Online Facilitation and Motivation in Online MBA Courses

Kyong-Jee Kim
Xiaojing Liu
Seung-hee Lee
Curtis J. Bonk
Richard J. Magjuka
Shijuan Liu
Mengyu Zhai
Bude Su
Alyssa Wise
Min Shi
Indiana University

Introduction

Online teaching and learning is making a significant impact on the fabric of higher education. In particular, online MBA programs have seen a rapid rise in student enrollments in recent years while the student enrollments in traditional in-residence MBA programs are in decline (Hayward, 2004; Lorenzo, 2004). This appears to be due, in part, to the convenience and flexibility of the delivery of online education, which enable adults with full-time jobs to attend classes without having to leave their current jobs (Mangan, 2001). Accordingly, many institutions of higher education are offering online programs to serve the growing learner population. Despite such an increase in the popularity of online education, there has been a concern in the quality of online education (Diaz, 2002; Islam, 2002; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Therefore, institutions of higher education have keen interests in offering quality online MBA programs. Moreover, educators need to be aware that student expectations on the quality of online education programs are rising rapidly (Bonk, 2004).

As online learning has gained its wide acceptance in higher education, there is an increasing awareness of the facilitative role of online instructors. While there is growing interest in examining instructor online facilitation roles in distance learning, few empirical studies have examined the issues and challenges the instructor are faced with when facilitating online courses. This gap in the research is especially apparent in facilitating online learning communities and teamwork. The results reported in this study extend previous findings regarding the moderating roles of online instructors (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Berge, 1995; Feenberg, & Xin, 2002) and learning communities (Eastmond, 1995; Lave & Wenger, 1995; Oram, 1998). In addition, they represent initial findings obtained from a long term research project intended to enhance the quality of instruction in a fast-growing online MBA program.

This paper presents preliminary results of a study of an accredited online MBA program at a top ranked business school in a large Midwestern university. 323 students enrolled in the public online MBA program during the academic year of 2004-2005. This particular business school under investigation also offers corporate online MBA programs, which are offered in partnership with business organizations, and 403 students were enrolled in corporate online MBA programs in 2004. This online MBA program has grown to include hundreds of students in just a few years. Although this program has maintained a very high student retention rate over the past years since its inception, there was a need for a systematic approach to evaluating the program due to the low response rate of course evaluations from the students. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of online facilitation as an effective instructional tool on several key components of online teaching and learning: online learning activities, social presence and learning community, and virtual teamwork. To this intent, this study will focus on the following research questions:

- What are the key strategies that instructors have used in facilitating online learning and motivating student learning?
- How do students perceive the effectiveness of instructors' online facilitations?
- What are the challenges and issues confronting instructors in facilitating an online learning environment?

The results of this study are expected to provide implications for the improvement of the online MBA program not just for the one under investigation but for other online MBA programs as well. In particular, it is

hoped that this study will help provide a better understanding of the issues related to teaching and learning in online MBA courses.

Literature Review

Despite the increased importance on the role of the learner in learner-centered approaches in online learning environments, many researchers suggest that the instructor still plays important roles in online learning (Arbaugh, 2000). Several studies have conducted of how online learning should be designed and facilitated. Many researchers posit that online discussions in asynchronous learning environments foster in-depth and critical thinking of students by allowing them the time to process their thinking when they post a message in online conferences (Duffy, Dueber, & Hawley, 1998). Bonk, Hansen, Grabner-Hagen, Lazar, and Mirabelli (1998) suggest that asynchronous conferencing was the preferable method for fostering in-depth student online discussions and rich interactions than synchronous conferencing among preservice teachers. Benbunan-Fich and Hiltz (1999) found in their study of case studies through asynchronous learning networks in an online MBA course that students participated in an asynchronous learning environment were able to produce better and longer solutions to the cases than the students participated in in-class discussions, but the online students were less satisfied with the interaction process. Several other studies also report positive results of using asynchronous online discussions to facilitate case studies in online MBA classes (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999; Rourke & Anderson, 2002; Henson, Kennett, & Kennedy, 2003).

Nevertheless, past studies also suggest that there are challenges in facilitating student learning through online interactions. Computer-mediated communications, especially in text-based conferencing, seem to a limited mode of communication compared to face-to-face communications in terms of the richness of communication modes that can be used (Curtis & Lawson, 2001; Draft & Lengel, 1984). Also, Herring (1999) found that there is a high degree of disrupted adjacency, overlapping exchanges, and topic decay in computer-mediated communications both in asynchronous and synchronous conferencing settings.

The design of online courses is important for the success of online learners. Various methods of instruction have been applied to teaching business courses online. Case-based learning has been a dominant method of teaching in many of the courses. In particular, authenticity and relevance of the cases seemed to be critical for students' engagement in their learning through cases (Henson, Kennett, & Kennedy, 2004; Theroux, Carpenter, & Kilbane, 2004). Online MBA course can foster students' reflective thinking (Ascribe, 2004: Hay, Peltier, & Drago, 2004). Also, creating virtual communities among online MBA students and fostering interactions among them made a significant impact on the students' evaluation of the effectiveness of their online learning experience (Hay, Hodgkinson, Peltier, & Drago, 2004; Paltier, Drago, & Schibrowsky, 2004).

Creating virtual teams are also of concern in facilitating online courses. There is an increasing interest in the learning theory that stresses learning as a social activity (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Jonassen, 2002). Some researchers argue that knowledge is situated in social practices; therefore, knowledge can be acquired in the context that it is actually practiced. From this viewpoint, students can acquire the competence of experts by participating in the practice of the community by engaging themselves into the activity and culture of the group that the knowledge and skills are practiced (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Studies have been conducted on characteristics, needs, and concerns of online learners. Many studies suggest that learners can learn in online settings as effectively as in face-to-face settings. Many researchers argue that online learning is not for everyone and suggest that different learning styles need to be addressed. Self-motivated learners are more likely to succeed (McCall, 2002). Students' experience with online learning appears to be an important factor in their perceptions of learning and satisfaction. In a study of online MAB students, Arbaugh and Duray (2002) found that students who had more experience in online learning were more likely to be satisfied with learning over the Internet. Conrad (2002) also found from her study of undergraduates students that students who had more experience in online courses were less likely to feel anxious about online learning.

Methodology

A case study approach was used for this study. A case is "instrumental" (Stake, 1994) in providing an understanding of the issues of how to facilitate learning online. Data collected in this study included: (1) semi-structured one-on-one interviews with selected faculty members and students; (2) surveys of the instructors and students on their perceptions of the issues in online teaching and learning; (3) in-person focus group interviews with the instructors and the students; and (4) content analyses of course documents and class assignments

including student participation in class activities posted in the course management system.

Interviews were conducted of the instructors and the students of the online MBA program for an in-depth understanding of the issues under study. Subsequent surveys were conducted in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings of the study. In addition, a content analysis was conducted of the online courses in order to explore how the courses were designed and also to triangulate the data with those from the interviews and the surveys. More detailed descriptions of the methods of this study are presented below.

The Interview Study

26 faculty members of the online MBA program and 3 faculty members who taught traditional residence MBA courses only were interviewed in person. 25 semi-structured questions were asked and the interview was conducted in an one-on-one interview format. The interview questions included the participants' background information, their perceptions of the issues on delivering case-based learning online, interaction in online settings, learner control, collaboration and motivation, and the online learning environment in general. Each interview took 45 – 60 minutes.

In addition to the faculty interviews, 40 online MBA students were also interviewed. 20 of them were first year students who were participating in a one-week orientation program held on campus. The other 20 of them were second year students who were also participating in a one-week orientation program held on campus. Each interview took place in-person in a meeting room on the campus and took 30-45 minutes. In addition to the one-to-one student interviews, 20 students participated in four focus group interview sessions (e.g., five students per sessions) held during their orientation program. The focus interviews were also held in a meeting room on the campus and took 45 - 60 minutes. A different set of questions were asked to first-year and second-year students because first-year student were interviewed right before their first semester began thus had no experience with online MBA courses at the time of the interview. In contrast, the second-year students had finished their first-year of the program and was about to start their second academic year in the program. Therefore, the interview questions for the first-year students focus on their expectations on the online MBA program, whereas the interview questions for the second-year students focused on their experience taking online MBA courses. Every interview session was taped recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

For qualitative data analysis, a constant comparative method was used to triangulate the data from different data sources and to identify emerging themes. Multiple researchers were involved to test the coding reliability. Member checking was also used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

The Survey Study

First-year and second-year public online MBA students were surveyed. The survey instrument for first-year online MBA students consisted of 47 questions regarding their expectations on taking online MBA courses. This survey instrument included multiple choice questions, 5-point scale Likert type questions, and some open-ended questions. The survey instrument for second-year online MBA students consisted of 67 questions regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward the online MBA program.

The paper-based questionnaires were handed out to the students who were present at the one-week program orientation session held on campus in the summer of 2004. 162 first-year students and 102 second-year students returned the survey, which accounted for an almost 100% return rate. The students participated in this study had various backgrounds in terms of their age, gender, location, professional experiences, and online learning experiences. Among those students surveyed, 40 of them also participated in one-one-one or focus group interviews prior to or after the survey.

The instrument for faculty survey consisted of 65 questions and was divided into three sections. The first section of this survey instrument asked the participants' background information. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of 5-point scale Likert type questions about their overall perceptions and attitudes toward teaching online MBA courses. The last section included four open-ended questions soliciting the participants' general comments about teaching online MBA courses and how to improve the online MBA program. The faculty survey instrument was developed on the Web using a Web-based survey tool.

For data analysis, the survey data was entered into SPSS for analysis. Various statistical analyses, including descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were employed for the data analysis.

Content Analysis

27 online MBA courses across various business disciplines were selected for content analysis. The content of course Web sites were analyzed based on a coding scheme. The coding scheme included following 9 categories: (1) course structure, (2) interactivity, (3) social interaction, (4) instructional design support, (5)

instructor facilitation, (6) case type, (7) learner collaboration, (8) degree of learner control, (9) assessment. In addition, 10 subjective rating scales were developed to assess the level of interactivity in the online courses under investigation.

Descriptive data were obtained by counting the frequencies of occurrences based on the coding scheme. Two investigators analyzed the data independently and compared with each other later to check for inter-reliability of the data analysis.

Results

This study is still in progress at this point and analyses of student and faculty interviews data and student survey data are completed so far. The results of faculty interviews and student surveys are presented below.

Content Analysis

82% of the courses analyzed used asynchronous class discussions (e.g., discussion forums), whereas 44% of the courses had synchronous class discussions (e.g., chat rooms). 33 of those courses had both asynchronous and synchronous class discussions. A majority of the courses under investigation (81%) used team activities in their courses, whereas 19% of those courses did not use any team activities and had only individual activities. Students chose their team in 48% of the courses under investigation, and instructors assigned teams in 33% of those courses. 20 out of the 27 courses being studied used cases to support student learning.

Faculty Interviews

Online Facilitation through Asynchronous Interactions

The study found that the online instructors use asynchronous tools more often than synchronous tools to facilitate students online. The instructors mentioned that they used e-mail, announcements in the course management system, and asynchronous discussion forums as primary ways to facilitate students. They used discussion questions (open up a discussion by asking a question, prompting questions for further questions), recognizing good points, and summarizing discussions as the techniques that they use to facilitate online discussions.

Most of the instructors valued the immediacy of instructor's feedback to students to respond to the needs of the online learners' need promptly Also, the instructors noted that it was critical for them to make sure the equal participation of the students in online courses for effective facilitate of online courses. The following is a quote from an instructor of an operation management course that illustrates the importance of providing guidelines to ensure students' equal opportunities in contributing to the discussion:

> So this year, I said [to the students] you can only contribute on the first day to two of the cases; you can't contribute to all four. Because there were guys in the previous years that would try to beat everybody to the punch on the cases, and answer every question on every case, and it got some of the others upset, so I said, no, you can only post to two. And, I give them some suggestions on these things. You don't have to answer every question. I'm interested in quality, not quantity. This time, they were much more disciplined.

Online Facilitation through Synchronous Interactions

The instructors mentioned some barriers in using synchronous tools to facilitate their online course. Almost every instructor tried to use chat rooms in facilitating online discussion or holding office hours in the beginning. However, a majority of the instructors discontinued using synchronous tools for several reasons, which were found from the analysis of interview transcripts. First, the limited functions of chat room tools in the course management system presented a major barrier (e.g., small text input box broke a large chunk of text input by the instructors or the students). Secondly, it was extremely difficult to schedule a time for all group participants to attend a synchronous chat session when the participants were located in different regions of the United States or the world. Consequently, the participation rate of real-time chats was often fairly low and both the students and instructors were not satisfied with the learning experience. Finally, the instructors realized their lack of moderating skills and experiences when the size of the conference reached above ten people as well as the constraints of their typing speed, as an instructor.

However, a few faculty members who used chat room found it helpful. Two instructors mentioned the

convenience of bringing guest experts to the chat room, as noted in the following comment by an instructor:

> What I try to do every week is have a chat session and I find those usually work pretty well and last semester when I taught this course, actually it's a different course in the winter quarter, I did something I hadn't done before which I brought in some outside speakers for the chat session. So since these guys can do this from anywhere I had the executive vice president of Intel online one week and I had the CFO of this company called Finish Line. So I think the students really liked that. I had never really thought about doing that before but it's very easy.

Needs for Better Technology and Tools for Online Facilitation

Approximately half of the instructors interviewed mentioned that that they would be interested in trying some advanced technology tools. Some instructors noted that more real-time, visual-based learning tools with multiple modes of communication channels to enrich online learning environment and further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of online learning. With those tools, it was expected that it could help establish a better professional intimacy, realism, and real-world flavor for online learning participants. Such visual representation and hands-on tools were perceived lacking in existing online courses in this program, as noted in the following comments by two instructors:

> For example, if I'm doing a lecture on inventory costs, I think it would be useful using whiteboard technology and a video camera to have me do what I would do in a classroom, maybe not for everything but for key points, actually go through things on the board, or go through a problem where the problem itself appears in a window on the video screen (Quoted from a professor who taught Accounting course)

> I saw a training video that a large CPA firm created for their staff, it had three windows, it had a power point slide with the main points, it had a window with the actual person making the presentation, it had a window of that person's script scrolling, so you could actually follow what was being said, and compare it with what was up on the power point slide, you could stop it and replay it, key words were highlighted, I mean, it's extremely engaging in the sense that it's much closer to a classroom experience (Quoted from a professor who taught Accounting course)

However, accessibility and bandwidth were key issues that concerned the instructors in their adopting more visually rich and interactive tools. Some instructors noted that:

> I think the idea of doing, there's a lot you could do but the constraint is the computers at the other end are not what they need to be. I'd love to get on a web cam and have a chat room with a web cam where they could get on and see me but most of them can't do that because they don't have the software or the hardware to do it.

> I've have the advantage of being a professor and I'm on the land here and I have high speed in my office. I have DSL technology at home. I have on occasions had to travel and been in a motel room and had to connect over a phone modem and it's thoroughly frustrating to me any more. I think students who still have that technology it's probably thoroughly frustrating for them also.

Student Surveys

102 second-year online MBA students completed the survey of which 82.4% were males and 17.6% were females. About 80% of those responded were between 26 and 40 years of age. 90% of the respondents took more than seven online courses in the program. The coefficient of reliability was performed on the instrument to check for its reliability and the Cronbach's alpha, was .91.

The Level of Instructional and Social Presence in Online Courses

81.3% of the respondents reported that the instructors made announcement and gave feedback to students on a regular basis. Receiving such regular announcement and feedback seems to strengthen student feeling of being part of a learning community (r=.46). Receiving the regular announcement and feedback was also moderately correlated with the overall course satisfaction (r=.47) and negatively correlated with the intention of dropping out of the class (r= -.51). Male students tended to be more positive than female students on whether the online instructors foster student learning (F=4.12, p<.05). The ANOVA result indicates that there is a significant difference between students who are 31-35 years old and those who are older than 45 on

their perception of whether the amount of orientation they received on the electronic course management system (ANGEL) was sufficient. Students at age 31-35 said that they have had sufficient training on how to use ANGEL, while students age above 45responded that the training was insufficient.

What Influences Online Students' Engagement in their Learning?

About 90 percent of the students reported that they were deeply engaged in their learning while they took the online courses (M=4.17, SD=.77). The correlation coefficient between learner engagement and the sense of a learning community was fairly high (r=.62). Student engagement was also moderately correlated with the student's feeling of how much the instructor's facilitation fosters learning (r=.41). The student learning engagement was also positively correlated with student satisfaction with the course quality (r=.65), feeling about learned a lot (r=.56), and intention of recommending this program to others (r=.42). In contrast, student engagement was negatively correlated with the student's intention of dropping out of the class (r= -.40). The feeling of being a part of a learning community was positively correlated with student overall course satisfaction (r=.61), feeling of learned a lot (r=.60), and their intention to recommend the program to others (r=.54).

Students' Attitudes Toward Virtual Teams and Online Interactions

Overall, the students had positive attitudes toward teamwork in their online MBA program (M=4.27, SD=.72). Approximately 93% of the respondents also felt that sharing information and giving peer feedback in team projects contributed to student learning (M=4.17, SD=.63). About 86% of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that working in groups was helpful for their learning (M=4.22, SD=.91). However, only 49% of the students agreed with the statement that group work was more important than individual work when learning online (M=3.42, SD=1.19,). About 94% of the respondents think that interacting with other students or instructors creates a more meaningful learning experience (M=3.84, SD=.84). Also, the respondents agreed that interacting with other students motivates them to explore knowledge more deeply (M=3.84, SD=.84).

Students' Satisfaction with Online Learning and Motivation

About 93% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of online courses (M=4.27, SD=0.72). The results of correlational analysis revealed that students' satisfaction with the online courses was positively correlated with following factors:

- feeling of being part of a learning community (r=.61)
- engagement in learning (r=.65)
- instructor's use of various instructional techniques to foster student's critical and reflective thinking (r=.51)
- technological affordances (r=.40)
- effectiveness of instructor's facilitation (r=.47)
- feeling of being part of a community at the school level (r=.46)
- feeling of having learned a lot (r=.73)
- academic confidence (r=.50)
- prompt feedback from the instructor (r=.50).
- informative feedback from the instructor (r=.43)

In addition to their high level of satisfaction with their online courses, the students appeared to be highly motivated to persist in their learning. Only 8.8% of the respondents report that they have thought about dropping out of the class due to their disappointment with the course design. This intention of dropping out of the classes was negatively correlated with learner engagement (r=-.40), a sense of learning community (r=-.47), comfort level of reading messages and materials online (r=-.40), and helpfulness of the instructor's facilitation (r=-.51). About 96% of the survey respondents also intended to recommend this online MBA program to others, which was strongly correlated with the student's satisfaction with the program (r=.61).

Conclusions & Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that both the faculty students displayed a high level of satisfaction regarding the effectiveness of online facilitation. They also exhibited positive attitudes toward the online learning environment in general. Additionally, this study found that case-based learning was being used in a majority of online MBA courses and the instructors used various approaches to implement case-based learning in their online courses. Both the faculty and the students perceived case-based learning as an effective way to teach an online MBA course. Also, most of the courses incorporated a team-based learning approach students

interacted with one another also with the instructor. In terms of student motivation, the students indicated a high level of motivation for completing their program, which is due, in part, to their goal to obtain a degree as well as to the flexibility and convenience of an online program.

Both instructors and students of online MBA courses perceived that interactions among the instructor and the students as well as among students were not sufficient and the sense of community among the online students was not strong. Such issues raised from the findings of this study indicate that the faculty and students both need more guidance and support technologically and pedagogically to create a more engaging and meaningful online learning environment.

The results of this study on the effectiveness and issues of online facilitation will be useful for distance educators and policy makers of online programs who are conducting strategic planning, making educational policies, or refining practices for providing more satisfactory educational experiences in online learning environments. This study will also provide a set of assessment instruments, models, and guides for those researching similar programs. Yet, this paper reports preliminary results of an on-going research study, and the analysis of faculty survey and student survey data are yet to be done. Further analyses of data are expected to provide more in-depth understanding and implications for theory and practice from the findings of this study.

References

Anderson, T., Rourke, L., Garrison, D. R., & Archer, W. (2001). Assessing teaching presence in a computer conferencing context. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 5*(2), 1-17.

Arbaugh, J. B. (2000). How classroom environment and student engagement affect learning in Internet-based MBA courses. *Business Communication Quarterly, 63*(4), 9-26.

Arbaugh, J. B., & Duray, R. (2002). Technological and structural characteristics, student learning and satisfaction with Web-based courses: An exploratory study of two online MBA programs. *Management and Learning, 33*(3), 331-347.

AScribe. (2004). *Study: Virtual courses producing measurable gains in high-level learning*. Retrieved September 18, 2004, from http://www.ascribe.org/cgi-bin/spew4th.pl?ascribeid=20040723.102807&time=10%2050%20PDT&year=2004&public=1

Barab, S. A., & Duffy, T. M. (2000). From practice fields to communities of practice. In D. H. Jonassen & S. M. Land (Eds.), *Theoretical foundations of learning environments* (pp. 25-56). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Benbunan-Fich, R., & Hiltz, S. R. (1999). Educational applications of CMCS: Solving case studies through asynchronous learning networks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 4*(3).

Berge, Z. L. (1995). Facilitating computer conferencing: Recommendations from the field. *Education Technology, 15*(1), 22-30.

Bonk, C. J. (2004). *The perfect e-storm: Emerging technologies, enhanced pedagogy, enormous learner demand, and erased budgets*. London, UK: The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.

Bonk, C. J., Hansen, E. J., Grabner-Hagen, M. M., Lazar, S. A., & Mirabelli, C. (1998). Time to "Connect:" Synchronous and asynchronous case-based dialogue among preservice teachers. In C. J. Bonk & K. S. King (Eds.), *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse* (pp. 289-314). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Duguid, P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher, 18*(1), 32-42.

Conrad, D. L. (2002). Engagement, excitement, anxiety, and fear: Learners' experiences of starting an online course. *American Journal of Distance Education, 16*(4), 205-226.

Curtis, D. D., & Lawson, M. J. (2001). Exploring collaborative online learning. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 5*(1), 21-34.

Daft, R.L., & Lengel, R.H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial information processing and organizational design. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 6*, 191-233.

Diaz, D. P. (2002). Online drop rates revisited. *Technology Source*(May/June).

Duffy, T. M., Dueber, B., & Hawley, C. L. (1998). Critical thinking in a distributed environment: A pedagogical base for the design of conferencing systems. In C. J. Bonk (Ed.), *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse.* (pp. 51-78). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hay, A., Hodgkinson, M., Peltier, J. W., & Drago, W. A. (2004). Interaction and virtual learning. *Strategic Change, 13*(4), 193-201.

Hay, A., Peltier, J. W., & Drago, W. A. (2004). Reflective learning and on-line management education: A

comparison of traditional and on-line MBA students. *Strategic Change, 13*(4), 169-182.

Hayward, S. (2004, September 24). *Going online for your M.B.A. may mean showing up for class*. The Wall Street Journal Online. Retrieved October 4, 2004, from http://online.wsj.com/public/article/0,,SB109398966309906191,00.html?mod=home_inside_today_us

Henson, S. W., Kennett, P. A., & Kennedy, K. N. (2003). Web-based cases in strategic marketing. *Journal of Marketing Education, 25*(3), 250-259.

Herring, S. (1999). Interactional coherence in CMC. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 4* (4).

Islam, K. (2002, May). Is e-learning floundering?: Identifying shortcomings and preparing for success. *E-Learning Magazine*.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

McCall, D. E. (2002). *Factors influencing participation and perseverance in online distance learning courses: A case study in continuing professional education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Moore, M. G., & Kearsley, G. (1996). *Distance education: A systems view*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Oram, I. (1998). *Computer support of collaborative case based learning by MBA students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Institute of Educational Technology of Open University.

Paltier, J. W., Drago, W., & Schibrowsky, J. A. (2004). Virtual communities and the assessment of online marketing education. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25(3), 260-276.

Rourke, L., & Anderson, T. (2002). Using web-based, group communication systems to support case study learning at a distance. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 3*(2).

Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Theroux, J., Carpenter, C., & Kilbane, C. (2004). Experimental online case study aims for a breakthrough in student engagement: Focus group results. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 8*(3), 71-83.