

## ABSTRACT

**DISSERTATION:** So, Why'd You Post There?: The Significance of Instructor Direction and Reciprocity in Online Writing Class Interaction

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Several prominent rhetoric and composition scholars have called for researchers to forefront the activity of an interaction (see Shipka, 2005; Yancey, 2009; Spinuzzi, 2011). This focus is particularly needed in the study of online writing instruction; with its emphasis on the unit of analysis being the action itself, activity theory proves useful to analyze the human-computer and human-human interaction that occurs in the online environment. Drawing from Haas' (1996) assertion that technology is a site to examine "the relationship between culture and cognition," this dissertation presents findings from an ethnographic case study that investigates CMS tool use in an online FYC writing course. Using activity theory as a theoretical and methodological frame, findings show how students made CMS tool-use decisions based not only in function, but also on culturally shared beliefs held about interaction in the online instructional environment itself.

Using both qualitative and quantitative data, this dissertation discusses two findings: students overwhelmingly use instructor direction when making navigation decisions and when complying with implicit rules. From the findings, this dissertation analyzes how the perceived assumptions that students and instructors in the online writing course make about the intended and unintended motivations of tool use reflect their actual practices. The dissonance that exists within the spaces created between intention and outcome are highlighted by this methodological and theoretical frame. Additionally, analyzing online writing course tool use can have larger programmatic applications in that by understanding what happens in an online writing course and what motivates its users, instructors can better deliver a course and administrators can better assess both a course/instructor and a course management system.