Preface

With the continuing growth of asynchronous online learning environments in higher education, instructors, instructional designers, program developers and students have created a set of structures and practices for these new virtual spaces. Currently, online learning has greater legitimacy than during the period following its broad adoption. As a result, the conversation among researchers, practitioners and designers has moved from a defensive posture, to a tool-based conversation (LMS selection for example) to identifying promising instructional practices. Attention has evolved from issues around content curation and creation to issues around immediacy. One might call this the interactive turn. The interactive turn is characterized by a focus on the human components of teaching and learning in asynchronous spaces populated by simulacra – video and audio recordings, icons and avatars.

In many ways, interaction in online learning environments mirrors the structures of interaction in traditional classrooms: teacher-centered, information based and assessment driven. Certainly these are all reasonable methods of interaction but they discount a number of inevitable and often inadvertent characteristics of in-person communication. These include the emergent quality of discussions that often lead to a meaning-making in an inquiry-based community. In other words, instructors and students, when in each other’s presence, can collaboratively determine why they think they know what they think they know. It is possible to recreate this emergent quality in online learning environments, but ironically, the more highly planned, developed and content-laden an online course is, the less space remains for students to exert their influence on the direction learning will take. An un-designed remainder, some space that allows for students to have agency, must somehow be designed.

Students often learn from the physical presence of their instructor – her comportment, facial expressions and movement through physical space. This important aspect, the modelling function, provides students with a real-time embodiment of how an academic thinks, what she thinks about and, perhaps most importantly, what this thinking looks like in action. Often in online environments, modelling takes place through recordings and comments in discussions forums. In fact, it can be argued that the mediated quality of asynchronous learning provides instructors and learners with more time to reflect upon their self-presentation and thus, to be more deliberate.

The following collection, Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments, is especially relevant as the environment of teaching and learning is rapidly evolving. With the ubiquity of communication technology and its attendant ease of use, face-to-face interactions in the traditional classroom are becoming augmented, and in some cases supplanted, by asynchronous interaction. These changes can be alarming in the sense that they are driven by technological and cultural evolution (and in some cases cost), rather than emerging from instructional best practices identified by educators. This is not to suggest that a retrenchment is in order and that they only truly valuable interactions (for instructional
purposes) take place face-to-face in real time. But, best practices for providing students with the sense that their teacher is a “real person” who is invested in the development remains an essential feature. The challenge for educators is to identify best practices to accomplish this.

The target audiences for this book are educators, researchers, instructional designers and learners who are interested in the development of effective, interactive and interpersonal asynchronous online learning environments. Specifically, the audience includes: course designers for online programs in higher education, faculty who teach online, higher education administrators for online programs (deans and directors), educational and instructional technologists, educational media specialists, educational software designers, higher-education researchers, undergraduate and graduate schools of education, teacher preparation programs and clinical field supervisors of teachers. The following brief descriptions of each chapter provide a preview of the text.

Building Teaching Presence in Online Classes
Oliver Dreon

Teaching online presents a challenge to instructors who have never learned online. This chapter digs deeply into how instructors new to the online environment can employ recommended strategies to enhance their presence. The author also examines a variety of technologies to support his effort and concludes with a valuable discussion of design principles that support teacher presence.

Instructor Immediacy and Authenticity
Caroline M. Crawford

Instructor beliefs and behaviors as a method of examining how to support student success through immediacy is an innovative and exciting way to examine immediacy. Cognitive vulnerability is a novel and essential feature of this chapter which, rather than focusing on technology, investigates the human components of teaching and learning.

Emphasizing Instructor Presence in Digital Learning Environments
Rachael O. Afolabi

This chapter explores online teacher presence from the perspective of both instructional designer and instructor. Instructor presence requires a commitment of time and resources of both designers – how can presence be built into the course, what tools can facilitate it? – and instructors – what is an appropriate amount of interaction? These are central questions in online learning environments that this chapter explores with an eye on student learning outcomes.

“I’m Here for You”: Instructor Presence Online
Kelly R. Elander

Zeroing in on one instructor’s practices, this chapter examines the variety of ways instructor presence is accomplished as well as the many opportunities for creating immediacy are available through standard instructional tasks that are regularly performed. The author suggest seven techniques to enhance instructor presence which range from scheduling regular online appearances to providing special periods
of instructor access. Strategies to simulate presence through pre-recorded audio and video content are also described.

*Interactivity and Immediacy in Online Academic Programs*
Neal Shambaugh

While interactivity and immediacy are increasingly perceived as integral components of online learning, they are often added on while the class is in progress and mediated through standard communication tools. This chapter describes how interactivity should be the focus of the design phase of instruction and includes best practices for building in immediacy. The chapter concludes with recommendations for a variety of online academic programs.

*The Human Element*
Melanie Hibbert, Kristine Rodriguez Kerr, Adrienne A. Garber, Matthea Marquart

Instructional videos are emerging as common components of online courses. This chapter examines the effectiveness of instructional videos as opportunities for immediacy using a specific set of evaluative criteria. The authors unpack the concept of immediacy and make essential recommendations for instructors.

*Leveraging Teaching Presence in Online Courses*
Kun Huang, Sang Joon Lee, Ashley Dugan

The authors employ the community of inquiry framework as a way to understand the social, cognitive and teaching presences of instructors in online environments. The chapter focuses on instructional design and organization and directed facilitation. The chapter also provides essential and specific strategies and examples for leveraging teacher presence in online courses. The chapter concludes with the student perspective of the recommended strategies.

*Synchronous and Asynchronous Tools Optimizing Online Learning in the English-Speaking Caribbean*
Paulette Stewart

The analysis of the effectiveness of asynchronous and synchronous tools used in the online education program at The University of the West Indies Open Campus that forms the center of this study provides a needed focus on the learning styles and needs of adult learners, who are self-directed, self-motivated and goal-oriented. Also, so-called non-traditional students are an increasing majority in higher education and in online learning environments. The study traces the movement from asynchronous communication and collaboration tools to synchronous tools and documents the effects of this evolution on instructional practices, student engagement and student learning outcomes.

*Facebook Mediated Learning Environments in Pakistan*
Tazeen Hussain
Preface

Exploring teacher immediacy in online learning environments by focusing on the use of social media is an interesting way to examine how interaction can be managed absent a learning management system. The study is based on teaching practice in Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and Department of Visual Studies, University of Karachi. The author focuses on how immediacy can be harnessed to improve learning outcomes. The chapter highlights how technological innovation and changes in social interaction can be integrated into teaching and learning with positive results.

Instructional Strategies for Synchronous Components of Online Courses
Matthea Marquart, Michael Fleming, Sam A. Rosenthal, Melanie Hibbert

The authors provide a practical toolkit of strategies and best practices for increasing immediacy and interactivity through the use of synchronous online webinars. The chapter is both a valuable examination and description of the broader implementation model and technology support system that makes these webinars effective.

Understanding Strategies of Teacher-Student Interaction
Tarryn L. Kille

A descriptive case study, this chapter explores strategies intended to reduce psychological distance in the online environment. Employing a theoretical approach, the author investigates formative feedback practices, student self-assessment tools and the use of rubrics. The chapter identifies best practices for enhancing interaction, improving the student experience and positively affecting student learning.

Using Audio and Video Feedback to Increase Instructor Presence in Asynchronous Online Courses
Larisa Olesova, Jered Borup

As audio and video have emerged as common tools in the development of instructor presence online, this chapter provides a needed examination of effective uses of this strategy. The authors share both benefits and limitations of audio and video and provide valuable source of solutions, recommendations and effective practices for increasing instructor presence.

Macromedia Director-MX Lessons Development (MAD-LED) Model:
The Immediacy of Online-Distance Teaching-Learning in Multimedia and Real-Time Environments
Jameson Mbale, Manish Wadhwa

This chapter focuses on a specific instructional design tool that focuses on enhancing online learning through the use of video, audio, graphics and animation in a synchronous environment. The chapter examines how student motivation is heightened through the use of these interactive elements and how learning outcomes are improved as a result.

Students’ Perceptions of the Online Instructors’ Roles in a Massive Open Online Course
Hengtao Tang, Shuyan Wang, Yingxiao Qian, Kyle Peck
The rise and subsequent sinking back to earth of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) has resulted in a reassessment of the effectiveness of this instructional modality. While the access promise of MOOC’s is still being realized, the instructional effectiveness and acquired student competencies are still in question – resulting in a clear need to identify effective instructional practices in this environment.

This chapter provides a needed, practical and insightful look at students’ perceptions of the instructor role and how the humanization of that role impacts the student learning experience.

An Entertaining Game-Like Learning Environment in a Virtual World for Education
Hsiao-Cheng (Sandrine) Han, Junsong Zhang, Nasim Peikazadi, Ge Shi, Annie Hung, Colette P. L. Doan, Sandra Filippelli

This chapter explores the possibilities, benefits, and difficulties of developing game-like virtual environments for education as a way to describe instructor presence form a different perspective. The chapter concludes with examples of such environments and suggestions for how to create game-like experiences for students.

Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments is a valuable toolkit for instructional designers, media specialists and subject matter experts to create and sustain effective online learning environments, essentially rescuing this area from early for-profit endeavors which have done some harm to the perceived legitimacy of online education at the University level. The collection identifies strategies for greater personalization of online learning environments with an eye on greater student success and supports the developers of online programs in the creation of context and culture specific online offerings so that online offerings do not become generic and technology-driven but retain their specific culture and character (so that courses offered online and University A differ from courses offered online at University B).

This volume is essential reading because online learning still has a perceived lack of legitimacy, is imperiled by the movement towards looking at education as simply another form of “content,” a perspective that which swallowed journalism, book publishing and music. This authors locate online learning in pedagogy rather than in technology. Technology is certainly a central feature but technologies evolve rapidly – foundational principles (best practices) for teaching and learning in online environments with a specific focus on instructor immediacy and presence – are essential.