LITERATURE REVIEW: CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN POST-SECONDARY ONLINE EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article seeks to provide a review of research literature published between 2008 and 2014 that discusses conflicts arising within the online education process, and their resolution within the online context. The goal of this article is to establish a current overview of related literature that can become the foundation of future studies in this field. An online search produced 48 references that were considered relevant to the purpose of this review. After a brief introduction of the topic, main definitions are provided. A section outlining the method for the development of the review follows including discussions of delimitations, the search, and reference descriptions. More background information is provided through a brief history of online education in the U.S. and an overview of the theories used in current studies in the field. The main body of the article describes common themes and emphases of online education conflict resolution that resulted from the literature analysis. After the uniqueness of online education conflict is established, strategies of virtual conflict resolution are described. Other common themes include foci on the instructor, the learner, and dynamics social interaction. The article closes with a categorized summary of suggested future research found in the literature.

Without a doubt, online education is here to stay. It fits well with modern lifestyles, it is appealing to university administrators because of its cost-efficiency, and it offers access to education for students who live far form institutions of higher learning. (Perry & Pilati, 2011, p. 99). The development of the Internet gave also rise to the phenomenon and practice of online dispute resolution (Braeutigam, 2006). The ongoing discussion surrounding online education has often shown that there are unique conflict situations arising out of the new education paradigm (Hailey, Grant-Davie, & Hult, 2001). This article seeks to provide a review of research literature published between 2008 and 2014 that discusses conflicts arising within the online education process, and their resolution within the online context.

Definitions

Chou and Hsu (2009) provided the clearest definition of online education related conflict: "Conflict is an awareness on the part of the parties involved of discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or irreconcilable desires" (p. 6). The importance of this definition lies in the emphasis on the perception of the parties that constitutes the essence of the conflict. A positive perception can lead to learning, while a negative perception can cause a disruption of the learning community. In an online education setting conflict can be relational, process based, or task related. Relationship conflict includes tension, friction, and ill feelings stemming from interpersonal incompatibilities, while task and process conflicts are related to the perception of tasks and their completion within a group. Conflict resolution generally refers to how people in organizations deal with social conflict. Social conflict consists of perceived or real differences of beliefs, values, or interests (Barsky, 2007).

I. Methods

Delimitations

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of research publications related to online education conflict resolution in post-secondary programs. The goal is to provide a literary research basis upon which future studies can be built. The study will mainly include peer-reviewed articles that were publicized after January, 2008. It further only includes publications that specifically focus on types of conflict unique to the online education environment, and conflict situations primarily resolved over a distance and not through face-to-face interaction. This means that removed from the review were any themes of curriculum integrated conflict resolution or conflict management designs, conflicts related to the development and implementation of online education programs, as well as conflicts between university administration and faculty related to online education. Further, any themes of crisis situations, defined as "a perception or experiencing of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds the person's current resources and coping mechanisms" (James & Gilliland, 2005, p. 3), have been excluded.

Search

This review includes peer-reviewed articles and book chapters that reference conflict resolution in online education. To find relevant references, several online database searches were conducted, abstracts were analyzed for relevance, and documents were searched for key words. The search included databases such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Academic Research Complete. Keywords for the Boolean phrase search were "online education AND conflict resolution", and resulted in 17 relevant references. The same keywords were applied to a Google scholar alert to ensure the inclusion of the latest relevant publications. This search added six sources. A title and keyword search of Rogers' (2009) *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning*, added another 15 articles. A search of the first 1000 results, sorted by relevance, of a ProQuest Dissertation search with key words "Online Education", "Higher Education", and "Conflict" resulted in eight relevant sources. Twenty-six articles were found when searching for "conflict" in scholarly journals including the Journal of Conflict Resolution, the

Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, the American Journal of Distance Education, and the Journal of Distance Education Technologies.

Description of References

The search resulted in 48 references that were considered relevant to the topic at hand. They include journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, and conference papers. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency distribution of references by year. A categorization of the references by genre is presented in Table 1. Even though the extent of this search cannot claim comprehensiveness, the researcher is confident that the identified themes reached good levels of data saturation.

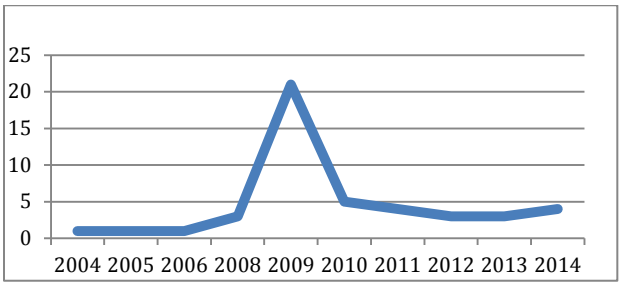

Figure 1. Frequency of References by Year

Table 1.
Genres of References

Review	Perry & Pilati (2011)	Blake & Scanlon (2014)						
Methodological	Braeutigam (2006)	Hailey., Grant-Davie, & Hult (2001)	Hornsby & Maki (2008)	Mintu-Wimsatt, Kernek, & Lozada (2010)	Susan 2009	Teräs, Teräs, Leppisaari, & Herrington (2014)	Dumais, Rizzuto, Cleary, & Dowden (2013)	
Mixed Methods	Koh & Hill (2009)	Ritke-Jones & Merys (2010)						
Qualitative Study	Castro-Figueroa (2009) Esarco (2009)	Lawlor (2013)	Koch, Leidner, & Gonzalez (2013)	Richter, Williams, Magny, & Luechtefeld (2011)	Rose, E. (2014).	Schallert, Chiang, Park, Jordan, Lee, & Cheng (2009)	Sugarman (2011) Xiong (2009)	York & Richardson (2012)
Quantitative Study	Al-Harthi (2010)	Chou & Hsu (2009)	Joyce (2012)	Lapidot-Lefler & Barak (2012)	Logsdon (2008)	Vance (2010)	Wang, Novak, & Pacino (2009)	Young & Bruce(2011)
Theoretical	Brannagan & Oriol (2014)	Dewan & Dewan (2010)	Donnelly & Portimojärvi (2009)	Enger (2009)	Frank & Toland (2009)	Guilbaud & Jerome-D'Emilia(2008)	Jones (2009) Nelson (2009)	Kukulska-Hulme (2009)
	Petska & Berge (2009)	Ragan (2009)	Rogers & Wang (2009)	Salmon (2009)	Stodel, Farres, & MacDonald (2009)	Suler (2004) Thomson (2009)	Wang (2009)	Xie, Miller, & Allison (2013)

II. Background

History of Online Education

Online education in the U.S. has its roots in correspondence courses that were established in late 19th century, and with William Rainey Harper (1856-1906), first president of the University of Illinois, correspondence education was introduced to higher education in form of extension services (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). During the twentieth century, educational television led to web-based learning with its beginnings in the mid 1990s. By 2008 almost 4 million post secondary students were enrolled in online courses in the U.S., which constituted about 25% of the student population (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Today web-delivered courses are a major element of higher education. In recent years advances in technology and the initiative of international universities have led to the development of massive open online courses (MOOCs). These are virtual classrooms that are populated by thousands of students from all over the world. The courses are free of charge, usually automated, and use computer graded assessments. Current examples of MOOC providers include EdX, Cousera, FutureLearn, Udemy, and Udacity (Blake &

Scanlon, 2014; Teräs, Teräs, Leppisaari, & Herrington, 2014).

Theories of Online Education Studies

Karatas, Ozcan, Polat, and Yilmaz (2014), in their research review of trends in online education, identified several theories that have appeared in studies on Internet based higher education. From 2007 to 2012 researchers most frequently applied transactional distance theory (Moore, 1993) and activity theory (Leont'ev, 1978). Other theories included the technology acceptance model (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989), cognitive load theory (Miller, 1956; Sweller, 1988), item response theory (Baker, 2001), the community of inquiry model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999), diffusion of innovation theory (E. M. Rogers, 1995), the expectation-confirmation model (Oliver, 1977), flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977).

III. Online Education Conflict Resolution

The analysis of the literature on online education conflict resolution led to the identification of common themes and emphases. The articles focused on issues including the uniqueness of online education conflict, virtual conflict management, the instructor and the learner, desired conflict, and issues related to social interaction.

Uniqueness of Online Education and Conflict

The online environment of distance education has challenged educators, students, and institutions to rethink what it means to educate and learn (Guilbaud & Jerome-D'Emilia, 2008). The roles of student and instructor are easier and more often switched when both sides take turns in facilitating group learning events (Xie, Miller, & Allison, 2013). This new mode of education births new and unique forms of conflict that cannot be resolved with conventional methods (Hailey et al., 2001). The very nature of online education makes the classes unpredictable and potentially explosive (Hailey et al., 2001). Virtual learning environments do not differ from face-to-face environments as much in their essence, but in the intensity of focus required for certain aspects of it (Thomson, 2009). The literature emphasizes communication and netiquette, as well as disinhibition and flaming as aspects that need special consideration in online learning. Student to student conflict can erupt without obvious reasons (Hailey et al., 2001). Causes for conflict in these situations mirror those from face-to-face classrooms, but a new layer of volatility is added. Instructor to student conflict often erupts over grading issues, inappropriate conduct by the student, or cases of academic dishonesty. Others identified collaborative learning activities as a source of conflict (Young & Bruce, 2011). A final dynamic of conflict exists between the individual and the actual process of online education. When education is placed in an online environment, the source, prevention, intervention, and resolution of conflict primarily happen online. It is in a very real sense a virtual conflict (Logsdon, 2008).

Virtual Conflict Management

Virtual conflict management, sometimes also referred to as online dispute resolution, refers to online opportunities of negotiation, mediation, and arbitration (Braeutigam, 2006). In online education environments, all conflicts are virtual and occur either between individuals, student-to-student (Logsdon, 2008) or student-to-instructor (Hailey et al., 2001), or within group settings. The literature presented several strategies to manage or resolve online conflict.

Negotiation, which "refers to any manner in which two or more parties interact with each other to deal with a conflict situation" (Barsky, 2007, p. 5), has elsewhere been applied to virtual conflict management (Petska & Berge, 2009). Richter, Williams, Magny, and Luechtefeld (2011) investigated how emotive language and emoticons affect online negotiations. They found that the medium itself, or the supposed ambiguity of it, are not a great obstacles to communication if emotive language is encouraged. But they also acknowledged the danger of flaming. Mediation, defined as "assisted negotiation" (Barsky, 2007, p. 118), in the online environment relies on the factors of trust in the facilitator, the process, and the virtual environment meeting the needs of the group to interact in a holistic fashion (Koh & Hill, 2009).

Thomson (2009) developed a team conflict resolution method that relies on Tuckman's (1965) four-stage model of team development, that also takes advantage of the written discussion documents for conflict assessment and evaluation that are produced by virtue of online communications. Xie et al. (2013) distinguished between conflict management approaches that rely on internal normalization, and those that require external intervention. Internal normalization is based on netiquette and learner communication competencies. Other normalization strategies include ignoring harsh comments, direct apology, clarifying statements, and refocusing on the goals of the course. When conflict cannot be resolved within the community, external intervention becomes necessary. In those cases the success of conflict resolution relies on the competencies of the instructor.

Another prevention strategy emerges from an investigation of effective use of Web 2.0 communication tools for learning in the higher education context

(Susan, 2009). This discussion will focus on relevant items found in Susan's study that can help instructors prevent or resolve communication conflict (see Table 2). The communication tools include email, asynchronous conferencing, synchronous conferencing, Wikis, and blogs. For each tool the applicable characteristics include (a) etiquette or ground rules for use; (b) potential demotivation through lack of response; (c) level of support for individual identity in communication; (d) level of power imbalance between designer and consumer; (e) opportunities for influencing the leaner's profile; (f) level of fear of exposure; and (g) level of conflict with personal learning approach and expectations.

Table 2
Conflict Resolution Value of Communication Tools (Susan, 2009)

	Email	**Asynch. Cof.**	**Synch. Conf.**	**Wiki**	**Blog**
Etiquette	learned outside	modeled by instructor	instant messaging	non-existent	examples of other blogs
Demotivation	possible	Yes, if rules are broken	Yes, but more control	Responses not expected	Yes, but sense of publishing
Identity	limited to writing style	limited but possible	Considerable	High	High
Power	n/a	High, when task focused.	Less	Equality	High
Influence	high	Higher with increased confidence	Less	High	High
Fear	less	High in early stages	Less	Less, when familiar with process	High in early stages
Conflict	less	high, slow resolution	high, but quick resolution	high, but easy resolution	high, but less damaging

The Instructor

The various roles the instructor takes on during conflict situations include negotiator, advocate, expert and consultant, evaluator, facilitator, mediator, healer, arbitrator, administrator, buffer, and penalizer (Barsky, 2007). In conflict situations instructors have to be mindful of their behavior and how they present themselves, their cognitive processes, and their affections and evoked feelings. Throughout the conflict resolution process the instructor's personal awareness, skills, values, practice, and the underlying theoretical framework all contribute to the success or failure of the intervention (Barsky, 2007).

As an e-moderator, the instructor should exhibit creativity and ability to handle conflict constructively (Salmon, 2009). As a mediator, the instructor should gain rapport and build trust needed to become an effective agent of reconciliation through thoughtful comments on the participant's contributions, increased use of summative statements, continuous reminders to apply constructive reframing, balancing the timing issue between deliberation and creating a sense of immediacy, and keeping in mind that outbursts on any side are much more unpredictable and harder to control (Raines, 2005). As a facilitator, the instructor should remove, through intervention, learning-obstacles due to conflict by discouraging personal criticism (Kukulska-Hulme, 2009, p. 1054). Esarco (2009) investigated the effectiveness of charters created by facilitators to guide and manage group assignments, finding that group charters increase the ability of resolving conflict within the group.

As a leader, the instructor should manage the relationships within the class, guide them to achieve the goals, and communicate effectively. This includes foreseeing problems and potential delays (Petska & Berge, 2009). As a conflict manager, the instructor should directly address relevant formal guidelines through feedback (Thomson, 2009), address any conflict openly and honestly (Nelson, 2009), and mainly use institutionally supported communication systems (Ragan, 2009). Hailey et al. (2001) suggest that early personal contact can both prevent and resolve conflict. Brannagan and Oriol (2014) suggested making conflict resolution part of the training of adjunct online faculty. Others have developed a framework that helps the instructor to increase the quality of online communication in the context of higher education through clear assignment of role definitions, modeling of expected behavior, variation of course activities, and application of community building elements (York & Richardson, 2012).

The Learner

The learner has a vital role in the context of online education conflict. The literature identified several

themes relating to this issue including the learners' perception, attitude, behavior, competency, gender, devotion, dependency, role understanding, and cultural background. The student's cultural background will receive greater focus, since it was discussed most frequently in the context of online conflict.

Logsdon (2008) investigated student perceptions of the factors leading to conflict among students in online courses, finding that the main sources of conflict lie in student attitude and behavior. The learners' competency as communicators and leaders in virtual contexts have a direct impact on the frequency and management of conflict (Petska & Berge, 2009). Others found meaningful connections between online conflict and gender (Joyce, 2012; Lawlor, 2013; M. Wang, Novak, & Pacino, 2009). Differences in the level of devotion towards the goals of a course, and differing levels of desire to complete work causes conflict in collaborative learning situations (X. Wang, 2009). Others found that conflict and dependency in teacher-student relationships are related to unfavorable outcomes such as negative attitude, avoidance, and hostile aggression (Dewan & Dewan, 2010). Dumais, Rizzuto, Cleary, and Dowden (2013) identified role conflict of adult online learners as a contributor to online conflict situations.

Conflict and Culture

In the context of online education conflict, the issues of culture were generally separated into the categories of ethnic or national culture, and learning culture. The concept of conflict has different meanings in different national cultures (P. C. Rogers & Wang, 2009). Important differences in this regard include cultural norms about power distance, collectivism versus individualism, and uncertainty avoidance (Barsky, 2007). Power distance refers to cultural expectations concerning appropriate behaviors when interacting with those in positions of higher authority. The aspect of collectivism versus individualism describes how much value a culture places on individual or group needs, and how a culture deals with ambiguity falls under the aspect of uncertainty avoidance (Barsky, 2007). Xiong (2009) investigated cultural implications for online-mediated collaborative learning events by studying Chinese students at U.S. university business programs. He found that the students' cultural background had significant influence on their conflict management due to their desire to preserve harmony during conflict situations. Lauzon (in Frank & Toland, 2009) identified dissonance with a dominant culture in a class as the main source of culture related conflict in online learning settings. Dominant cultures and resulting cultural gaps come from the often very homogenous environment at university campuses (Enger, 2009). Another source of culture-based conflict is found in student attitudes resulting from their cultural backgrounds (M. Wang et al., 2009).

Conflict based on learning culture emerges as different learners participate and collaborate in the same online class. "Learning culture is defined as a set of shared beliefs, values and attitudes favorable to learning" (Teräs et al., 2014, p. 199), broadly categorized as Eastern and Western, or collective and competitive. Cultural differences based expectations towards learning between students and faculty are a potential source for conflict in online learning environments (Al-Harthi, 2010). There were two approaches to handle learning culture, one to try and accommodate diverse cultures as good as possible, and the other to raise awareness of cultural issues.

In overcoming learning culture conflict in distance education, some suggest that the system must be brought closer to the student and the student must be brought closer to the system. This happens through policy, socialization, and leadership interventions (Koch, Leidner, & Gonzalez, 2013). Others lean towards the approach to appropriate the system to the student. Xie et al. (2013) examined authentic online learning through a case study and developed a model of social conflict evolution. This model includes five phases through which a conflict evolves, and the foundational step is the formation of learning community culture. Depending on the differences of individual learning cultures and the community culture, subsequent communication and interaction can lead to social conflict. The dynamics of online education require of the student a much higher level of self-determination, and the redefinition of the roles of student and instructor can cause emotional stress (Xie et al, 2013).

Intentional Conflict

Conflict by itself is neither good nor bad. It can become an opportunity for constructive change (Barsky, 2007). As with any community, unresolved conflict is also a defining aspect of asynchronous online adult learning communities (Sugarman, 2011). A great deal has been written on the nature of desired or encouraged conflict in online education, namely cognitive conflict. Some assignments are designed to encourage learning through creating cognitive conflict (Hornsby & Maki, 2008; Stodel, Farres, & MacDonald, 2009). Others point out the benefits of the generation of alternatives, raising of creativity, and beneficial competition that come from maintaining and encouraging healthy conflict in online learning environments (Jones, 2009). Mintu-Wimsatt, Kernek, and Lozada (2010) made the argument that too much emphasis on being nice can hinder learning,

because students might refrain from expressing alternative opinions.

Social Interaction

Communication and Netiquette

Conflict management is one of the most common areas in virtual learning environments that needs special attention even before the instruction is delivered, and that must be continued during the first tasks of the course (Thomson, 2009). Electronic communication media increase the likelihood for conflict since it is difficult to express emotions, facial and body cues, or non-verbal elements through text (Donnelly & Portimojärvi, 2009). This can lead to communication difficulties, misunderstandings of requirements and goals, and to a decline of sense of community (Koh & Hill, 2009), all of which are potential sources of conflict. Recently, even the open source MOOCs increasingly begin to rely on standardized online code of conducts to manage the online presence of students, to avoid unnecessary conflict, and to outline constructive approaches to conflict resolution and the handling of disagreement (Blake & Scanlon, 2014).

Netiquette is the art of niceness in online communication settings (Xie, et. al, 2013). It includes acceptable ways of polite, tolerant, respectful, and harmonic interaction in online classes. If netiquette is well observed by students, online learning increases in quality because it encourages a sense of membership and community, it constrains social conflict, and it enhances relationships in the class (Schallert et al., 2009). However, netiquette must go together with teaching guidelines to improve the quality of online group discussions (Mintu-Wimsatt et al., 2010).

Disinhibition, Flaming, and Cyber-Harassment

Online disinhibition refers to the phenomenon when people exhibit a different behavior using Internet media than they usually would in face-to-face interactions (Xie et al., 2013). In other words, people act more unrestraint in online environments than otherwise (Rose, 2014). Contributing factors to this inhibition effect are, among others, invisibility, asynchronicity, minimization of authority, and dissociative imagination (Suler, 2004). Disinhibition can have positive, or "benign", effects in that an otherwise shy student might engage more readily in collaborative learning activities (Rose, 2014). Ritke-Jones and Merys (2010) observed the benign reality of online disinhibition:

> The safety that the online environment affords, created by the anonymity and distance of participants, may make an online space perfect for transformative learning events. Using the space as a sort of cushion, learners in online groups, both male and female, may feel safer to assert their voices during a conflict and at the same time they both may find that the online space allows them to be more yielding, allowing them to develop greater empathy for one another (p. 694).

On the other hand, disinhibition is often the cause for social conflict in online settings. In such cases disinhibition is considered "toxic", and is often manifested in aggressive, rude, and angry behaviors, harsh criticisms, and even threats that would not have occurred in residential settings (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012; Rose, 2014). In contrast, Rose (2014) also observed a reverse effect, in that the knowledge or expectation that others will communicate with less restraint actually causes some students to be excessively nice.

Flaming can be defined as, "the times when, due to distance and the feeling of safety, the communication can become excessively negative" (Richter et al., 2011, p. 2). Others have also identified online classrooms as more volatile to eruption of destructive and undisciplined behavior than residential classrooms (Hailey et al., 2001). Cyber-bullying among adults it is referred to as cyber-harassment. Vance (2010) described the extend and nature of cyber-harassment experienced by students and teachers and found that about 40 percent of faculty and a little over ten percent of students suffered from it. The highest rates of experiencing cyber-harassment were found among older faculty members.

IV. Future Studies

This section contains suggestions for future research from the literature in the areas of social interaction, culture, virtual groups, the role of the instructor, and course design. Excluded from this section are all suggestions that asked for a repetition or modification of the original study, or that did not pertain directly or indirectly to conflict resolution in online settings. Many publications did not include suggestions for future research.

Future studies on aspects of social interaction should consider, (a) the adverse effects of social interaction in online learning such as aggression, cognitive conflict, and relational conflict, while placing special emphasis on causes for non-response and the dynamics of conflict evolution (Xie et al., 2013); (b) the important characteristics of cyber-harassment in online environments with special focus on variables of age and faculty status (Vance, 2010); (c) the non-traditional students and their social presence in asynchronous settings using qualitative approaches to research (Sugarman, 2011); (d) the development of politeness in students as they begin to form relationships, and the instructor's use of politeness (Schallert et al., 2009),

Table 3
Samples for Netiquette Rules (Mintu-Wimsatt et al., 2010)

- Do not dominate any discussion
- Give other students the opportunity to join in the discussion
- Do not use offensive language. Present ideas appropriately
- Be cautious in using Internet language. For example, do not capitalize all letters since this suggests shouting
- Popular emoticons such as J or L can be helpful to convey your tone but do not overdo or overuse them
- Avoid using vernacular and/or slang language. This could possibly lead to misinterpretation
- Never make fun of someone's ability to read or write
- Keep an "open-mind" and be willing to express even your minority opinion. Minority opinions have to be respected
- Think and edit before you push the "Send" button
- Using humor is acceptable but be careful that it is not misinterpreted. For example, are you being humorous or sarcastic?

(e) the written communication with special focus on profanity, punctuation, capitalization, and emotive language, and the development a language diagnostic tool (Richter et al., 2011); (f) the online disinhibition effect with special emphasis on descriptions of online social settings, the absence of eye-contact in communication, and the role of gender (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012); and (g) the effect of inhibition and disinhibition on learning and relationships (Rose, 2014).

Future studies on the cultural impact on online conflict should consider, (a) to further clarify individual differences of particular cultures in relation to the predominant Caucasian culture (Joyce, 2012); (b) to measure variables of uncertainty avoidance and power distance, and to determine their effect on learner self-regulation (Al-Harthi, 2010); and (c) to describe how the cultural differences impact the instructor-student interaction, especially when the student resides in a different country (Xiong, 2009).

Future studies on virtual groups should consider; (a) the impact of network structures on conflict as both cause and consequence; (b) the effect of task properties on communication in virtual environments (Chou & Hsu, 2009); (c) the continued development of models and the investigation of their effectiveness towards collaborative learning (Koh & Hill, 2009); and (d) the negative or positive impact on hostility that comes from striving for social presence in online classes (Rose, 2014).

Future studies on the role of the instructor should consider; (a) the motivation, personality, and styles of excellent teachers, and how they transitions from face-to-face instruction into the online world (Dewan & Dewan, 2010); and (b) the preparation of instructors to create community in online classes (Young & Bruce, 2011).

Future studies on course design should consider, (a) the composition of the design team; (b) the qualification prerequisites of prospective participants; (c) a personality assessment of participants (Castro-Figueroa, 2009); and (d) the impact of class format on student-to-student conflict with special emphasis on the role of group work (Logsdon, 2008).

V. Conclusion

The body of literature relating to online education conflict resolution is relatively slim in comparison to the rapid growth of the field of online education (Perry & Pilati, 2011). It has been noted elsewhere that the study of online education still lacks fully developed theoretical structures and much scholarly focus has been devoted to the establishment of online programs (Guilbaud & Jerome-D'Emilia, 2008), and the transition of faculty from residential formats to internet based instruction (Yang, Cho, Mathew, & Worth, 2011). The uniqueness of the virtual conflict resulting from the new paradigm demands a greater effort in theoretical and empirical work.

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