

Student use of Informal Communities in Online RN-BSN Programs



A Descriptive Case Study

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A big THANKS to my Committee!

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Problem

Formation of friendships in online courses often taken for granted

- Billings et al., 2005; Kreijins, Kirschner, & Jochems, 2003

Online programs often disregard the socio-emotional aspects of learning

- Billings et al., 2005; Kreijins et al., 2003

Feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation, result in barriers to learning, lower grades, and increased attrition rates

- Delahoussaye et al., 2001; Jiang, 2008; Waltonen-Moore et al., 2006; Zembylas, 2008



Purpose

Add to the body of knowledge regarding how online course design can promote the formation of informal communities

Broaden understanding of how RN-BSN students use informal communities in the online academic environment



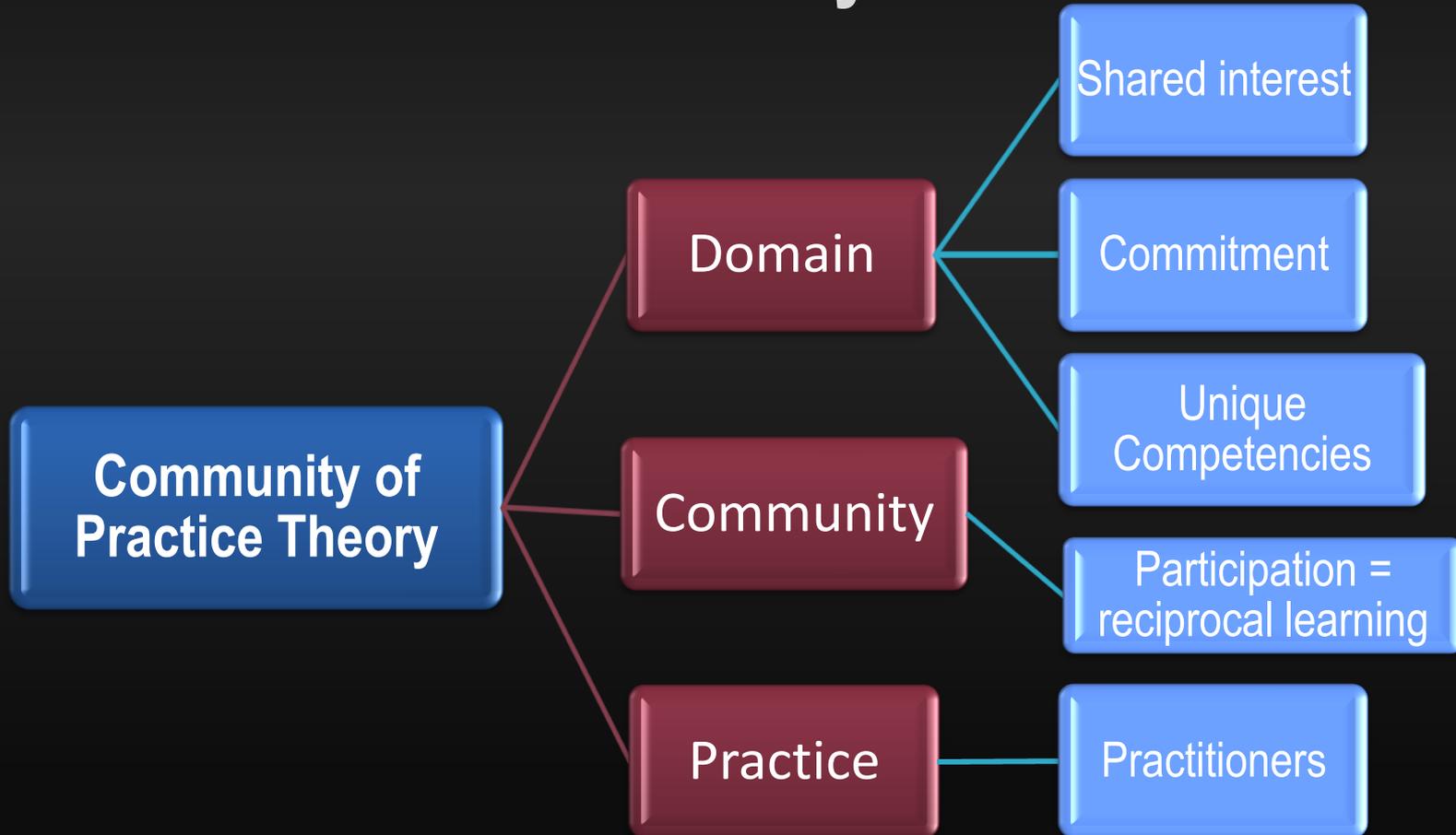
Research Questions

1. How can online course design promote the formation of informal communities?

2. How do students use informal communities in online RN-BSN degree programs?



Theoretical Foundation: Community of Practice Theory



Wenger, 2006;
Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002



Instrument: Interview Guide

- Created by researcher
- Questions based on the literature
- E-mailed to participants prior to the interview

APPENDIX INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pseudonym: _____

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Age: 25 or under _____ 26-35 _____ 36-45 _____ Over 45 _____

Number of online courses completed _____

Tell me about your experiences as part of an informal community in your online program.

1. Are informal communities incorporated into your online course? If so, how? Examples include but are not limited to a chat room, informal discussion forum, and personal profile pages (including links to Facebook or a personal blog).
2. How do you communicate with the members? Examples include but are not limited to e-mail, course mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, telephone, blogs, micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter, Pownce), wikis, virtual worlds (e.g., Second Life), social bookmarking (e.g., Diigo, Delicious, StumbleUpon), multi-media (e.g., flickr, Skype), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Ning).
 - a. Why do you choose this medium(s)?
3. How do you decide who in your program to include in your informal community? Reasons might include other students' work in the classroom, mutual professional or personal interests.
 - a. How many people are in your informal community?
4. When are you most likely to contact a member of your informal community? Examples include but are not limited to socio-emotional support, clarify assignments, better understand course content.
 - a. How often on average do you contact a member of your informal community?
5. Describe how and if participation contributes socio-emotional support (collaboration, trust, respect, sense of belonging, motivation), academic support (knowledge and information sharing), and/or self-knowledge (i.e., self-awareness).
 - a. Is there something other than an informal community that would contribute the same thing? For example, family members or friends.

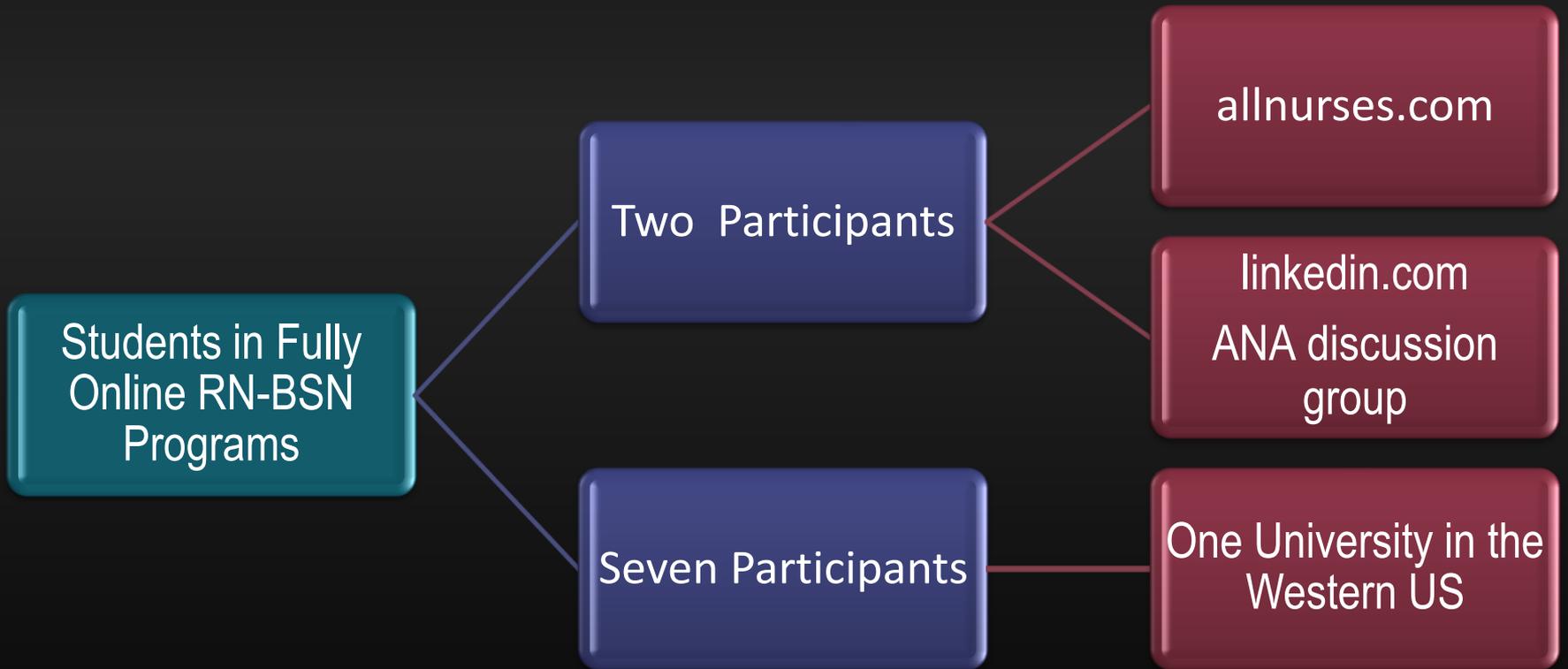
Briefly describe an experience you have had that reflects your view about informal communities in your online program.



Procedures



Target Population



Data Collection

May 6 – September 2, 2011

Recorded
Telephone
Interviews



Transcription of
Recorded Content



Participant Demographics

Age Ranges

- 4 participants >45 age group
- 3 participants 36-45 age group
- 2 participants 26-35 age group

Ethnicity

- 7 participants Caucasian
- 1 participant African
- 1 participant unknown

Number of Courses Completed

- Number of online courses taken : 4--29
- Average 13

Marital Status

- 8 participants married
- 1 participant divorced

Distance from Campus

- Only 1 participant lived < 30 miles from campus
- 1 participant , distance unknown



Participants' Informal Communities

Number of People in Informal Community

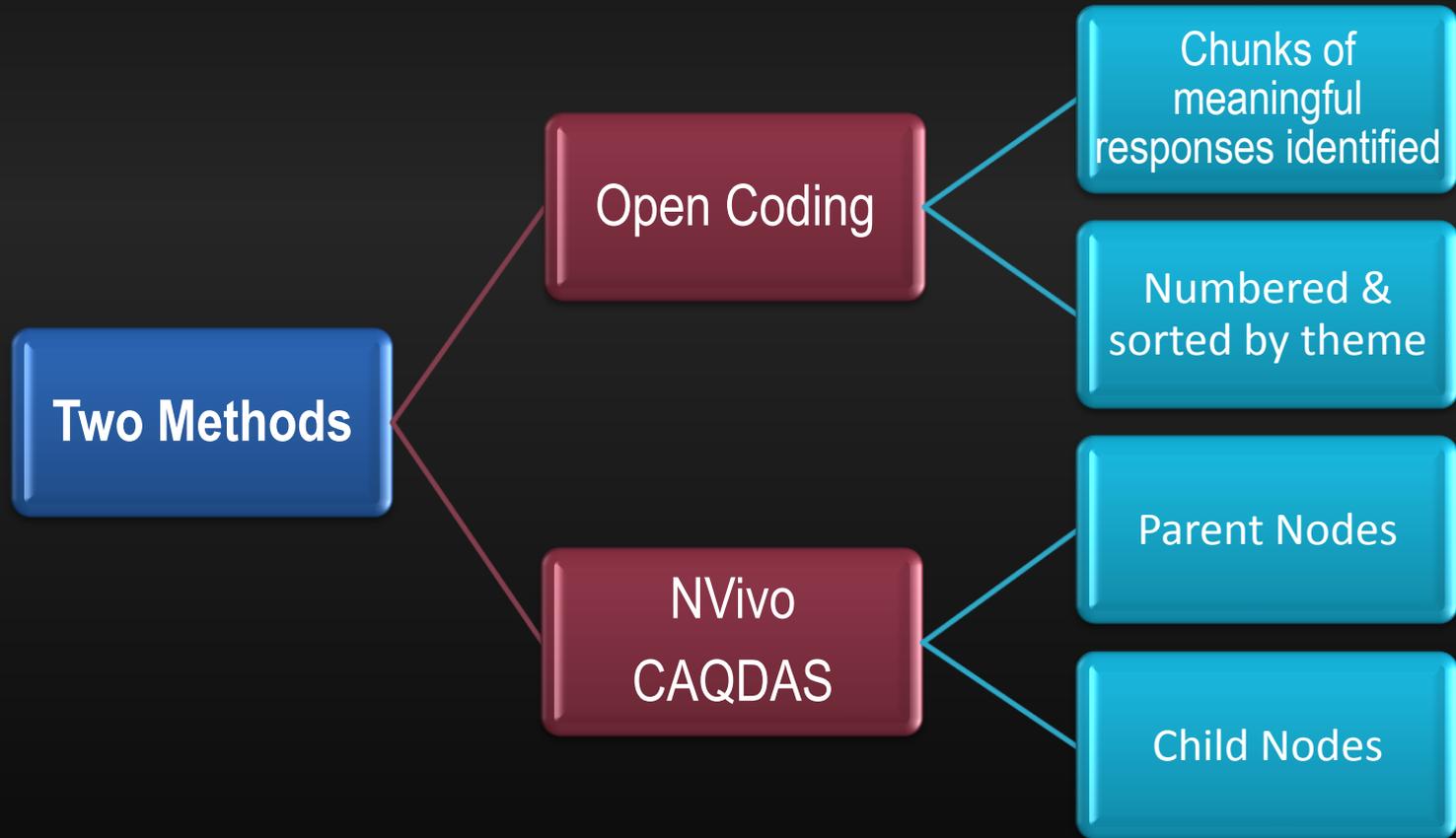
- Range 1—15
- Average 4

Frequency of Contact with Community Members

- Range everyday to “variable”
- Most 1--2 times per week



Data Analysis



Data Analysis: NVivo

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	Sources
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	Sources
Reasons to contact	8	13	11/12/2011 2:32 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:51 PM	VB	
Frequency of contact	8	9	11/12/2011 2:32 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:50 PM	VB	
COMPONENT-- ORGANIZATIONAL	2	3	11/6/2011 1:14 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:08 PM	VB	
COLLABORATION		5	14	10/30/2011 4:02 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:49 PM	VB
help from others		7	9	11/6/2011 1:47 PM	VB	11/6/2011 6:39 PM	VB
MOTIVATION		5	5	10/30/2011 4:22 PM	VB	11/6/2011 6:57 PM	VB
SOLIDARITY		2	2	11/6/2011 6:48 PM	VB	11/6/2011 6:59 PM	VB
CoP--external dimension	2	2	11/6/2011 5:38 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:43 PM	VB	
COMPONENT-- KNOWLEDGE SHARING	1	1	11/6/2011 1:06 PM	VB	11/6/2011 5:40 PM	VB	
learning from others		6	17	10/30/2011 5:42 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:49 PM	VB
help from others		6	9	11/6/2011 1:40 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:49 PM	VB
Students need individualization	1	1	11/12/2011 2:41 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:41 PM	VB	
Interview Questions	0	0	10/30/2011 12:17 PM	VB	10/30/2011 12:17 PM	VB	
COMPONENT-- INFORMATION SHARING	0	0	11/6/2011 1:08 PM	VB	11/6/2011 1:16 PM	VB	
COMPONENT-- SOCIAL	0	0	11/6/2011 1:15 PM	VB	11/6/2011 1:15 PM	VB	
encouragement and support		8	24	10/30/2011 2:04 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
informal community provides unique support		7	17	11/6/2011 7:20 AM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
Empathy		7	16	10/30/2011 3:55 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
help from others		6	11	10/30/2011 2:12 PM	VB	11/12/2011 2:49 PM	VB
barriers to maintaining informal communities		4	6	10/30/2011 2:22 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
different from face to face		3	4	11/6/2011 7:11 AM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
sources of support		4	4	11/6/2011 7:03 AM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
meet for lunch		1	1	10/30/2011 8:12 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
important to build relationships		1	1	11/6/2011 7:09 AM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
met face to face		1	1	10/30/2011 4:04 PM	VB	11/6/2011 7:13 PM	VB
instructional design (question 1)	0	0	11/6/2011 1:34 PM	VB	11/6/2011 1:34 PM	VB	
modes of communication		6	11	10/30/2011 2:03 PM	VB	10/30/2011 8:17 PM	VB

Use of starter codes based on the literature
(the process of adding, sorting, and coding data continued past this download)



Data Analysis: Open Coding

- Meaningful chunks highlighted
- Meaning of chunk in the right column
- Meaningful chunks numbered and grouped into themes
- Number of chunks coded: 120

1. How do you decide who in your program to include in your informal community?	
BETH: My informal friends, they are in the same field. They are nurses [and] really understand. My family and friends xxxxxxx know much about nursing or really understand my judgment. They don't understand the scope of practice and different scenarios and all the stuff	(1) Pick people who understand my field
BETH: The nurses that I work with, some of them (not to be judgmental) still like Associate degrees. Those in xxxxxxxx . For example, when I was taking my Associate degree, there was a class I took that included genetic teaching. Everybody who came had something to do with genetics. If you have diabetes, it xxxxxxx to genetics. We [were] not covering the genetic aspect, so the schools decided to come up with one of the classes xxx taking to include genetics. If xxx talking to one of my colleagues or other nurses that have a Bachelors, they can understand it but they don't quite understand it, because it was introduced later. I didn't even know about it myself, but because of scheduling and having to take this class, I see things differently. I'm seeing some things that have changed	(2) (they) Share common knowledge (3) (other people) don't understand things the way I need to understand them
MAUREEN: I guess it's because it's safe. We don't work together, we don't live in the same community. She's going through the same thing so she understands that stuff and what I'm feeling. I don't see the people that I work with as... I kind of feel like xxx behind the people I work with because they all went through the traditional four year BSN program and I started out with an ADN. I feel like xxx trying to catch up. They're in my face all the time. They're there all the time and I just don't want to have to explain myself to them. With her [Rebecca], I don't feel like I have to explain myself	(4) they are safe; I don't have to work/live with them (5) (they) share common experience (6) I don't have to explain myself
KATHERINE: I would say only about four or five that their name pops up again in each class. There are a couple [classmates] I go to repeatedly. I pick people when we have discussions because I like the way that they answer questions, so I just listen for help or direction or clarification . Some mutual personal interests [are a deciding factor], like where they work. I work long-term care. Other people might work long-term care, so we have something in common. Maybe they like cats and I like cats, or they have grandkids and I have grandkids	(7) Likes how they answer discussion questions (8) Mutual interests—things in common
Reasons to pick members of informal community:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust 4, 6 • Absence of judgment 4, 6 • Share knowledge 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 • Share experience 5, 8 	



Data Analysis

Research Question #1

Interview Questions	Responses	Central Themes
1. Are informal communities incorporated into your online course? If so, how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informal discussion forum• Course mail• Chat room	
2. How do you communicate with the members? Why do you choose this medium?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E-mail• Texting• Informal discussion forum• Course mail• Facebook• Telephone• Chat room	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust• Convenience



Data Analysis

Research Question #2

Interview Question

Central Themes

3. How do you decide who in your program to include in your informal community?"
4. When are you most likely to contact a member of your informal community?
5. Describe if participation [in an informal community] contributed socio-emotional support, academic support and/or self-knowledge.

- Knowledge & Information Sharing Component
- Organizational Component:
 - Collaboration
- Social Component:
 - Trust
 - Empathy
 - Encouragement and Support
 - Shared experiences
 - Unique contribution



Exemplary Responses

Knowledge and Information Sharing Component

- *Somebody might be really strong in Home Health or somebody might be strong in Critical Care or Public Health. It might just be a mother who just wants a mother....*



Exemplary Responses

Organizational Component: Collaboration

- I would always get a response from her and I would always feel compelled to respond to her, only because it elicited a better response from me. She was able to allow me to dig deeper, and I felt like I was able to do the same for her.*



Exemplary Responses

Social Component: Encouragement & Support

- *As we got into harder courses like Nursing Research, it started to become more support and cheerleading like, 'You can do this'... I can text someone and say, 'Hi, can you call me? I really need someone to tell me 'Good job'.*



Exemplary Responses

Social Component: Empathy

- *They would e-mail and say, 'We'll be praying for you,' or 'Sorry you're going through this...it felt like people were really caring and concerned.'*



Exemplary Responses

Social Component: Shared Experiences

- *Maybe they like cats and I like cats or they have grandkids and I have grandkids; they like camping and I like camping.*



Exemplary Responses

Social Component: Trust

- *After a couple classes, there's a trust...you're more willing to be spontaneous and without withholding your emotions.*



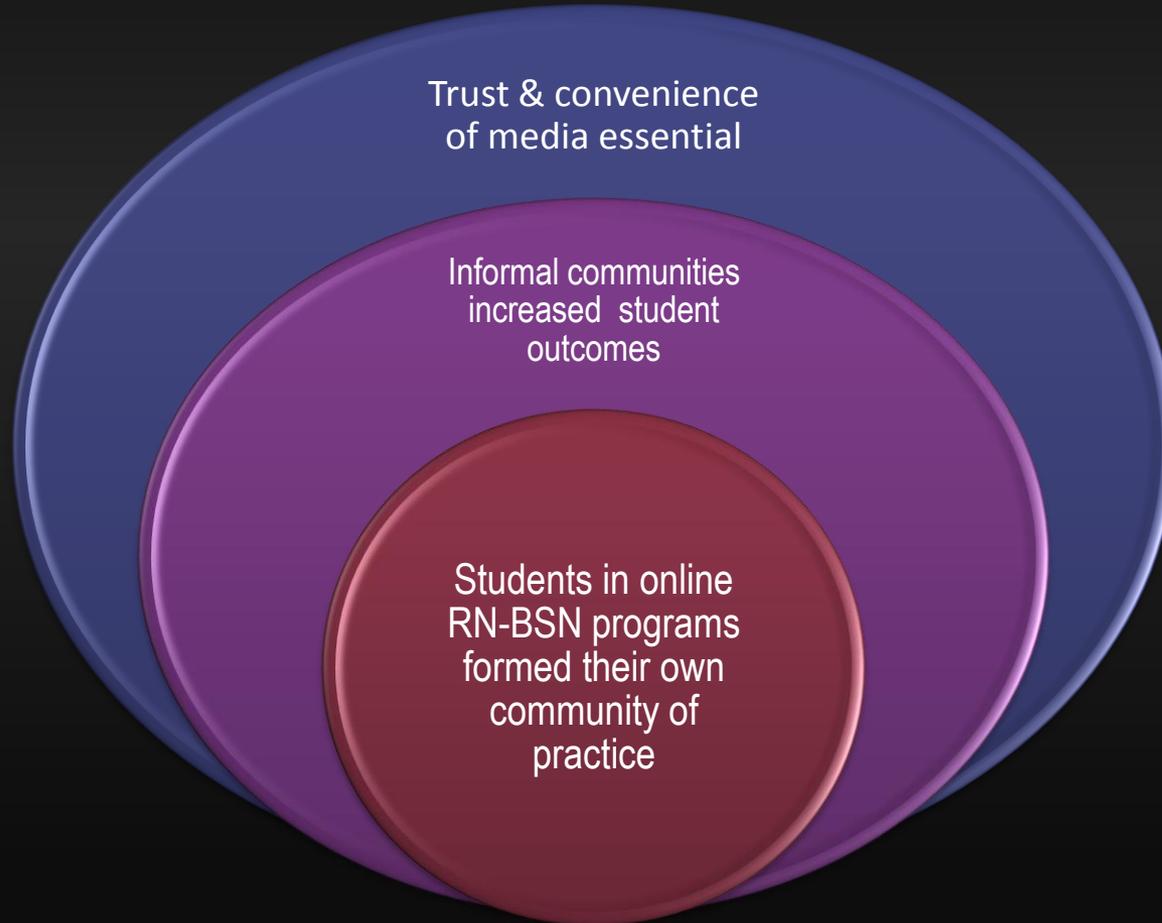
Exemplary Responses

Social Component: Unique Support

- *Your kids can say, 'You're a great mom,' or your sister and friends can say that and it means a lot, but when you have another equal like another RN who is going through the same thing and has the same stuff--when someone you respect and is your equal to you says, 'You're doing really amazing,' it means a lot.*



Conclusions



Implications for Instructional Design

Incorporate the affective domain in course design

- The affective domain contributed to perceived learning, student satisfaction, & retention

The latest isn't always the greatest

- Consider the learners' degree of digital literacy & desire to learn new tools
- These participants communicated through "traditional" means



Implications for Instructional Design

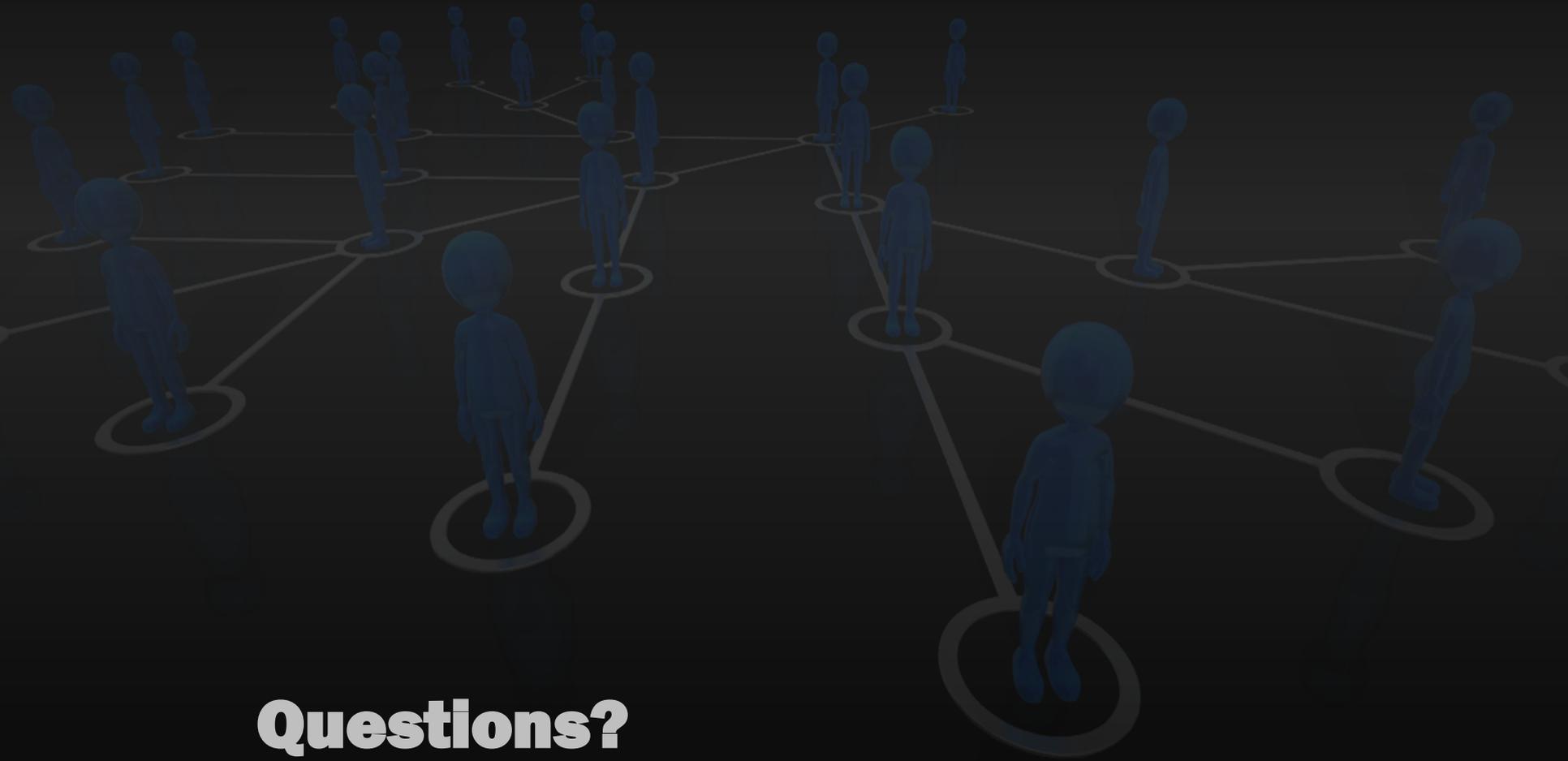
Convenience of using media essential

- Participants short on time – consider time required to use, and learn to use, media
- Ensure adequate scaffolding for students

Trust in using media essential

- Some participants still did not feel safe using social media, and felt more secure using tools within the LMS
- Increased use of social media over time will likely lead to greater comfort levels in using new media, but this should not be assumed





Questions?

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