning in ways that she felt made her effective.

Yet these barriers also allowed her to bring to the fore one of her other strengths, which was to learn with her students. In respect to technology, Loreen stated:

As I now understand, new technologies are changing at such a rapid rate (and this is the nature of the beast) and that one of the most fundamental things for me to know is how to be a learner and a risk taker in this new digital environment.

She knew as a literacy educator that “the very world of reading and writing was changing, and because I was in the business of helping teachers to help students read and write, I knew that I needed to enter the conversation.”

As Loreen became more comfortable with her role in an online environment, the technology was no longer an issue for her. She began to concentrate more on the program as a whole given her role as

program coordinator. She also began to concentrate on her pedagogy and not the technology per se. Her shift in practice did not necessitate a shift in her rapport or relationship with students. As she noted:

When it comes to my teaching, I will say that I change a lot. One of the most fulfilling aspects of teaching, for me, is the creativity and the challenge of figuring out how to get better and better. This also helps me to stay engaged and away from a rote style of teaching. I really like to feel alive in my teaching, even though it is exhausting.

Thus, Loreen's shift was momentary, which was also noticeable in Paula's "shift."

### **ANNA, THE ACCESSIBLE PRAGMATIST**

Anna, as the director of the school, found online learning to be a great challenge, as well as an opportunity to communicate with both faculty and students in a new capacity. She had been at the university for seven years and had served as director for two. The role of director often limited her communication with others because of concerns about bias, thus creating an obstacle in the way of her growth as an innovator. As an experienced online instructor, she focused her work on improving access for students and building on her existing knowledge for engaging learning opportunities. Often focused on the "how-tos" of the experience, Anna experienced a new insight upon reflection into herself as a teacher: she enjoyed teaching online and felt she was a better teacher online than in her face-to-face instruction. She noted she was "kinder and gentler" online because she empathized with students just learning the tools needed for online learning. After greater reflection, Anna was able to consider the impact of her design work and practice in the online environment and to examine how to reframe her face-to-face instruction in the future.

While Anna's internal motivation was what generally compelled her to move to teaching online, she sought to collaborate with students, faculty, and technology-savvy individuals to support her quickly building base of knowledge of online learning. More central to Anna's focus was the idea that the content, as much as the technology and those using it, had a voice. As she stated, "I liked the idea of the distance, where I wasn't looking students in the face, but rather allowing my words, my language to do the talking for me." Anna's belief

in respect for the content, the users, and the environment, coupled with rigor and reflection, is what brought her to understand her role and the impact she has on students in the online world. She reflected, "If we engaged in these studies or conversations more often, I think rigor would be a natural outcome, as we would be more reflective about our practice and generate more ideas about how to improve our programming."

When contemplating Anna's shift in practice, we noted that it occurred not only in her identity but also in her teaching manner and use of technology as a tool. This meant that Anna's work was no longer limited to observations of practice in an online world but her transference of her own online teaching practices to her face-to-face courses. Anna shared, "I actually think that the online person [Anna] may be teaching the face-to-face [version of herself] to be more explicit, to be more engaging, and to be more direct about what is expected from the class." One aspect of Anna's view of teaching that remained without shift was Anna's acknowledgement that no matter the format, her determination to construct an environment that:

I must respect the learner, respect the content, respect myself, and figure out how to pass that along to students while attempting to engage them on an academic and personal level, care about them, and acknowledge the reality that sometimes it can all go wrong.

Ultimately, while a shift in Anna's view of the value and usefulness of online teaching and learning may have occurred, the overall value she placed on constructing meaningful and engaging learning experiences had not changed her identity as a teacher educator.

### **MAGGIE, THE ABSENT FRAMER**

In many ways, Maggie could be considered a "digital native" (Hargittai, 2010; Prensky, 2009), having used technology since she was a child. At the time of our study, Maggie had been with the university for five years and knew a great deal about technology in general but also had considerable knowledge about specific technologies that could be used for online instruction. She described herself as "someone who is relatively well developed in knowledge and practice in online learning." Maggie's colleagues viewed her as one of the most technology-savvy faculty members of the program,

and Maggie was aware of colleagues' perceptions. When writing about her role as a faculty member within the university's school of education, Maggie wrote, "My role has been significantly more defined in relation to my competency and knowledge in the area of technology integration into teaching." Interestingly, Maggie's identity as an educator was linked to her colleagues' perceptions, as indicated in her earliest essay when Maggie wrote, "If I was to sever my ties to technology, my relevance [among my colleagues] would change and require reinvention on my part."

Even though Maggie had taught face-to-face and online courses for several years, she expressed vulnerability with respect to teaching effectiveness. She said she could not confidently describe herself as "always an effective teacher" and suggested that student course evaluations had not been overly positive. She expressed a sense of fear about putting her "lectures and teaching in print" in the online environment, which opened them up to students' scrutiny. When our study group discussed specific courses that each of us believed reflected our identity as instructors, Maggie first linked her identity to the development of an online program of study rather than to a particular course. In essence, Maggie's identity was grounded not in her teaching ability but rather in her expertise and facility with technologies that could be used for teaching online and developing online programs. In fact, Maggie explained that she felt "compelled" to employ new technologies and online strategies in order to maintain her "status" among colleagues as an online educator and expert.

In respect to change, Maggie was the least prohibited by the consequences that change might bear. In fact, it was because of her stance toward the usefulness of technology and the ease in which she used it that Maggie was selected to work with other faculty members on technology and online instruction. Maggie suggested that change was "something I welcome, but like others, find myself awkward with it at the introduction. I do seek out change, but not always for the right reasons." Maggie asserted that her feelings about change were also reflected in her teaching. She noted, "If too much change occurs too quickly, then some good from what is already existing may be lost." She understood that change could make others uncomfortable, however, especially those unprepared to

take the leap with her in respect to technology. She stated, "This is when I am most reflective about change—when I think others may be directly affected by any sudden 'leaps.'"

While some of us struggled with the transition to online instruction, Maggie seemed to thrive in it. For Maggie, online instruction was professionally fulfilling; so much so that she described teaching online as "critical to [her] existence as a professional." Maggie enjoyed changing the technologies she used in her online courses, particularly when new strategies emerged. She described these new technologies as puzzles to be solved. Maggie indicated that trying "the latest and greatest" technology was a way of discovering herself in the context of teaching, once again linking her identity to technology rather than to teaching. Through this study, however, Maggie came to recognize that she must be more present in her online courses as teacher of the content, not simply the purveyor of new technology.

## DISCUSSION

Working through the data, we found a continuum that included Doubting Perfectionist (teacher-centered) to Critical Facilitator (rapport with students) to Accessible Pragmatist (student-centered) to Absent Framer (instructor absence). In our face-to-face lives, we were faculty members in one school but with different roles to fill. Paula had been the program coordinator but had given up the position years earlier to dedicate more of her time to scholarship. Loreen was the current program coordinator and found herself divided in wide-ranging activities that included an abundance of administrative tasks. Anna was the school director but continued to teach, and Maggie was the coordinator of a specialized concentration within the larger program as well as the "go to" person with respect to technology. Our lived experiences were often manifested in each of our virtual lives. Paula created an online environment reflective of her face-to-face courses, which was also an element of Loreen's student rapport concerns where her administrative life seemed to draw her away from her teaching. With Anna, her reason for entering higher education was for teaching, not necessarily administration, thus her concern with student-centeredness, and Maggie's love of technology was replicated in both the online and face-to-face environments.

Through our analysis of the data, we noted that the continuum of our teaching identities replicated our stances toward technology. Paula, the Doubting Perfectionist, was focused on self as teacher, concentrating on her teaching methodology regardless of delivery, which was disrupted by new technology. Loreen, the Critical Facilitator, was more student-centered and often student-led to help build rapport. She wondered about the need for online learning and was concerned that distance education would indeed create a distance between herself and her students. Anna, the Accessible Pragmatist, focused on student opportunity and the way in which technology allowed students access to higher education. Maggie, the Absent Framer, focused largely on creating spaces for student learning without awareness of her role as teacher. Yet how did our positionality in respect to technology affect our teaching identities? Was there a gentle shift or disruption in our identities as educators?

Paula's struggle with technology was manifest in her identity as teacher. Fear of failure was an aspect of Paula's identity that can be observed in many instructors who move to online teaching, regardless of their willingness to make such a move. Many of us are comfortable with our identities as teacher educators or instructors in higher education. Paula reminds us, however, that when asked to change in a way that may risk our identities as teachers, an element of fear may result. Paula stated in one of her writings, "Both in our technology autobiography and in our last paper on effective teaching, I wrote about the angst (Anna's word) I feel about students' evaluations and my reputation within the school as a good teacher." Paula represents a number of faculty members who have felt their teacher identities jeopardized by their ability or inability to utilize new tools to conduct the work with which they have typically felt most comfortable.

In juxtaposition to Paula's fear or angst, Loreen's deep concern about the distance she felt from students, represents the driving force of her teaching, and thus, her identity was jeopardized. Once she gained proficiency with the technology, she returned to her traditional way of teaching, which included changes each term. She had not recognized the use of new technologies as simply one of those changes. Many educators may go through this loss of relationship with students as they attend to developing their knowledge of the

technologies needed to facilitate that relationship online. Loreen is emblematic of faculty who understand they may need to make changes but are concerned about what these changes will do to the status quo of their teaching. Not necessarily concerned about their reputations or external factors outside of those relationships, faculty members like Loreen are more concerned about students' recognition of her value as a teacher and may go through brief periods of identity loss while attempting to adjust to new teaching situations.

Considering Paula and Loreen, we noted that when it came to shifting practices in teaching, they were both momentarily "disrupted." They regained their initial stances in their teaching identities, however, once they became comfortable with the new technologies they were using in their teaching. The same could not be said for Anna and Maggie, who represent more movement in their teaching identities as a result of this study about online teaching and teacher identity.

Anna, whose role as administrator often compromised her time, continued to take interest in providing her students with access, no matter the platform, and thus ultimately enabled her to shift easily into the role of educator in an online environment. Even Anna's greatest change, which was seeing herself as someone different online, proved to be fruitful in building engagement and was productive for her students as was noted by students in course feedback. She evaluated this professional development experience from a practical standpoint: how will online work function in her life as an educator? Will students continue to focus on content and learning, not just simply logging-on and regurgitating educational facts? In respect to her identity, Anna recognized that she had not changed in regards to her acceptance and use of technology, but because her focus was on student access, she changed in respect to who she was in an online environment, which eventually allowed her to reinvent her face-to-face instruction and instructional persona. In essence, her identity shifted. The use of new or different tools establishes openings for some faculty members to shift not only their teaching but also their sense of who they are as teachers, which is what Anna's profile illustrates.

Finally, Maggie, who also shifted in practice, became more attuned to her role as educator rather than simply "framer" of an online course. Because

technology had such a prevalent place in her life in and out of the university, she found that her focus was always on the technology and not on what the technology might facilitate in respect to student learning. There are times when faculty members are reminded that teaching has a mirror image, and that image is found in learners. Through this experience, Maggie learned that the technology in a learning environment should be considered in conjunction with the course learning objectives as well as the student learners themselves. Technology for its own sake would be better suited to activities outside the classroom environment and then instituted in the classroom when appropriate. Thus, through this experience, Maggie's changes produced within her a comfort level for working with students in online and face-to-face environments while also making her more cognizant of her students' needs and facilitation with technology for enhanced learning. Ultimately, her teaching identity shifted.

In comparing profiles, we noted that while each of us felt momentary shifts in our identities due to our engagement in online course delivery, two changed their teaching identities because of this move. Maggie became present, and Anna transferred her online manner to her face-to-face courses. The experience of working within a community of learners reflecting upon their practice had us noting that the use of online technologies initiated a shift in us in ways we had not previously considered or expected.

### SHIFTING IDENTITIES FOR ALL?

Our stances toward technology and online teaching and learning were connected to our identities as teachers. The "doing" of our identities did shift, if only momentarily for Paula and Loreen, as we all adjusted to new practices and ways of being with students. While Maggie shifted from framer to teacher, becoming more aware of and engaged with students in her online courses, Anna shifted from observer of online teaching to practicing new skills across all of her classes by connecting her previous experiences to her newfound life in online instruction. Yet, we all experienced some discomfort with our changing identities in respect to the role technology might play in our lives along with how the process of learning about those technologies would proceed. Comfortable as 'teacher,' we

noted that this identity was disrupted when we became 'students' in order to learn new technologies. We became open to learning new technologies and to utilizing new tools to deliver online coursework. We did this in a variety of manners that included new ways of addressing knowledge through themes rather than through time constraints.

Anna worked in thematic modules defined by course content rather than by time (e.g. daily or weekly reading or assignments). Paula and Loreen preferred to remain within weekly boundaries but attempted new ways of connecting with students. Two of us felt bound to discussion boards, while others did not need to be as present in our classes and thus used other online tools to engage our students. Our identities shifted towards ways that ultimately had us examining who we were as individuals who taught, rather than as teachers going online. Anna mentioned "being kinder and gentler" online. This had to do with her shift from being fully present as the school director to the teacher she felt she was prior to inhabiting that role within the school.

### NO, SHIFTING PRACTICES

Ironically, even as we all acclimated to online teaching, our attitudes toward incorporating technology remained relatively stable. Anna and Maggie, more willing to teach online, were also more open to new technologies to improve their teaching. Loreen's skepticism remained when new technologies were introduced. Anna was always looking ahead to see what might work to make online learning more accessible to students, and Maggie continued to venture into new technologies that she incorporated into her courses. Paula remained dedicated to the first technologies she learned to improve her teaching and coursework. Yet, even as we noted how we did not shift in respect to technology, we found that our work together allowed for Anna's and Maggie's shifts in ways that improved their practices and allowed all of us to think about our teaching manner with students.

Many who read this might suggest that there are "Paulas," "Loreens," "Annas," and "Maggies" in their teaching faculties. In a climate where more universities and colleges are moving courses online, programs in higher education need to shift to help reach a broader audience, but the reality is that some faculty members are not yet suited to on-

line teaching. Others will feel uncomfortable with distance learning and that discomfort can manifest within the relationship between student and instructor. The concern is whether the discomfort is permanent and to determine what factors create that discomfort. Does the discomfort have to do with teacher identity or does it come from learning, in this case, tools and strategies for online delivery? Most of us adjusted rather quickly, which leads to similar questions about what it means to teach. How do online tools allow teaching to occur in respect to that definition of teaching? Finally, Maggie's case brought to light the difference between loving technology for its own sake and using technology for effective teaching and learning.

As we continue to consider our identities as teachers, we find that these questions and concerns need to be addressed by individuals who are contemplating teaching online, as well as by programs who are considering moving to an online environment for pragmatic and economic reasons. These questions do not take into account learners who go online and the outcomes for both students and instructors when some are less suited to distance alternatives. Regardless of our learners, however, we must continue to examine the distance online delivery creates within our concepts of ourselves as teachers, and among ourselves as colleagues, as we address the imperative for moving to virtual worlds.

Helpful to this process is an understanding by universities that faculty members' identities are disrupted while undergoing such a process, and thus they may require time and, when possible, assistance with the process. Without support, individuals who are experiencing discomfort may reject moves to online due to frustration or inexperience rather than any philosophical stance. Bringing in experts who understand how to facilitate the development of online teachers would be beneficial to the organization as well as its faculty. Technology support for course development and mentoring is essential for smooth transitions to online teaching and learning processes. Thus, questions for further study might address not only best practices for teaching online but best dispositions for teaching online, types of courses best suited to online delivery, and the facilitation process for programs, faculty, and students as they transition to an online environment. In addition, revisiting the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989) as it relates to teacher identity would

be of interest to those interested in examining the correlation between one's affective response to technology and how he or she might relate to changes in teaching identities or manners.

## CONCLUSION

Making sense of our identities as literacy educators is important because identity shapes the ways in which we make sense of the world and our experiences in it. As we noted earlier, Vygotsky (1978) argued that as humans interact with one another socially they develop an awareness of self and internalize certain beliefs about themselves. In this sense, identity and selfhood are inextricably linked. Making sense of our identities is also important because our sense of identity and our selfhood influences how we interact with and respond to the students in our classes, as well as how we teach and learn together with them. Moreover, those interactions with students can shape students' identities as learners and teachers. Indeed, all of us can come to understand ourselves in particular ways because of our engagement with literacy learning and instruction (see McCarthy & Moje, 2002). As part of this community of practice, through discussion and reflection, we all engaged not only in the transition of our classroom content and delivery but of our identities. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) suggested that including the construction of our identities through such communities is an important means to addressing issues of change and teaching.

In these reflective case studies, we have documented various identity shifts each of us experienced as we learned to teach our respective courses in an online format. Those shifts were a result of teaching within an unfamiliar context and with new tools that challenged some of our beliefs about ourselves as educators, beliefs grounded in previous face-to-face teaching experiences, as well as our personal, sociocultural experiences. As a result of that process, we learned that it is advisable and worthwhile to challenge our sense of identity, question ourselves as teachers and learners, and reconceptualize what it means to be an educator—regardless of, or perhaps in light of, instructional delivery. We were reminded that identity is complex and dynamic, situated and constructed, “a consequence of interaction between people, institutions, and practices” (Sarup, 1998, p. 11). Our identities were hybrid and fluid as we moved from one teach-

ing space to another and as we used the new literacies and new discourses of online instruction. In a very real sense, these new literacies and new discourses became mediators of particular teaching identities in particular instructional spaces (see Luke & Luke, 1999).

Finally, we believe that the challenges to and changes in our identities described here are at the heart of literacy learning and instruction. Learning to teach online forced us to revisit what it means to be a novice learner. We suspect that as our students engage in our courses as online learners, they may likely face similar challenges to and changes in their teaching identities, which motivates us to strengthen our commitment to providing students with the most supportive learning environments possible. In the end, our identities matter to who we are and who we are becoming, both within our virtual classrooms and beyond.

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