

Universität Duisburg Essen  
Fakultät für Bildungswissenschaften  
Institut für Berufs- und Weiterbildung  
Learning Lab  
Studiengang Educational Media

# **The Student's Perception of Social Presence in a Blended Learning Programme of Higher Education in Emergencies**

## **An Exploratory Study on the Influence of Cura Personalis and Care in Education**

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**FOR JESUIT WORLDWIDE LEARNING**

von

Ulrike Kersten, M.A.

## Abstract

Social presence is a key factor for student retention and connectedness in online learning. It describes the subjective feeling of being acknowledged and recognised. The NGO Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) has set up a specific blended learning system with a global classroom online and in-person tutoring on-site to provide tertiary education for young adults living in large refugee camps worldwide as a form of Higher Education in Emergencies. A central value in Jesuit education is *cura personalis*, the care for the whole person. The aim of this study is to explore if this form of care influences the students' perception of social presence in the JWL blended learning setup. For this purpose, *cura personalis* has been operationalized by concepts of care in higher education. In addition, a model on social presence, social space, sociability, and social interaction (Kreijns et al, 2022; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017) was created and combined with *cura personalis*/teacher care. Seven students of JWL participating in the refugee camp Dzaleka, Malawi, were interviewed. These semi-structured qualitative interviews were analysed using focused interview analysis.

It was found that the students, both first-years and graduating students, perceive social presence in varying degrees. For some students, it takes time to initially get used to communicating in a foreign language, online learning and typing. Here, *cura personalis* helps establish social presence and social space. For the graduating students, meeting other students in the global classroom in the form of a discussion forum of the Learning Management System, feels like family. Even though the sociability of the discussion forum is limited, students help each other in social interactions online, creating a collaborative environment. On a structural level, *cura personalis* is expressed by the conception and applicability of the Sustainable Development BA programme, which has high relevancy to the lived experience of the students and leads to self-efficacy and empowerment.

The results of this study show that *cura personalis* has an influence on social presence. The creation of a shared social space in the discussion forum helps to establish social presence. Designed social interactions focus on familiarizing and on the course topics. Contextual social interaction by the students mainly remains focused on studying. The question of how social space is transferred from the on-site to the online space with different group composition could not be answered.

Care is an essential factor in blended learning arrangements and fosters relationship building and connectedness among students. The effects of care are complemented by the on-site tutoring and enhance the establishment of a learner community. Further research on the importance of care in the context of Higher Education in Emergencies would be fruitful for learner engagement in such learning environments.

**Keywords:** social presence, care/*cura personalis*, blended learning, Higher Education in Emergencies, Jesuit education

## Kurzfassung

Soziale Präsenz ist ein Schlüsselfaktor für die Bindung und die Verbundenheit der Lernenden beim Online-Lernen. Sie beschreibt das subjektive Gefühl, bestätigt und anerkannt zu werden. Die Nichtregierungsorganisation Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) hat ein spezielles Blended-Learning-System mit einem globalen Online-Klassenzimmer und persönlicher Betreuung vor Ort eingerichtet, um jungen Erwachsenen, die in großen Flüchtlingslagern auf der ganzen Welt leben, eine Hochschulausbildung als eine Form der Higher Education in Emergencies zu ermöglichen. Ein zentraler Wert in der jesuitischen Bildung ist cura personalis, Latein für die Fürsorge für den ganzen Menschen. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, zu untersuchen, ob diese Form der Fürsorge die Wahrnehmung der sozialen Präsenz der Studierenden in dem Blended Learning Setting beeinflusst. Zu diesem Zweck wurde cura personalis durch Konzepte von Care in der Hochschulbildung operationalisiert. Darüber hinaus wurde ein Modell zu sozialer Präsenz, sozialer Raum, Soziabilität und sozialer Interaktion (Kreijns et al., 2022; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017) erstellt und mit cura personalis/teacher care kombiniert. Sieben Studierende von JWL, die im Flüchtlingslager Dzaleka/Malawi teilnehmen, wurden interviewt. Diese halbstrukturierten qualitativen Interviews wurden mittels fokussierter Interviewanalyse ausgewertet.

Es wurde festgestellt, dass die Studierenden, sowohl die Studienanfänger als auch die Absolventen, die soziale Präsenz in unterschiedlichem Maße wahrnehmen. Für einige Studierende ist es anfangs gewöhnungsbedürftig, in einer Fremdsprache zu kommunizieren, online zu lernen und zu tippen. Hier hilft cura personalis, soziale Präsenz und sozialen Raum zu schaffen. Für die Absolventen ist das Zusammentreffen mit anderen Studierenden im globalen Klassenzimmer in Form eines Diskussionsforums des Lernmanagementsystems wie eine Familie. Auch wenn die Soziabilität im Diskussionsforum begrenzt ist, helfen sich die Studierenden gegenseitig bei sozialen Interaktionen online und schaffen so ein kollaboratives Umfeld. Auf struktureller Ebene wird cura personalis durch die Konzeption und Anwendbarkeit des BA-Studiengangs Sustainable Development ausgedrückt, der eine hohe Relevanz für die Lebenspraxis der Studierenden hat und zu Selbstwirksamkeit und Empowerment führt.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie zeigen, dass cura personalis einen Einfluss auf die soziale Präsenz hat. Die Schaffung eines gemeinsamen sozialen Raums im Diskussionsforum hilft, soziale Präsenz aufzubauen. Gestaltete soziale Interaktion konzentriert sich im Rahmen des Kursgeschehens auf das Kennenlernen und auf die Kursthemen. Kontextuelle soziale Interaktion der Studierenden bleibt hauptsächlich auf das Studium fokussiert. Die Frage, wie der soziale Raum vom Vor-Ort Raum in den Online-Raum mit unterschiedlicher Gruppenzusammensetzung übertragen wird, konnte nicht beantwortet werden.

Care ist ein wesentlicher Faktor in Blended-Learning-Arrangements und fördert den Beziehungsaufbau und die Verbundenheit unter den Studierenden. Die Auswirkungen der Betreuung werden durch die Vor-Ort-Betreuung ergänzt und fördern den Aufbau einer Gemeinschaft von Lernenden. Weitere Forschungen über die Bedeutung von Care im Kontext der Higher Education in Emergencies wären für das Engagement der Lernenden in solchen Lernumgebungen fruchtbar.

**Schlüsselwörter:** soziale Präsenz, care/cura personalis, Blended Learning, Higher Education in Emergencies, jesuitische Bildung

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## Abbreviations

BSD, BASD	Bachelor of Arts in Sustainable Development
CLC	Community Learning Centre
CoI	Community of Inquiry
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication
CSCL	Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning
IPP	Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
JWL	Jesuit Worldwide Learning
LMS	Learning Management System
MAXQDA	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OGL	Online Group Learning
SIPS	Sociability, Social Interaction, Social Presence and Social Space
SIPT	Social Information Processing Theory
SJ	Society of Jesus (Latin: Societatis Jesu), indicating that someone is an ordained Jesuit
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
TSR	Teacher-Student Relationship



# 1 Introduction

In a time of global crisis, with more than 117,3 million people forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2024), the urgency of humanitarian aid is more important than ever. In recent years, international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) offer humanitarian aid in the form of educational programmes. Access to education counts as a basic human right and is one of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants from 2016, the Global Compact on Refugees as well as the Global Compact for Migration, both from 2018, define political aims and measures to support refugees and displaced people themselves and to ease the pressure on the host countries and communities (UNHCR, 2001b). Young adults in particular are empowered by the opportunities offered by vocational training and/or a university degree. Today, refugees or displaced people are no longer condemned to form a “lost generation” (Reinprecht et al., 2021) without access to education and training. Furthermore, education can secure the integration of refugee students into host societies.

Higher Education in Emergencies is offered by various stakeholders in conflict-affected societies and among displaced populations. In 2019 only 1% of refugees had access to higher education, in 2023, 7% were enrolled. In comparison, 40% of non-refugees were studying worldwide in 2023. It is the goal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to increase the number of refugee students by 15% by 2030 (UNHCR, 2023). Most often, the organisations offering Higher Education in Emergencies in various settings use educational technology (Gladwell et al., 2016; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2021). The educational programmes in refugee camps are facilitated by computer-mediated learning, e.g., in the form of blended learning arrangements. It is not just the training programme that counts, but its function as “psychosocial intervention” (Crea, 2016, p. 19) in a refugee community setting.

Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) and its predecessor Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins (JC:HEM) have been active in this field since 2010 (McFarland, 2014, p. 3). Nowadays, JWL runs over 80 community learning centres with more than 10.000 students in more than 30 countries (Jesuit Worldwide Learning, 2024a). Being a Jesuit organization headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, they apply Ignatian Pedagogy and the values of Jesuit education in their courses (Dickel & Ishii-Jordan, 2008). Also, they follow their social-religious mission to care for people on the margins, striving for social justice and “walking with the excluded” (Sosa SJ, 2019). JWL students learn to be open-minded and use critical thinking skills, regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, and gender (Jesuiten in Zentraleuropa, 2024). Partnering with Jesuit Universities and other associates worldwide, blended learning courses are set up for

the JWL student community. Accreditation of JWL's courses is possible through the Jesuit partner universities. The scope of JWL would not be possible without blended learning as a scalable solution. Next to the tailor-made web-based trainings, their specific arrangement includes an asynchronous classroom with university instructors, who utilize the discussion forum of their Learning Management System (LMS). JWL students from different countries study their chosen subjects online in a global classroom setting. Additionally, there are on-site classes, which are attended by different sets of students, namely by students that are situated in the same location. They receive on-site support in form of tutoring by an on-site facilitator and use collaborative and applied learning.

The Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is central in Ignatian Pedagogy and denotes the individual care for the whole person. In the field of teaching, this means that the instructor shows each student individual care and attention. It is a special way of treating the other by showing respect and puts human dignity in the centre, based on the Christian-Catholic worldview of the Jesuits. Mencuccini (2021), a Jesuit PhD researcher, defines *cura personalis* as follows:

[A] Latin term that means care and respect for the whole person. The concept behind *cura personalis* [emphasis in original] is that our talents, abilities, physical attributes, personalities, desires, hearts, faith, and minds are all equally worthy of care and attention. It is a call for each of us to love ourselves and others: the entire person, the entire gift of life from God that has been given to us. It is an important value in Jesuit education because the purpose is to educate the whole person, and to promote human dignity. (Mencuccini, 2021, p. 9)

This thesis focuses on the application of *cura personalis* in the context of a blended learning arrangement and the social perceptions as perceived by the students. The goal is to provide insights into the topics of care in higher education/teacher care and social presence, an educational technology research theory. Social presence is a socio-psychological theoretical construct originating in 1976, explaining how other people are perceived as "real" in computer-mediated contexts. The research will be based on the social presence model proposed by Kreijns et al. in 2004, reformulated in 2022, and its extension by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017). This so-called SIPS model is applied to the online component of JWL's programme in a refugee camp, Dzaleka, Malawi with the intention to find out more about social presence, social space and sociability.

This research is of interest because it combines the inner attitude and value of *cura personalis* with an educational research theory. The two concepts have one theme in common: personal recognition and acceptance of the individual student in an educational setting. This master thesis gives voice to the students of Dzaleka in a qualitative, interview-based study, using Rädiker & Kuckartz' (2020) Focused Interview Analysis, a form of qualitative content analysis

applied to the generated interview data. The underlying question of this thesis is how the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is put into practice in the blended learning arrangement and how it affects the student's perception of social presence.

There are many aspects that could be of interest in the context of an analysis of Higher Education in Emergencies or specifically in the context of the JWL program. This study does not deal with possible missionary aspects of the Jesuit programme or the religious practice and world view of the Jesuits. Questions of cooperation in multi-ethnic communities or internationalization through worldwide classrooms cannot be addressed in detail either. Furthermore, the content of the courses is not subject of this study. A comparison between the pedagogical approaches of the Jesuits and secular educational approaches cannot be formulated since no contrastive literature on this topic could be found. The focus and the research interest of this study lies on the blended learning arrangement of the JWL from an educational media studies perspective.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: the theory chapter (chapter 2.1) begins with an overview of the development of social presence theory, and then focuses on the approach by Kreijns et al. (2022) and its extension by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) with the SIPS model. Chapter 2.2 explores the historical evolution of the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* and its use in Ignatian Pedagogy. The application of this in refugee contexts, both in the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and its schools in Lebanon as well as an introduction to JWL and its specific setup, supports the theoretical findings. To analyse the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, the ancillary concept of care in higher education in face-to-face and online settings, as well as teacher-student relationships are presented in chapter 2.3. By linking the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* and the concept of care in education with social presence (chapter 2.4), a preliminary research model is proposed in chapter 2.5. The research questions and hypotheses for this thesis are introduced in chapter 3. In chapter 4 the qualitative research design is presented, providing the methodological background with guiding principles, also considering research ethics. In a next step, the general research planning is described in chapter 4.4. Here, the selection of the data collection method (semi-structured interviews) is substantiated, the development of the data collection instrument (semi-structured question guide) is described, and the chosen analysis procedure (Focused Interview Analysis) is presented. The implementation follows in chapter 4.4. The results of this study are presented in chapter 5. In chapter 6.1, the results are being reflected upon while linking them back to the theoretical frame provided in chapter 2. Chapter 6.2 will provide a reflection on the field of research, the instrument and method used, and the application of the methodological guiding principles. To conclude this thesis, the outcome of this study will be assessed and practical implications will be given in chapter 7.

## 2 Theory

In this chapter, the theoretical approach to the subject of investigation of this paper is set forth. The subject is approached threefold. First, the educational technology research theory of social presence and a specific social presence model, SIPS (an acronym for Sociability, (Social) Interaction, (Social) Presence, (Social) Space) will be examined. Then, in chapter 2.2, the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is introduced. Thirdly, care in higher education as an ancillary for *cura personalis* is presented to operationalise the Jesuit concept scientifically (chapter 2.3). Finally, these three topics will be linked together in chapter 2.4.

### 2.1 Social Presence

For analysing the blended learning programme of Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) on a scientific basis, social presence theory is used in this thesis. In educational technology research, social presence theory was first defined in 1976. Here, the history of social presence theories and the application to JWL will be examined. After an overview of the theoretical developments, Kreijns' model for computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) and online group learning (OGL) will be focused on. In a next step, Weidlich & Bastiaens model will be introduced, in which they expand and test Kreijns' model for online and distance learning through including social interaction. Social presence in the context of text-based, asynchronous arrangements will be explained and analysed.

#### 2.1.1 Overview of Social Presence Theories

In a recent article by Kreijns et al. (2022), 28 different definitions of Social Presence are referenced, a conundrum in social presence research. They state that there are too many different approaches, with unspecific definitions and incomparable methods of measurement which make a comparison between these impossible "regarding social presence, its determinants and consequences, and its defining role in online group learning" (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 140).

*Social presence* in its most common definition is the perception that the other person is "real" in an interaction in an online learning setting (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). A result of strong social presence, as commonly defined, could be a sign of good rapport among the students and between them and their instructor, the building of relationships within a computer-mediated classroom. Lacking social presence can lead to feelings of isolation on the student's side and in its extreme, disengagement of the student (Swan, 2023). Face-to-face interactions differ from computer-mediated environments, especially when the online part

consists of asynchronous communication and is perceived as constrained in respect to communication (Nardi, 2020, p. 50). This requires special attention.

Research on social presence has been conceived by Short et al. (1976), defining it as “the degree of salience of the other person in a mediated interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal interaction” (p. 65). Salience is a term used in social psychology to describe something as standing out, of significance, against a background (Pezzo, 2007). According to Kehrwald (2008, p. 91), two different strands of research in this area developed, namely media richness and relational approaches. The first, Media Richness Theory, was formulated by Daft and Lengel in 1986. Here, the richness of mediated communication was measured against face-to-face interaction, making those media rich which could be as close to real communication as possible, compared to lean media settings which contained significantly less social cues (Kehrwald, 2008, p. 91; Trevino et al., 1987). With technological progress, the second strand of research became more prominent, which focused on the quality of relational aspects in evolving social presence theory (Shin, 2001). It included not only the perception of others in a mediated context, but also how tangible (McLeod et al., 1997) and how affective connections could be (Swan & Shih, 2019). Swan & Shih found that students perceived social presence differently, as high and as low social presence, and changed their respective communicative behaviour because of it (Swan & Shih, 2019). The ability “to project [oneself] socially and affectively into a community of inquiry” (Rourke et al., 1999, p. 52) was introduced by Rourke et al. Human agency became an important factor with the participant as a focal point, depending on the context (Rourke et al., 1999) and type of task (Yoo & Alavi, 2001; Tu, 2001, 2002). Gunawardena (2017) researched cultural aspects in social presence theory as did Tu (2001).

By 2017, concepts and definitions of social presence had been overextended, so much so that Öztok & Kehrwald proposed either “moving beyond, going back, or killing social presence” (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 259). To them, there has been a conflation of the nature of social presence and the effects of social presence, “what [it] is and what it does” (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 261). In social presence theory, phenomena like “identity, intimacy and connectedness” (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 263) which are part of already established psychological and sociological discourses, are inadequately reassigned or reinvented to explain and expand educational technology research. The effect is that social presence’s analytic rigor is compromised: “it explains nothing at all” (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 259).

Öztok & Kehrwald (2017) are critical of the so-called Community of Inquiry approach (Garrison et al., 1999), “[as] this seems to have been extrapolated beyond support to suggest that social presence is responsible for all interpersonal engagements or knowledge sharing in

technology-mediated spaces” (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 261). Also, the ability to project oneself and feel the other’s presence is seen as problematic (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997), because it combines social presence and the concept of identity, where a better differentiation would be more beneficial (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017). A sense of community or connection, so Öztok & Kehrwald, is a product of social presence, not social presence itself (Swan & Shih, 2019). And lastly, seen mainly as a capability of the medium and how true (or rich/lean) it is to real life perception (Lombard & Ditton, 1997), the original connection to the psychological aspect of the theory is left out (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 262).

Öztok & Kehrwald propose this definition of social presence instead:

[It is] the subjective feeling of being with other salient social actors in a technologically mediated space. It is the sense of ‘being there, together’ when ‘being there’ does not involve physical presence. This definition is predicated on the sense that there is an other (or others) in the technology-mediated space and that the others are potentially viable partners for social interaction. We believe this definition is fruitful because it underscores the inter-subjective nature of social presence: it is constructed dialogically and is a combination of the self and others [...]. (Öztok & Kehrwald, 2017, p. 263)

Kreijns et al. (2024, p. 4) classify four major categories of social presence theory (see Table 1): (1) perceiving the other person as “real” by medium attributes only, also called technological determinism, (2) perceiving the other person as “real” through medium attributes, social context and individual attributes, (3) the ability “to project oneself” as “real” person, identifying with the group or community, and (4) the critical literacy approach.

**Table 1. Classification of different Social Presence Models following Kreijns**

Category	Example
(1) perceiving the other person as “real” by medium attributes only	Technological Determinism (Short et al., 1976; Kuyath & Winter, 2019)
(2) perceiving the other person as “real” through medium attributes, social context and individual attributes	Kreijns working model (e.g. 2022)
(3) the ability “to project oneself” as “real” person, identifying with the group or community	Community of Inquiry Framework (Garrison, 2015)
(4) the critical literacy approach	Social Presence Model (Whiteside, 2015)

Source: own representation following Kreijns (2024, p.4)

Technologically determined or facilitated explanations focus on the attributes of the communication medium used, this is category (1). Short et al. (1976) is the first to define social presence and he does so based on technological aspects. A more modern example is Kuyath &

Winter (2019), who examine instant messaging in connection to media richness theory and social presence.

The Community of Inquiry Framework (CoI) by Garrison et al. (2010) belongs to category (3) and sees social presence as one of three presences of the learning experience, next to teaching presence and cognitive presence in their framework. “[In its 2009 revision], the initial emphasis [of the social presence construct of the CoI-Framework shifted] from interpersonal relationships to identification with and processes in supporting the creation of a cohesive community of inquiry.” (Garrison, 2015, p. 73). It is the most prominent approach in this area of research (Kreijns et al., 2024).

Belonging to category (4), Whiteside (2015) focuses on social presence alone in her Social Presence Model (SMP). She found five elements to be active in computer-mediated communication (CMC) courses: affective association, community cohesion, instructor involvement, interaction intensity, and knowledge and experience. Social presence, for her, is a “master conductor that synchronizes the instructor, students, norms, academic content, learning management system (LMS), media and tools, instructional strategies, and outcomes within a learning experience.” (Whiteside, 2015, p. 63) She later expands on the Social Presence Model as a critical literacy (Whiteside, 2017). Her research covers social presence in connection to blended learning:

[In] blended learning environments and programs, social presence plays a critical role because the multimodal shifts in learning environments and technologies create unique challenges and opportunities for teaching and learning with profound consequences for learners and instructors [...]. (Whiteside, 2017, p. 138)

Kreijns et al. (2024) position themselves in category (2). In this thesis at hand, the choice for the working model by Kreijns et al. (2022) and its expansion, the SIPS model, by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) are more suitable for the specific setting of JWL’s blended learning conception and this research, because it allows to examine this setup in a conceptual framework which can help the analysis later on. For the purpose of completeness, it should be noted that Kreijns et al. in 2024 included blended learning approaches, yet focused on “the concept of social presence and its antecedents, [not] how social presence affects learning processes and outcomes” (Kreijns et al., 2024, p. 2). This would exceed the scope of this work.

Coming back to the review of 28 different social presence models presented by Kreijns (2022), with Öztok’s & Kehrwald’s criticism in mind, social presence becomes a muddled affair. “In other words, how are the findings of the social presence research and their usefulness for designing online learning to be interpreted when different definitions and measures of social presence are used?” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 154).

### 2.1.2 Extending Social Presence: Sociability and Social Space

The working model proposed by Kreijns et al. (2022) for OGL takes a fresh look at the original technological determinist approach that Short et al. (1976) introduced, to see what can be recovered. Kreijns et al. (2022) introduce - or rather return - to a three-partite model from 2004, developed for CSCL environments, for understanding the phenomenon of perceiving others as real in mediated communication: social presence, sociability and social space, as influencing each other (Kreijns et al., 2024).

- *Social presence* covers both the physical attributes of CMC tools and platforms as well as the “contingency of individual and social factors such as personality, motivations, social contacts, social processes, and so forth” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 158). They thereby state that social presence is not only commanded by technological attributes. “The term physical ‘real’ [...] refers to the extent to which a person feels the presence of these other people and is subsequently ready to interact with them because they *seem* [emphasis in original] to be real in many aspects” (Kreijns et al., 2024, p. 2).
- *Sociability* serves as a “medium attribute” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 160). It covers the aspect of being perceived as real because of what the medium allows, the capabilities of the medium, e.g. the platform, and its social affordances (p. 161). A typical example for a device with social affordances would be a coffee machine where people gather to have conversations, “off-task” and “on-task” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 233), depending on the coffee machine’s location in a space to be social in or in a meeting room. People, e.g. learners, make use of the “sociability potential” (Kreijns et al., 2004, p. 157) afforded by the learning environment, and create social space through their social interactions. Basically, “sociable environments enable and facilitate affiliation, interpersonal relationships, trust, respect, satisfaction, social cohesiveness, and good working relationships, and cohesion” (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016, p. 5).
- A well-functioning, sound *social space* is “manifested by a sense of community, group climate, mutual trust, social identity, and group cohesion” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 159). Also, tasks like “elaborating, questioning and defining” (Kreijns et al., 2004, p. 156) covering the cognitive aspect of the acquisition of knowledge and building of competence take place. Thus, social space is a “group attribute” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 159), it’s about “trust building between peers” (Vrieling-Teunter et al., 2022, p. 1). In this space, group participants develop or adhere to specific sets of “norms and values, rules and roles, and beliefs and ideals” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 159). These cultural artefacts lead to experiences of a common social identity, cohesiveness of the group, a sense of connection, trust and belonging, a specific



climate and atmosphere. This enables learning through “productive social interactions” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 160) that are meaningful.

Summing up the individual elements, Kreijns et al. conclude that a sound social space needs “socioemotional interaction” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 231) for a successful social context when learning collaboratively. Then,

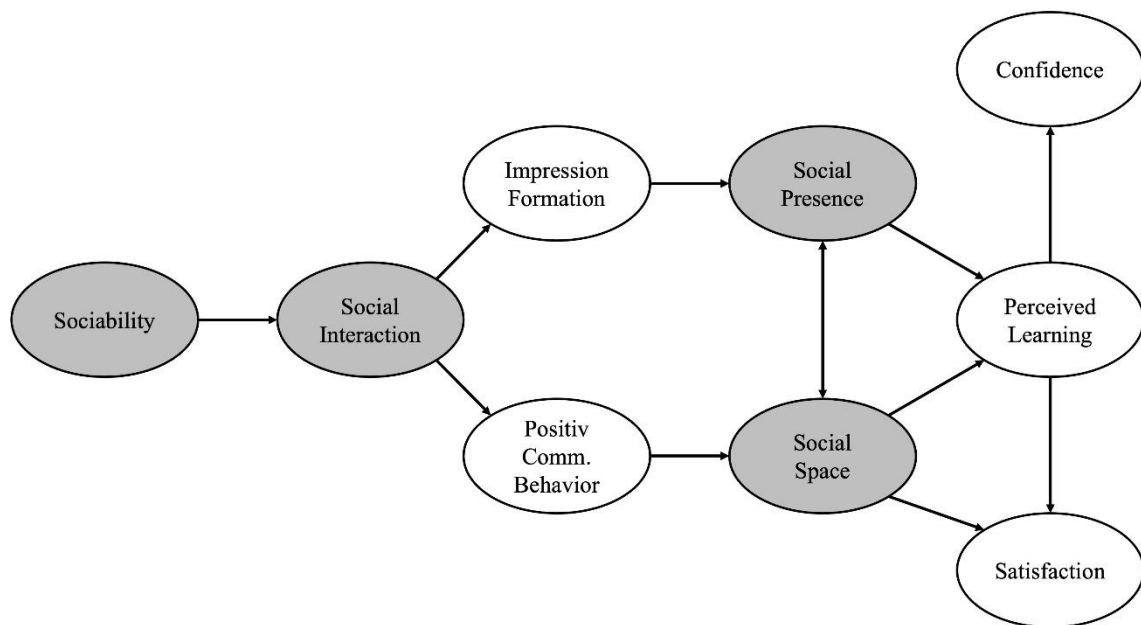
“[the] extent to which the social space becomes sound depends on the *social presence* [emphasis in original] of the participants; the degree to which people experience the other as ‘real’ people in the communication. [...], we explain that this degree of ‘realness’ of the other is codetermined by the CSCL environment’s sociability” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 231).

Kreijns’ model, conceived for CSCL and OGL, has been tested for the use of discussion groups, with group sizes from small (4-5 members) to larger (16-17 members), with the result being that smaller groups are more preferable and more conducive to sociability, social space and group cohesion (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016, p. 13).

### 2.1.3 Social Interaction as a Further Extension

Based on Kreijns’ conception from 2013, Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) emphasize the role of *social interaction*, proposing a model with the acronym SIPS (Sociability, Social Interaction, Social Presence, Social Space). They describe social interaction as “[the] amount and frequency of communication between the given student and his [or her] peers” (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017, p. 482) Social interaction fosters mutual learning and the creation of social space for a shared understanding of “trust, sense of community, and strong interpersonal relationships” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 229). Social presence, according to Weidlich & Bastiaens, focuses largely on student-student interaction, with Moore’s different types of interaction in online and distance learning in mind (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017; Moore, 1989; cf. Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006 f.). The SIPS model is tailored for online and distance learning and is shown in FIG. 1.

As can be seen below in Fig. 1, the sociability of the Learning Management System or platform used allows for social interactions by the students. Through these interactions, the impression of the other person is formed (Walther, 1993), resulting in the perception of social presence of that person; and also positive communicative behaviour, which establishes a positive climate and group cohesiveness, which leads to a sound social space. Social space itself is also impacted by social presence. This SIPS model was streamlined in that there are no variables for social affordances nor pedagogical techniques; there is no bidirectional flow; and lastly, it deviates from Kreijns (2004; 2013) in as much as sociability is not directly linked to social presence (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017).



**FIG. 1. The SIPS model and outcome variables.**

Source: adapted from Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017, p. 481)

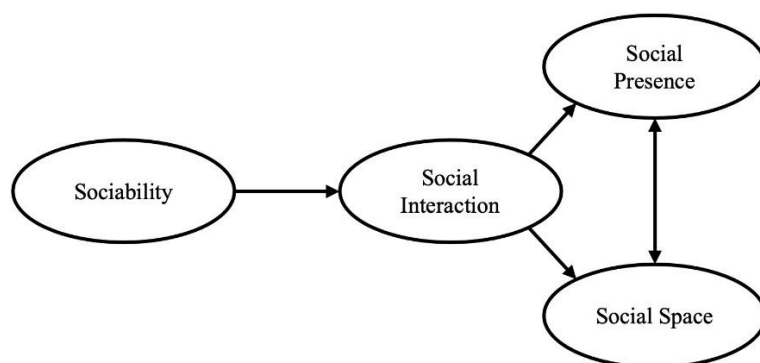
Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) tested if social space is distinct from social presence with this model. They found out that social interaction is the main driver for social space, whereas the link between social interaction and social presence is weaker than expected. That means for teachers and instructional designers, that

- in the design of sociable environments, easy to use communication functions may be a valuable addition,
- to enlarge the perception of social presence in the design, the possibilities of social interaction need to be strengthened, because these contribute to the forming of individual impressions of participants,
- teachers and instructional designers ought to consider social interaction as one of the strongest drivers for creating a sound social space.
- As there is only a small effect of social presence on social space, social presence alone cannot foster a good learning atmosphere and interpersonal connections that create a sound social space, which asks for additional attention.
- In respect to satisfaction, teachers and instructional designers ought to create possibilities for a sound social space to emerge.

Based on Kreijns' original model (2013), this model clearly distinguishes between social presence and social space and shows how important it is to include sociable features into the learning design to bring about social interaction between students to generate a sound social space and thus satisfaction. Other studies based on different social presence theories which don't

distinguish between social presence and social space, attribute a strong, direct relationship between social presence and learner satisfaction. The result of the study by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) is the finding that social space is the dominant driver for student satisfaction, not social presence.

For this research, a simplified model will be used, consisting of sociability, social interaction, social presence and social space:



**FIG. 2. Simplified SIPS Model**

Source: own representation, based on Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017, p. 481)

Social interaction in an online environment can be classified as three different types of interaction: learner-content interaction, learner-instructor interaction, and learner-learner interaction (Moore, 1989). These three types may occur simultaneously (Koskey & Benson, 2017), depending on the task. Also, learner-to-learner interaction takes place in one-on-one settings, in small groups or with all learners of a course (Oyarzun et al., 2018), with or without instructors present (Moore, 1989). The inter-learner group interaction between students is described as an “extremely valuable resource for learning, and sometimes even essential”, especially when face-to-face is combined with “distance education techniques” (Moore, 1989, p. 5).

Kreijns et al. point out that “the informal, social-emotional processes are not typically the focus of instructional design” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 230), whereas cognitive interaction is paid special attention to and serves a task-oriented function. Drawing up the picture of a real-life classroom and contrasting this to “the hallway, the canteen, the places outside the building” (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 230), outside the direct online learning setting, there is not much space in online learning for the socio-emotional dimension. Weidlich & Bastiaens describe these socio-emotional variables as “(1) concerned with the social realm, more specifically the sociality between fellow students and (2) [as] affective in that they generally relate to a non-cognitive aspect of the learning experience” (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2019, p. 2). They define “social

interaction or student-student interaction” (p. 3) as the process where students are aware of the social presence of their peers inside the learning environment, within a sound social space, and communicate with each other. Social interaction here can be “spontaneous yet sustained” (p. 3). This, they say, is contextual social interaction, as opposed to designed social interaction, a distinction which goes back to Borokhovski et al. (2012).

Two kinds of interaction are at play in student-student interaction according to Borokhovski et al., the contextual interaction, where students have the opportunity to interact with each other without collaboration, and the designed interaction, with the intent to get students to cooperate and collaborate. According to Koskey & Benson (2017), the kind most adequate is dependent on the learning objectives:

[For] example, if a goal is to expose students to multiple viewpoints, self-reflect, share resources with other students, or obtain feedback from other students, contextual interaction would serve the purpose. If, however, the goal is for students to be able to evaluate and create through debating viewpoints, developing a learning community, or collaborating to create a product or an artefact, then designed interaction is more appropriate. (Koskey & Benson, 2017, p. 272).

All three types of interaction (student-content, student-teacher and student-student) can have a positive effect on student learning, yet student-student interaction in a review study proved to be the most fruitful approach regarding student achievement (Bernard et al., 2009). Students by themselves don’t necessarily interact with other students in an online course even when expected to. A study by An et al. (2009), where student interaction in an asynchronous learning environment was examined, highlighted that the facilitation strategy employed by the teacher leads to more or less activity on the discussion board, depending on the required number of postings and the teacher’s presence through commentary on the boards. When voluntary, students tend to only fulfil the minimal requirements, a so-called “I agree”-syndrome may take hold of the interaction (Koskey & Benson, 2017). When there is too much presence of the instructor on the boards, students tend to answer the teacher, not each other (An et al., 2009). Oyarzun et al. (2018) stress that it is not so much the quantity of interaction but the quality, which is harder to measure.

#### **2.1.4 Social Presence in Text-Based, Asynchronous Environments**

JWL’s online learning environment is largely based on a text-based and asynchronous discussion forum of the LMS and web-based trainings (see chapter 2.2.3.2). Globally connected classrooms require comparable technical standards, which in the present example of JWL limits the possibilities of instructional design and its applications to a basic level in favour of technical availability and local internet supply. Thus, the discussion board is the main component for

online interaction between the students based in different refugee camps around the globe. For these reasons, a further theory based on social presence will be taken into consideration to expand the already presented models of Kreijns et al. (2022) and Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017). Sociability – according to them - describes what the medium and its affordances allow for.

From the perspective of technological determinism, one could conclude that the limited functionality only allows a small interaction space for students and restricts social presence. Walther et al. (1992) argue in *Social Information Processing Theory* (SIPT) that individuals are very well able to create a satisfying social presence by adapting to the communication environment, making it dependent on the interactants, not the medium. Even though in text-based CMC where there are fewer cues, both verbally and nonverbally, intimacy can be produced equally well, even though it might take longer to achieve it. “Because information exchange occurs at a slower rate, relationship formation requires longer periods of time to achieve development comparable to [face-to-face] interaction [...]” (Ramirez Jr & Zhang, 2007, p. 291). Individuals who use text-based CMC are capable of even higher levels of social presence compared to face-to-face interaction, Walther et al. added in a further study. He objected to what he called “deficit theories of social presence” (Walther, 1994, p. 481). Also, to increase social presence in leaner environments such as text-based, asynchronous discussion forums, “modality switching,” for example the additional use of messenger services such as WhatsApp, can improve a feeling of connectedness among the students, and thus strengthen social presence to a certain extent. Distraction and the number of messages are two disadvantages of such back channel communications (Stone & Logan, 2018).

## **2.2 The Jesuit Concept of Cura Personalis**

The Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is used to describe the care for the whole person and will be approached from different angles in the following part: first, the historical dimension of the term is being explored. In the second part, its role in Ignatian education will receive attention. It needs to be mentioned that whenever the focus is on JWL, not on Jesuit education in a general sense, it will be especially indicated. How Ignatian education was put into a refugee context by the JRS in Lebanon follows, before a look at the specific educational blended learning setting of JWL will complete this section.

### **2.2.1 Historical Dimension of Cura Personalis**

The meaning and practice of the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is somewhat elusive and hard to pinpoint. Ignatian Pedagogy has its roots in the experiences and writings of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Jesuit order, and was developed further throughout

the centuries. The term *cura personalis* itself was first coined in 1934 by Władimir Ledóchowski SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). In 1972, it was taken up in a homily by Superior General Pedro Arrupe SJ and Laurence J. McGinley SJ (Geger, 2014). McGinley historicized the term *cura personalis* by writing “what Jesuits 400 years ago [*sic*] called ‘*cura personalis*,’ [is] the concern, care, attention, even love of the teacher for each student – in an atmosphere [*sic*] of deep personal trust” (McGinley, cited in: Geger, 2014, p. 7).<sup>1</sup> There is no document prior to Ledóchowski’s using this terminology. According to the Jesuit pedagogue Casalini, Ledóchowski might have introduced the term in contradistinction to then flourishing theories and changing practices in the educational realm of the 1930s. His point of view was that next to the subjects teachers taught, they ought to be trained pedagogically and practically (Casalini, 2021).

Casalini sees the common philosophical ground of the concept of *cura personalis* and Jesuit pedagogy throughout the order’s history, as it reflects “a strongly humanistic approach to education” reaching back to the sixteenth century, when the founder of the order St. Ignatius of Loyola combined his sense of spirituality with a model of humanistic education that soon made Jesuit schools stand out across Europe. “This philosophy was rooted in a specifically Jesuit culture of care, the dynamic and goals of which were intertwined with those transmitting knowledge (*tradere disciplinas*) [emphasis in original] and educating a broad array of students” (Casalini, 2021, p. 247). According to Casalini,

“[...] what made the Jesuit schools so successful over time was their care for the whole person of each of their students, a process that had as its goal the formation of a fully-fledged spirit, an upright character, a sound body, and a learned person, in support of the common good.” (Casalini, 2021, p. 256)

Stemming from the beginning of the early 1930s, *cura personalis* has gained traction and has become a standard expression of Jesuit interpersonal values (Geger, 2014).

### 2.2.2 Cura Personalis in Ignatian Pedagogy

In 2007, Superior General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ, delivered a speech on the concept of *cura personalis*, opening a workshop on “Spiritual Accompaniment in the Ignatian Tradition” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 9). According to him, *cura personalis* is “both a characteristic of spiritual accompaniment and a constitutive element in Jesuit education and formation” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 10). Talking about the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, “‘*cura personalis*’ is expressed in the human acts of ‘giving’ and ‘receiving’, an act of transmission and consequently of reception” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 10). According to him, the Jesuit pedagogical approach requires to be

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<sup>1</sup> Original text only available in the University Archives St. Peter’s University, Jersey City, NJ p. 17 FN 8.

familiar with “the personal history of each [pupil, to lead by example and to] love these students, knowing them personally – ‘cura personalis’ - living in respectful familiarity with them” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 16). Teachers should be able to cater to the needs of each student. It is described as the “pivot” of the Spiritual Exercises, and within the Jesuit Society, the “pivot of all Ignatian education, which envisages a personalised pedagogy” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 16). For this, “not only academic excellence, professional specialisation or the most advanced scientific research [are the goal], but through these undertakings the integral formation of the person for responsible life in the people of God and in human society” (Kolvenbach SJ, 2007, p. 16).

According to the theologian Geger SJ, three main aspects define the concept of cura personalis:

The first [meaning] is holistic education that attends to spiritual and moral dimensions of a person in addition to his or her intellectual development. Second, *cura personalis* denotes an education that is respectful of the unique needs and identity of each student. Finally, it can signify the duty of administrators and Jesuit superiors to show solicitude for individuals working in their institutions [...]. (Geger, 2014, p. 6)

Ignatian Education stands for a holistic education, touching the spirit, heart and hand (“spiritu, corde, practice”), coined by Jerónimo Nadal in the founding years of the order (Spermann et al., 2015, p. 19). The General Curia of the Society of Jesus states that “the intellectual, affective, moral and spiritual development of every student [is at the heart of cura personalis,] helping each one to develop a sense of self-worth and to become a responsible individual within the community” (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017, p. 306). Looking after the individual students’ needs, Jesuit teachers should establish a mutual, caring connection with the student which is described as personally interested in the development of each student’s full potential (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017). Rao et al. speak of this as a threefold of “advice, feedback and mentoring that is sensitive to individual circumstances” (Rao et al., 2021, p. 71). As a result, the students are supported step-by-step in the development of Christian values which lead to an orientation that is not based as much on the ego but also considers other people’s needs (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017).

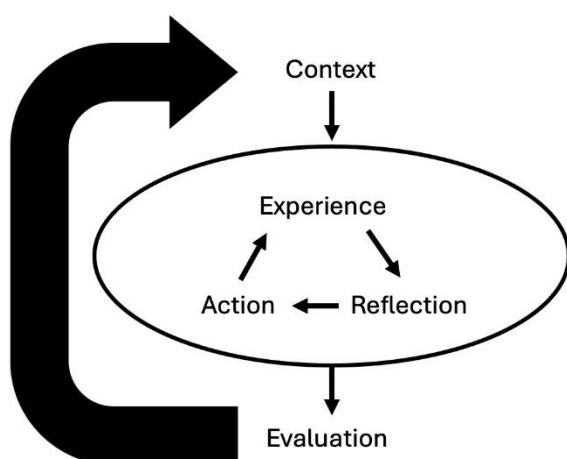
“[The] question is not just *what* we teach but *how* we [Jesuits] teach [emphasis in original]” (Rao et al., 2021, p. 73). An Ignatian school curriculum for instance is not organized around the materials covered, but aligned to the person, the student’s ability and personality, each according to their own pace (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017). Cura personalis includes the pursuit of excellence, high academic standards and rigor, which are not lowered to meet the students, rather, in Ignatian pedagogy each student is supported so that they can reach their full potential, academically, professionally and personally. Challenging

students is one way of reaching this goal in “relationship-rich environments” (Rao et al., 2021, p. 73). They distinguish between philosophy and technique of *cura personalis*. This important differentiation will be picked up later, as the techniques are reminiscent of techniques used for creating social presence (see chapter 2.4.2.).

The Jesuit General Curia states that “‘*cura personalis*’ is not limited to the relationship between teacher and student; it affects the curriculum and the entire life of the Jesuit institution. All members of the Jesuit educational community are concerned with one another and learn from one another” (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017, p. 306). Accumulating what helped students learn and grow helped formulate Ignatian educational principles. Generally speaking,

[t]eachers and administrators, both Jesuit and lay, are more than academic guides. They are involved in the lives of the students, [...]. They try to live in a way that offers an example to the students, and they are willing to share their own life experiences. (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1986/2017, p. 306)

Geger, himself a Jesuit, emphasizes that the practice of *cura personalis* is also important for educational and administrative staff since they are “more committed and willing to help” (Geger, 2014, p. 11) and thus more prone to overwork due to general helpfulness. Here, the concept of *cura personalis* serves as element of the self-care of the facilitators, faculty, and staff to actively set boundaries to prevent “burnout and cynicism” (Rao et al., p. 74).



**FIG. 3. The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP)**

Source: Stadnyk (2021,, p. 9)

From its beginning, Ignatian pedagogy has accumulated methods and techniques eclectically from various sources. In 1993, the Society of Jesus formulated their own pedagogical guidelines called the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) to establish a clear distinction between Ignatian Pedagogy and other, mainly secular approaches to education (The General Curia of the Society



of Jesus, 1993/2017). It uses a cyclical model of experience, reflection, and action to map any learning process or structure (see FIG. 3). Framed by context and evaluation, this learning model shows which care goes into the formation of the students through the design of learning with a “practical teaching strategy” (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1993/2017, p. 367). According to the Jesuits, the IPP helps the students to develop critical thinking skills, to learn how to apply knowledge and to self-reflect on their learning experience.

Among the general value statements of the Jesuits, of which *cura personalis* is part of, “Men and Women for Others” (Rega et al., 2024) expresses the aspect of conduct with others, altruism and solidarity. For JWL, the “core worldview is to educate people to transform themselves and the world they live in” (Rega et al., 2024, p. 144). Personal growth of the students is central to this value-based education.

### **2.2.3 Jesuit Educational Projects in the Context of Flight and Displacement**

#### **2.2.3.1 Jesuit Refugee Service’s schools in Lebanon**

From within the field of research, investigations of the application of *cura personalis* in education are scarce. In an ethnographic case study from 2021, the Jesuit researcher Stadnyk examines the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)<sup>2</sup> schools in Lebanon for the children of Syrian refugees with a special focus on *cura personalis* “in action” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 74). According to him, the application of the concept of *cura personalis* in Lebanon Refugee Schools shows the holistic approach of Jesuit education as humanitarian aid to non-Catholics, which can also serve as a tool for mission. “When students receive *cura personalis* the hope of a student should increase and help them open their eyes to opportunity and potential, which ultimately is the freedom of choice” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 64). While these attributes cannot be operationalized in this master thesis, it nevertheless shows an interpretation of the effects of *cura personalis* from a Jesuit point of view. According to Stadnyk, the use of *cura personalis* teaches the students self-worth, acceptance and love by others, which should motivate students to surpass themselves and make decisions they had not previously thought of (Stadnyk, 2021).

In the understanding of Stadnyk, *cura personalis* serves first and foremost as acknowledgement of the other person, before the care of the person comes the knowing of the person (see p. 202). Regarding the JRS, the interviewed Regional Director is quoted: “[We] are

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<sup>2</sup> The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international faith-based NGO founded in 1980 and “accompan[ies], serve[s], and advocate[s] for refugees and displaced people” worldwide. One part of their work are their educational programmes, which also cover post-secondary and professional courses. (Jesuit Refugee Service, n.d.)

not dealing with numbers of people or a group of people. We are dealing with individuals and each one of them. He or she has history and circumstances and it should be taken into consideration somehow” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 132). Stadnyk writes that accompanying and cura personalis count much more than material aid, it is a sign of valuing the person in distress (p. 66). Also, “[cura] personalis helps to demonstrate that humans are valued more than just their scholarly abilities [...]” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 216).

In a wider context of humanitarian aid provided by secular and non-secular organizations, the educational focus is a clear distinguishing feature in Jesuit humanitarian aid. According to Stadnyk, the educational offer is at the same time a central tool in the mission of non-Catholics (Stadnyk, 2024).

### 2.2.3.2 Jesuit Worldwide Learning’s Blended Learning Set-up

Jesuit Worldwide Learning’s blended learning set-up will receive attention at this point due to its particular construction, which is of importance to the understanding and the focus of this theory chapter. JWL as a faith-based international organisation offers tertiary education to people who are “socially and geographically marginalized, such as refugees and internally displaced people, minorities, and remote and poor communities” (Rega et al., 2024, p. 143). To enrol, students must have graduated from high school and prove a B1 level of English for the professional courses and a B2 for academic programmes. JWL’s local Community Learning Centre (CLC), which is situated in the refugee camp, offers computer pools and classrooms for learning. Participants of the surrounding areas are also permitted as members of the host communities. The offer of courses includes programmes that are highly applicable to the students’ situation, for instance the Peace Leader professional programme or a bachelor in Sustainable Development (BASD).

Students follow culturally sensitive web-based trainings and are given assignments on a weekly basis. For support, an on-site facilitator works with the group of local students, while in the global classroom of the Learning Management System (LMS) peer feedback is given to the assignments before they are submitted to the online facilitator who grades and gives feedback. The online facilitators (faculty) mostly come from Jesuit universities around the world.

Considering the technology used for blended learning, for people from a marginalized background its use is often the only chance at learning and acts as an enabler for education. The current technical system was developed specifically for JWL from 2017 on, to accommodate low internet connectivity at the CLCs run by JWL. Contents are downloaded onto a server throughout the times when the load is low and then later distributed when required. In this set-up, the online global classroom of the course acts as the input phase when communicating with faculty

situated at a partnering university (Mayr & Oppl, 2023). The students are globally mixed to achieve a diverse student body, including a 50% women/50% men ratio.

JWL students experience very limited mobility and their possibility to interact with peers from over [sic] countries and backgrounds is very remote; the global classroom is the element in the model that enables a worldwide exchange of thoughts to take place despite this lack of physical mobility. Through these global interactions, students are able to share their stories, viewpoints, and values and to open up to different perspectives. (Rega et al., 2024, p. 148)

This also includes dealing with their own prejudice, intercultural and/or religious, coming to a place where equality and respect is fostered, according to Rega et al. To keep discussions inclusive, faculty also moderate the online conversations; they coordinate with the on-site facilitator when there are intercultural issues to be dealt with to give the support needed. (Rega et al., 2024, p. 149).

Offline face-to-face meetings are offered at the local CLCs where collaborative learning and tutoring is guided by the on-site facilitator with a different set of students, those that are in the same location (Mayr & Oppl, 2023). “The on-site facilitators are never subject matter experts and will therefore not deliver subject-related support. Rather, they are trained to support the learning process [...]” (Mayr & Oppl, 2023, p. 2586). Here, the content is contextualised to the local environment, pastoral and academic care is provided and community building takes place (Rega et al., 2024). The on-site facilitator is also responsible for keeping the students motivated, for calling or visiting them whenever they see the need, for example when continuing this path of education is put into question, and to find solutions for the problem.

In total, around 20 hours workload each week are needed for the self-study materials distributed, activities online and the face-to-face meeting once a week with the on-site facilitator and local classmates (Mayr & Oppl, 2023). Courses last eight weeks and are stackable to adjust to the flexibility needed under the given circumstances. For students, one entry is through the Global English Language programme, which offers English classes. After reaching B1, students can follow seven professional courses or go on to B2 for a certificate in Liberal Studies, required for entering a Bachelor program in Sustainable Development or General Studies (Rega et al., 2024). Ignatian Pedagogy is used throughout the blended learning courses.

Web-based trainings, activities, assignments, forum, feedback, and the on-site meeting are the basic elements in the organisation of the courses of JWL. The asynchronous text-based global classroom within the learning management system, where the exchange with faculty and fellow students in the online classroom takes place, has several advantages: technically, the bandwidth used is lower; its asynchronous nature allows for flexibility of study time; all students can equally contribute (Swan & Shih, 2019, p. 116); reflections on the contributions of one’s

peers are more easily possible when creating one's own answer (Swan & Shih, 2019, p. 116). Lastly, for students whose mother tongue is not English, there is ample space to craft and correct their postings compared to face-to-face or synchronous video-based communications.

## 2.3 Care in Higher Education

The focus now is turned to the concept of care in higher education. It will be used as an ancillary concept for the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, as the theoretical findings about *cura personalis* are not extensive enough for this research. It shall prove helpful to operationalise the concept of *cura personalis* through comparison and expansion. Also, since it was difficult to identify literature on the topic of care in a blended learning context, both in person and online settings for care in higher education will be considered.

The subject of care itself and care in education received due attention in the 1980s and 1990s within the feminist movement in academia. In the western sphere of influence, the viewpoint of care scholarship shifted from virtue ethics<sup>3</sup> to care ethics (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 25) with relational approaches at the center. After looking into these conceptions of care in higher education (chapter 2.3.1), teacher-student relationships will be addressed (chapter 2.3.2) because of their centrality in Ignatian education and thus *cura personalis*.

### 2.3.1 Concepts of Care

As a secular academic field of study which can be connected to the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, caring in the teaching profession might provide further explanations for *cura personalis* and its effects upon the students. Feminists' names prominently shape the subject area of teacher care and care in education, among them Nel Noddings, Joan Tronto and Carol Gilligan, who in the 1980s began to redefine the (male) gaze upon women and women's (unpaid) care work (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 24). Like for Jesuit *cura personalis*, a precise definition for 'care' is difficult to grasp: "[It is a] highly amorphous concept (discourse, phenomenon, practice, perspective, ethics). [...] The word 'care' is not necessarily the best word; perhaps 'kindness', 'compassion', or 'empathy' would work better [...]" (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 1) As a working definition of care in education, Baker and Burke suggest:

[Care]/caring is understood [...] as a moral framework, an ethics, a discourse, and a set of practices that are the basis of the repair and maintenance of all that we consider to be

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<sup>3</sup> In moral philosophy, virtue ethics puts an emphasis on character and virtue. It stands for a rather paternalistic assuming of what help is needed, contrary to having a dialogue with the other(s). (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 24f.)

meaningful, and is essential for the upkeep of the moral, ethical, physical, social, emotional, economic, and philosophical dimensions of our lives. [...] (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 52f.)

Nel Noddings (2012b) sums up the main elements of an ethics of care in regard to education. The unequal distribution of power between teacher and student, between carer and cared-for calls for an awareness of it in educational contexts. Noddings presents a caring cycle consisting of the following steps:

1. Finding out the expressed needs of the student, in distinction to what the curriculum prescribes.
2. The teacher will “undergo motivational displacement” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 772), acting on behalf and with the cared-for in mind, thus providing help to the student. If a conflict of interest arises, two ways to proceed are possible: either the teacher responds positively to fulfil the request or the teacher has to decline and react in a way that maintains the caring relationship with the cared-for, allowing further communication to happen.
3. The student shows acknowledgement of this care in any manner; this response is the completion of the caring cycle. (Noddings, 2012b)

Noddings differentiates between “relational carers” and “virtue carers.” Virtue carers are the ones who assume the needs of their students, who don’t establish a relation of care and whose efforts don’t match the students’ actual needs. A relational carer/teacher is an attentive and empathic listener and will try to accommodate the expressed needs of students. In reaction to what the other might feel, the teacher empathically synchronizes, which is a result of caring. However, “empathic accuracy” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 775) through reflection and dialogue is necessary, not through attributing one’s own feelings in a specific situation but striving for a real perceiving of the other. “[The] empathy of care ethics is other-oriented, not self-oriented” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 777). In a climate of care, listening remains one of the main tasks. “It is the basic attitude that characterizes relations of care and trust [...]” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 780).

Noddings (2012a) highlights four elements of care in education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. This model has been used as a framework in research on care in education (see Table 2 in this chapter).

- *Modeling* care through behaviour and actions, the teacher in their relation to the students shows what care means and how it affects the relations with them.
- *Dialogue* about caring explains the teacher’s or students’ behaviours, what manifestations of care can look like and how they can be analysed and interpreted. Dialogue tells more about the cared-for and helps teachers to act accordingly. It promotes growth and invites reasoning.

- Immersing the students in *practice*, a “mentality” (Noddings, 2012a, p. 232) is produced which helps the students to assimilate this form of moral education. Instruction is best when it explicitly states the purpose of why students should e.g. work cooperatively, namely for learning understanding, sharing and supporting the other.
- Lastly, through *confirmation* the students experience affirmation and encouragement, which brings out the best in them. This is best done by knowing the other rather well, which asks for continuity and trust.

Teachers who care want to change the attitude of their students towards a caring perspective on life in all aspects, both professional and personal (Noddings, 2012b, p. 779). “We do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them” (Noddings, 1992, p. 228). Walker & Gleaves go one step further by reporting that teachers not only felt “compelled to care,” but had the urge “to make students different” (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 70) as one teacher participant expressed it.

[The] narrative surrounding these teachers’ beliefs that students are being empowered, being made intellectually richer because of their particular types of interactions with them, remains very powerful, and agrees with research into students’ testimonies that such relationships are precious and valued [...]. (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 74)

The following “‘exemplifiers’” helped select caring teachers for their study, whereby this list has not been arranged according to importance of the exemplifier - several different dimensions of care can occur at the same time.

[Caring teachers have] the ability to: listen to students, show empathy, support students, actively support students’ learning, give students appropriate and meaningful [feedback and] praise, have high expectations of work and behaviour, and finally, show an active concern in students’ personal lives. (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 66/68)

According to Tang et al., who also based their research on these exemplifiers (Tang et al., 2023), there is a tendency to marginalise caring pedagogy even though it is a global phenomenon in higher education teaching (Tang et al., 2024). Also, caring in higher education is not as common a subject for research as it is for caring in schools (Anderson et al., 2020).

*Online care* is different to face-to-face care, Velasquez et al. (2013) point out: the thoughtless application of face-to-face methods of care in online learning ignores the students’ differing needs and the affordances of the media used. Students may feel disembodied behind their screens, isolated, disengaged and not being truly perceived as person (Henriksen et al., 2022). The student-teacher interaction, which in face-to-face settings includes the teachers’ verbal and non-verbal cues for immediacy, can be hampered in online learning not only by missing social presence, but also by a “psychological and communicational gap between [teacher and student]” called transactional distance (Moore, 2018). It is “a space of potential

misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner” (Moore, 1991, p. 2 f.) The more students and teachers communicate with each other, the greater the amount of dialogue, the easier it is to minimise this transactional distance (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006; cf. Moore, 2018).

It takes careful design to create ongoing dialogue, an engaging lesson, a good course climate and sustained learning. A focus on care in face-to-face classes “[builds] on empathy and closeness, personal contact, embodied presence, [...] interaction [and] social connectedness” (Henriksen et al., 2022, p. 76). In contrast to this, in educational technology discourse, “the humanity of each student” is often overlooked, focusing on an agenda of efficiency, evaluation, outcomes etc. It is thus necessary to look at the distances and barriers technology creates socially. An important affordance of the Internet and digital communication is to build and maintain connections, so the distances and barriers are more of an indicator for “a lack of design for pedagogy of care in online spaces” (Henriksen et al., 2022, p. 77) and coming with that, a lack of social presence/social space/sociability. Since technology shapes the ways users use it, how can online platforms be designed so that a holistic way of education is possible, which includes caring relationships with others? An online pedagogy of care has to find different methods for replacing embodiment for students, because of the missing corporeal and physical cues of a face-to-face lesson. Holistic care includes dialogue as an important element - the exchange of information and experiences should be considered purposefully within the “sociability features of the platform” (Henriksen et al., 2022, p. 86). To foster a group identity, “learning [has to take] on connective qualities” (Henriksen et al., 2022, p. 87) for the whole group, creating social presence/social space. By carefully designing the learning experience, teachers “honor the idiosyncratic nature of each student’s experience, recognising their lives, curiosity, engagement, and well-being in all respects. [...] In online interactions [compared to face-to-face] care requires even more intentional design” (Henriksen et al., 2022, p. 88).

For Burke & Lamar, care is not only enacted in the course content, methods and classroom organization (Burke & Lamar, 2021). Including possibilities for pairing students for peer support or facilitating social interaction between students next to forums, synchronous tutorials and group work led by students carry the potential of creating relations between the participants. Technological innovations require time and patience of the teacher to strategically integrate and experiment with the tools regarding their interactivity, which is not necessarily granted or paid for by the institution. Robinson et al. (2020) look at online learning from an inclusive point of view, incorporating a focus of care. By actively anticipating more groups of students from marginalized backgrounds in the design phase they aim at “participation and achievement, underpinned by inclusive values” (Robinson et al., 2020, p. 99). The role of emotions and

affective aspects are framed by caring and care in online learning. “The capacity to be moved by the affective condition of the other” (Noddings, 2012b, p. 773) can augment the experience of online students and their instructors and yield student participation and persistence (Robinson et al., 2020, p. 100). Using Noddings’ four elements model of care as a framework (see this chapter), Al-Freih & Robinson (2023) apply the elements of this model in their study, which can be seen in the following table (cf. Burke & Larmar, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020; Rose & Adams, 2014).

**Table 2. Online care in education - Themes developed by Al-Freih & Robinson, following Noddings’ Model**

Element	Themes
Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor presence</li> <li>• Modelling care through course design</li> <li>• Opportunities for synchronous interaction</li> <li>• Student-centred teaching practices</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple purposes and tools for communication</li> <li>• Eliciting student feedback</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> </ul>
Practise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty readiness for online teaching</li> <li>• Intentional design for group interactions and activities</li> </ul>
Confirmation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple purposes of feedback</li> <li>• Personalized feedback</li> <li>• Timely feedback</li> <li>• Dialogic feedback</li> </ul>

Source: Al-Freih & Robinson (2023, p. 6)

Whereas Noddings focused on face-to-face teaching and learning, online learning has different properties; and due to the nature of online learning, different measures need to be applied by the teachers to create a climate of care and understanding. To counter the negative side-effects of studying online, “a significant role of forethought and intentional design and planning in establishing a climate of care and maintaining caring relations” (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 9) is necessary. Al-Freih & Robinson see this as an element missing in Noddings’ framework and call it “*Anticipating*” (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 10), making it a fifth element of online teacher care, next to the four elements presented in Table 2 above. Anticipating the potential needs of students in design and course content, clarity of structure, easy navigation, transparent communication, effective use of tools for learning, and ongoing support for student organization are just some of the strategies which can be employed (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 9).



### 2.3.2 Teacher-Student Relationship

Because teacher-student relationships (TSR) are central to *cura personalis*, a look at how TSRs are viewed in educational literature will now be undertaken. Care, for Hagenauer (2023), is one part of a well-functioning TSR. To establish a good TSR in higher education, several conditions must be met, above all interaction and reciprocity for a dynamic relationship as the basis. TSRs at university are formed between adults in a hierarchically structured relationship (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019), however, it depends on how this asymmetry is actually lived (Hagenauer et al., 2023). According to Karpouza & Emvalotis, there are different stages in the forming of such relationships, from „impersonal, formal and superficial“ (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019, p. 126) to personal, and depends on how far the teacher encourages the students to go and in how far they maintain professional standards (Hagenauer et al., 2023). Relationship building is a mutual process and the TSR deepens through shared experiences like academic work (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). Also, it builds on respect, appreciation, caring, understanding, trust and approachability, among others (Hagenauer et al., 2023). Establishing a TSR is not a linear process and shows complex dynamics and the process can falter when faced with obstacles, failed expectations or the crossing of boundaries deemed as inappropriate (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019).

For online learning, Burke & Lamar (2021) contend that it is the non-traditional students who, due to digital learning options, have gained access to education and lifelong learning and the flexibility it entails. The diversity of these students and their individual backgrounds and goals can pose challenges to the traditional educational system. It makes better and more emotionally engaging online learning experiences necessary that are both “transformative and empowering” (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 1). “Careful consideration of the human element and how to cultivate a strong sense of identity, belonging, and connectedness in the digital space” (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 2) is what is needed.

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of applied caring pedagogies became strikingly obvious in higher online education. As Baker & Burke write, “unlike power, care is most evident when it is absent” (Baker & Burke, 2023, p. 5). The more diverse the student body becomes, the more indispensable care and caring pedagogies, including inclusivity, become to higher education audiences. An element indicating the presence of care is a “meaningful instructor-student relationship built on trust, mutual respect, cooperation, receptivity, and ongoing dialogue” (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 9).

Feedback is an important element in online education (Robinson et al., 2023), especially personalized feedback provided in a caring learning environment, which makes students feel

recognized and helps them grow academically. One of the determinants that help foster a good TSR is showing personal interest in the work of a student. Dialogic feedback, which is given in a timely fashion and which provides helpful information on how to improve, as well as a general responsiveness of the teacher for further questions can encourage the student and create hopefulness rather than anxiousness (Pekrun et al., 2014). Consistency in quality and timely responses are key to a good feedback practice, whereas delays might dishearten the student and leave them in doubt over the quality of their work. Care is also expressed by a teacher who shows presence on the discussion boards, who replies to emails and makes announcements. Initiating peer-to-peer feedback, the instructor helps the students to think about what was being said or written more deeply, being helpful and providing a different point of view on the position given; an opportunity to exercise care towards their fellow students. Especially for first year-students and/or students with a non-traditional background, feedback serves as an important reinforcement of study motivation (Robinson et al., 2023).

## 2.4 Connecting Social Presence, Cura Personalis, and Care

Having explored social presence theory, the Jesuit concept of cura personalis and its ancillary care in higher education on its own, a look at how these topics can be linked and compared to each other will be undertaken in this chapter. First, similarities and differences between the concept of cura personalis and care in higher education will be presented. In a second step, the link between social presence and care, then social presence and cura personalis will be illustrated.

### 2.4.1 Cura Personalis and Care in Education

It seems apt to provide a comparison of the Jesuit concept of cura personalis and concepts of teacher care at this point from the research done in this thesis. In this juxtaposition, important aspects will be gathered for further consideration in Table 3.

**Table 3. Comparison of the Jesuit concept cura personalis and concepts of care in higher education**

	<b>Cura personalis</b>	<b>Care in HE</b>
General approach	Global holistic approach in Ignatian education	Depends on individual teacher and institution
Goal	Spiritual and moral development of the student	Ethical and moral development of the student
Focus	Centrality of the individual student	Individual support, other-oriented approach
Pedagogy used	IPP; personalized learning experience	depends on individual teacher and institution

TSR	Mutual trust and familiarity (TSR)	Trust on a professional basis (TSR)
Informed by	Informed by aspects of social justice in a Jesuit understanding	Informed by aspects of social justice in more secular contexts
Social approach	Relationship-rich environments	Relational approach
Role of teacher	Teachers as role models	Teachers as role models
Desired Effects	Increasing self-worth of the students  Changing students to serve others, altruism	Caring for self and others (students and teachers)  Mentality of caring changes students and their behaviours

Source: own representation

One of the key differences seems to be that applied teacher care in higher education is not institutionalised and depends on the individual teachers, whereas in the Ignatian tradition, *cura personalis* is one of the cornerstones of education. Stadnyk distinguishes the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* from teacher care, focusing on TSRs: “Particularly, for education, a genuine form of *cura personalis* occurs when teachers and students are in a *mutual caring relationship* [emphasis added] rather than a charitable delivery of care given from a teacher to a student” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 47). Jesuits stress the appropriateness of contacts between Jesuit and lay teachers and students in Jesuit institutions: “Knowing the students and their context is a key aspect for understanding them and building an appropriate relationship with them” (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 167). Another angle on this relationship is found in the document “Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical approach” (1993), which describes the Jesuit relationship more deeply: “For such a relationship of authenticity and truth to flourish between teacher and student, mutual trust and respect that grows out of a continuing experience of the other as a genuine companion in learning is required” (The General Curia of the Society of Jesus, 1993/2017, p. 381).

Walker & Gleaves found two main elements of teacher care in higher education in the literature they consulted: “the active fostering of and maintenance of *pedagogic relationships* [emphasis added] above all else, and within these, the privileging of trust, acceptance, diligence, and individual attentiveness” (Walker & Gleaves, 2016, p. 66). It is the argument of the author of this thesis that these two approaches enrich each other through comparison. Both parties want to change their students through leading by example and promoting their values, that is caring for self and others (Noddings’ teacher care) and “women and men for others” from within a Christian Jesuit concept.

### **2.4.2 Linking Care and Cura Personalis with Social Presence**

Examining the connection between social presence (in a general sense, not referring to Kreijns model) and teacher care in the context of online nursing courses, Plante & Asselin (2014) came up with a list of best practices and evidence-based strategies. They found that there was hardly any research looking into both constructs in combination, but that both had “similar and overlapping themes” (Plante & Asselin, 2014, p. 222). According to them, it is important to teach students behaviours of caring in online courses, with teachers impersonating caring examples. Their list of best practices to create social presence and caring in an online environment includes 18 items, among them caring language in all communications, encouragement for interactions, timely feedback, open dialogue and supporting others. They state the need of a combination of care and social presence:

Faculty who teach online classes are challenged to create caring social engagement through interactions that promote a sense of belonging and a sense of community. This perspective actualizes the human potential of interpersonal relationships, the trust of self and others, and of awareness of others’ feelings (Plante & Asselin, 2014, p. 222).

Coming back to the Jesuit approach of cura personalis, Rao et al. (2021) distinguish between the philosophy of cura personalis and its technique used in their specific institution. In the online context, this seems similar to techniques used to promote social presence. They stress the use of relationship-building, using asynchronous icebreakers and networking techniques among the students. Social interaction among the peer group and with faculty should be strongly promoted. “Building a warm and open relationship with the class encourages students to bring their most authentic selves to the class.” (Rao et al., 2021, p. 74). With a focus on online courses, students are encouraged to use the LMS for sharing information about themselves and commenting on classmates’ introductions. Faculty participate in these activities to get to know the context and experience of the students (part of the IPP).

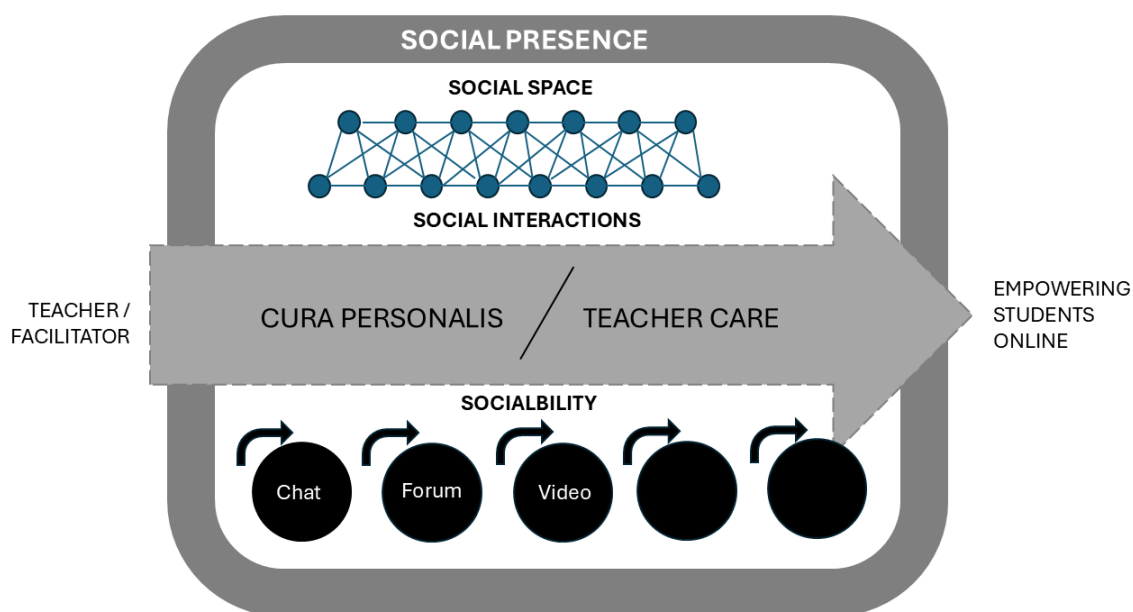
## **2.5 Summary and Subject of Investigation**

A basic background for this thesis has been established in this theory section by looking closely at social presence theory, the Jesuit concept of cura personalis, and care in higher education in person and online. Kreijns’ working model (2022) and its expanded version by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017), SIPS, deliver relevant distinctions through their precise definitions of what the theoretical concept of social presence is and is not and what it can accomplish. The differentiation between social presence and social space helps to build a better understanding of the complex process of feeling recognized and acknowledged in an online environment in this thesis. Because of the sociability aspect, human agency must be considered, as shown in the

SIPT approach by Walther et al. (1992), because it's the individual students who use this online space and fill it with their own experiences, creativity and care and thereby shape it.

While *cura personalis* and teacher care are not the same, it has proven fruitful to explore both in connection. Due to the scarcity of scientific literature on Jesuit education and *cura personalis* "in action" (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 74) in an online environment, the concept of teacher care with its framework adapted from Noddings (2012a) and its extension by a fifth element for online teaching, "anticipating" (Al-Freih & Robinson, 2023, p. 10), can serve as ancillary theoretical construct for examining the practice and effects of *cura personalis* at Jesuit Worldwide Learning. Care affects the climate of teaching and the well-being of students and teacher. Students are encouraged and affected by their teachers, their way of handling the teaching, and their fellow students. Teachers in turn want to change their students towards being caring and considerate in their own relationships with fellow students and other people.

The following preliminary model was developed on the basis of this research:



**FIG. 4. Preliminary model on how cura personalis/teacher care connects to SIPS**

Source: own representation

As depicted in Fig. 2, under the influence of *cura personalis*/teacher care, social presence is realised and social space established through shared interactions via the sociability functions of the online classroom. Social space hereby is the common ground, whereas sociability acts as an enabler for interactions, considering constraints to natural communication and affordances.

### 3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study is aimed at closing a gap in research, namely how social presence, social space and sociability are influenced by a specifically caring behaviour of the instructors in Higher Education in Emergencies. The programme researched is the Jesuit Worldwide Learning BA programme in Sustainable Development, which is delivered in a blended learning arrangement consisting of web-based trainings, a text-based discussion board used by a globally mixed audience, and on-site tutoring and exchange in person. For this study, students of the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi, which was selected by JWL Geneva, will be interviewed online.

Only little scientific research has been conducted in this area of online education. Most research on the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* and the practice of it in learning arrangements is published by members of the Jesuit Society. Outside the Jesuit environment, there's no research on the concept of *cura personalis* in a refugee setting published. The relevance of the thesis presented here will not only be interesting to researchers of social presence, but also of interest in a Jesuit context. It explores the relationship established between theory and inner attitude (German: *Haltung*), following a practical example, Jesuit Worldwide Learning.

Because of the lack of literature on the concept of *cura personalis* practised in online learning environments, the first research question is to accumulate rich descriptions of care for the whole person of the individual student.

**RQ1. How is *cura personalis* expressed in the online format and what are the effects on the individual student?**

The second question will explore the group attribute of social presence/social space.

**RQ2. What is the role of *cura personalis* in social presence/social space?**

Since this is a blended learning setting with a specific arrangement, the following research question will test if there are social influences of the on-site facilitation carried into the online format. Usually in blended courses, the same group of students convene in the online part as well as in the offline part, however, with JWL the concept is different due to reasons such as the various locations of faculty and students. To reach better inclusion among JWL students, it is of interest to see if the two spaces, the classroom online and the tutoring space on-site, develop a shared dynamic socially, which leads to the third research question:

**RQ3. How does the in-person onsite format contribute to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students?**

Online learning environments “[...] can differ in their ability to facilitate the emergence of a social space; [...]” (Kreijns et al., 2007, p. 179), which is defined as sociability by Kreijns et al. Sociability as the technological aspect of their three-partite social presence concept is limited in the researched online space at JWL due to restrictions such as asynchronous communication in a text-based environment. It has limited “social functionality” (Kreijns et al., 2007, p. 180). However, as seen in the SIPT theory by Walther et al. (1992), people make the best use of what is technologically given to convey whatever they want to express. Also, changing students through a specific way of teaching will be examined by the fourth question:

**RQ4. How do students use cura personalis in social interactions with other course members while sociability in the online component is limited?**

**RQ4a. Is there a difference over time?**

Comparing first year students to graduating students will give an impression if there is a steady progress in the use of cura personalis and personal development of the students.

This leads to the following hypotheses:

**H1. There are distinct expressions of showing cura personalis online and there are identifiable effects on the students by that.**

**H2. The better the students feel cared for, the more social presence is realized and a sound social space is established and maintained online.**

**H3. The in-person onsite format contributes to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students.**

**H4. Students use cura personalis in social interactions with other course members even though sociability is limited.**

**H4a. There is a difference in behaviour between the students who have been exposed to cura personalis for a longer period of time and students who are only starting to be exposed to cura personalis.**

## 4 Research Design

In this chapter, the research design of the thesis will be described. For this, the qualitative method (chapter 4.1), the epistemological principles (chapter 4.2) and the research ethics (chapter 4.3) employed will serve as a foundation for the actual research planning in chapter 4.4 and its implementation in chapter 4.5.

### 4.1 Choice of Method

According to Döring, quantitative and qualitative research methods differ in that the quantitative approach, based on natural sciences, is more focused on explaining (“Erklären”), whereas the qualitative approach is more interested in understanding (“Verstehen”) human behaviour (Döring, 2023, p. 15). She addresses two points of contestation: the understanding of reality (ontology) and the role of the researcher. Firstly, for quantitative research, a quantifiable view on lived reality can be expressed in variables which then can be analysed. It is seen as objective and can be empirically tested. For qualitative research, a holistic and context dependent approach to individual actors’ behaviours and viewpoints is the basis for the reconstruction of lived reality; this makes observation and interviews the main methods of examination. It allows for the possibility of finding aspects which had not been considered prior to the examination. Secondly, the role of the quantitative researcher is that of a neutral analyst, if possible, who by using theory and statistics derives at findings which are well-balanced and significant. Opposed to this is the qualitative researcher, who acknowledges that they themselves are not neutral, that they are influenced by their experiences and values which become part of the formation process of their research. This includes a disclosure of the researcher’s viewpoints within the research and an imperative of improving society (Döring, 2023, p. 16).

A qualitative approach seems the most suitable for an area of research that is not well documented, since not much has been published about *cura personalis* in connection with blended learning, especially not on the actual contact point with the recipient of care in education. Focusing on personal experiences, individual perspectives, and backgrounds, a quantification of these does not seem possible without losing the breadth and depth of what interviews can offer. The chosen exploratory design brings together the qualities of the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* and care in education and connects them with social presence, social space, and sociability, in order to investigate if there are any cross-influences.

This researcher’s experiences and assumptions are intersectionally based in being a white, middle-class, educated, and privileged European woman who looks from the outside into how



education with a Jesuit background works in the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi, Africa. As a teacher of German as a foreign language (Deutsch als Fremdsprache), this researcher has had direct contact with refugees and immigrants to Germany; as an online student of Educational Media, an interest into this mode of studying is a given. The subjectivity and perspectivity of the researcher, which demands reflection and documentation thereof, will be taken into account within this master's thesis by applying epistemological principles, explained in the following section.

## 4.2 Epistemological Principles

For a long time, qualitative research has been considered as inferior to quantitative research because the comparability of the two methods and their quality criteria and standards were too different. Within qualitative research, a transfer of the quantitative quality criteria objectivity, reliability and validity is possible, as shown in Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr (2021, pp. 26–34). This is seen as problematic by Döring (Döring, 2023) because clear distinctions in taxonomy and definitions are being blurred when applying quantitative quality criteria to qualitative research approaches. She also questions the adequacy of quality criteria being transposed from one research paradigm onto the other. The application of the internal logic of the qualitative research process leads to quality criteria that are quite different. Döring suggests five epistemological principles which will also be applied in this research project.

**Table 4. Epistemological principles according to Döring**

	Principles	German
1	life-world phenomena	„Ganzheitliche und rekonstruktive Untersuchung lebensweltlicher Phänomene“
2	reflected theoretical openness	„Reflektierte theoretische Offenheit zwecks Bildung neuer Theorien“
3	circularity and flexibility	„Zirkularität und Flexibilität des Forschungsprozesses zwecks Annäherung an den Gegenstand“
4	research as communication and cooperation	„Forschung als Kommunikation und Kooperation zwischen Forschenden und Beforschten“
5	self-reflection	„Selbstreflexion der Subjektivität und Perspektivität der Forschenden“

Source: own representation following Döring (2023, p. 64)

For the first principle, the everyday *life-world* of the researched is at the centre. Communication and interaction here are the basis of social phenomena. The examination of

individual actors and their own construction of lived reality, e.g. through interviews or observation, is the focus of a holistic examination of these social phenomena and leads to detailed descriptions. The scientific reconstruction of a life-world is in itself unique for each subject and always subject to change. *Theoretical Openness*, the second principle, asks of the social scientist to look for new hypotheses and new theories within the life-world of the researched. Absolute openness would be impossible to achieve, as theoretical presuppositions always guide the researcher epistemologically. Thus, a relative or critically reflected openness enables the researcher to either reject or build on the original presuppositions, questioning and finding new ways to look at the object of research. With this in mind, the presuppositions based on the state of research and on the guiding hypotheses that were derived from theory, will be critically questioned and are generally open to modification in the course of the research process. This kind of *circularity and flexibility* are necessary for remaining open in the research process. Going through the research planning, the data collection and the data analysis in several cycles, the insights gained can be used to readjust and fine-tune the research design, so that a sound picture gradually emerges. This process character evolves like a spiral and every cycle builds on the previous cycles. During the process of data analysis, repeated coding of the material leads to finer and more subtle awareness and insights with each cycle.

Regarding *research as communication and cooperation*, qualitative research is mostly based on texts that have been retrieved from communicative acts in cooperation with the researched, who open up to give an insight into their lived reality. This makes understanding and rapport between the researcher and the researched indispensable. “Fremdverstehen,” (Döring, 2023, p. 68) which is an expression for understanding the conversation partner from within his/her frame of reference, rests on trust and cooperation. A sensitivity for asymmetrical situations and behaviours towards the researched needs to guide the communication, especially when researching topics connected to people on the margins. The researcher needs to be constantly aware of his/her subjectivity and perspectivity. In order to do so, self-reflection is required and needs to be documented for reasons of transparency. Such an approach leads to insights and knowledge construction which would not be possible otherwise and is dependent on the relationship between the researcher and the researched, with an awareness to the hierarchical power structures (Döring, 2023).

For this thesis, the understanding of reality is derived from a social constructivist perspective, as “different subjective perspectives on the object and the necessity to reconstruct them” (Mayring, 2021, p. 117) will be considered. Thereby, “Verstehen” (understanding; Döring, 2023, p. 15) is the important mode of interpreting interview data, or, as Przyborski & Wohlrab-

Sahr put it, the “reconstruction” is the objective of research (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2021, p. 15).

### 4.3 Research Ethics

Since the interviewees belong to the group of vulnerable participants (Garrels et al., 2022, p. 2), special attention has been paid to research ethics. Brinkmann & Kvale recommend “a parallel ethical protocol treating ethical issues that can be anticipated in an investigation” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 29). They list seven research stages in which ethical issues can arise:

**Table 5. Brinkmann & Kvale’s overview on research ethics**

1	Thematizing	Not only the scientific value is of interest but also an awareness for improving the human situation
2	Designing	In the design stage, ethical issues need to be worked into the project, like informed consent, confidentiality and a consideration of possible effects of the study for the researched
3	Interview situation	Consequences that arise from the interview interaction, e.g. stress, different self-understanding
4	Transcription	Protection of confidentiality, being loyal to interviewee’s words in the transcription process
5	Analysis	Benevolent handling of the interviews, possible participation of the interviewee in the interpretation
6	Verification	Providing knowledge that is as proofed and validated as possible; how far is a critical questioning of the interviewee desired?
7	Reporting	Awareness of confidentiality issues and consequences of the interviews when made public

Source: own representation based on Brinkmann & Kvale (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 28 f.)

*Thematizing.* In this study, the work of the NGO Jesuit Worldwide Learning is being made visible through student voices, people from the margins, and how the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, the care for the whole person, and social presence contribute to the learning process. For JWL, “[...] everyone can contribute their knowledge and voices to the global community of learners to foster hope to create a more peaceful and humane world” (Rega et al., 2024, p. 144). Education as a humanitarian response not only raises the level of development of the students and their communities, but fulfils important psychosocial functions in connection to flight and displacement. (Talbot, 2013; UNESCO, 2017)

*Designing.* The Participant Consent form was prepared with the help of the research department of JWL in Geneva. A cross-check with data protection for research in North Rhine-

Westphalia has been conducted (*Forschungsdatenschutz - Universitätsverwaltung Köln*, 2024). Confidentiality is being secured through the pseudonym procedure described in the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 3). JWL has assured the author of this thesis that whatever the participants say, it will “not affect their grades or any academic opportunities or anything like this in JWL or partner universities” (M. Honen-Delmar, Global Director of Professional Programs and Research Manager at Jesuit Worldwide Learning, personal communication, July 23, 2024).

*Interview situation.* As spelled out under “Risks and Vulnerabilities” in the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 3), if the participant feels “[triggered by] unpleasant and unwanted emotions and memories,” he or she can at any point choose not to answer or to stop the interview. The local JWL coordinator will be available for support if needed, as well as an external safeguarding contact person. Also, the interviewee has the right to retract their data from research up to one week after the collection of the data.

*Transcription.* With transcription, confidentiality is guaranteed. According to JWL, the pseudonym procedure is enough to protect the interviewees’ identity (for further considerations on anonymization, see chapter 4.4.4). The interview texts have been smoothed in the transcription process for better readability, yet remain faithful to what was being said in the interviews.

*Analysis.* A well-intentioned fundamental attitude by this researcher is given, following ethical principles of beneficence according to Fletcher’s Situation Ethics (1966/1997), which follow “a commitment to the welfare of [the] participant and working towards a greater good, and *non-maleficence* [emphasis in original] which is about avoiding harming [the] participant” (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022, p. 91).

*Verification.* The researcher has to provide knowledge which is as “secured and verified as possible” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 29). For factual information, the JWL research department has been contacted for cross-checking the data. For personal accounts, no further verification was undertaken.

*Reporting.* Confidential treatment of the statements of the interviewee, which contain private information that is being made public, is taken into consideration. For instance in the anonymization process, the pronouns have been changed to “he/she” for more confidentiality (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

## 4.4 Research Planning

### 4.4.1 Selection of Data Collection Method

In qualitative research, several methods for obtaining data can be used: observation, document analysis, individual interviews and partner interviews or focus group interviews (Döring, 2023). In this study individual interviews are used to generate the qualitative data needed to gain insight into the subject of investigation. “[... Interviews] are particularly well suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 51). Contrary to qualitative methods, standardized, quantitative methods reduce complexity in the design stage of the survey, prior to the contact with the researched. Qualitative methods accumulate descriptions, here through interviewing the participants, and only afterwards in the analysis stage reduce the variety of answers through coding and further analysis (Helfferich, 2011). Interviews offer unique insights into the life of the interviewed, who by sharing their “activities, experiences and opinions” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 10) provide their own perspectives on their lived reality. “The focus is on nuanced descriptions that depict the qualitative diversity, the many differences and varieties of the phenomenon, rather than on ending up with fixed **categorisations** [emphasis in original]” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 15). A “qualified naïveté [should guide the researcher, and should be paired with] a bracketing of presuppositions” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 16) to achieve relative qualitative openness toward the interviewed and the subject of research. Open questions posed by the interviewer guide the interviewee to certain themes, “not to specific opinions about these themes” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 16). The power relation between the interviewer and the interviewed is asymmetrical: as the interviewer determines the topic and generally steers the conversation, the distribution of roles is clear from the outset of the interchange (Döring, 2023). Brinkmann and Kvale thus describe the interview as a “one-way dialogue” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 19). Distortions are always possible because the interviewed know they are partaking in an interview. The main advantages of qualitative interviewing are its adaptability and flexibility, both traits that would not be provided by a quantitative survey or fully structured interviews (Döring, 2023).

With regards to qualitative interviewing, Döring distinguishes between unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Döring, 2023). Whereas the former is applied without the use of a data collection instrument and thus leaves room for open questions and narrations, the latter is partly structured by a semi-structured question guide. Brinkmann & Kvale classify the use of such question guides as the *semi-structured life-world interview* and define it as “[a] planned

and flexible interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 173). Semi-structured interviews are highly versatile, because the interviewer is “allowed (and expected) to explore emergent themes, rather than simply focusing on concepts and ideas defined prior to the interview” (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022, p. 23). Also, it is expected of the interviewer “to rephrase a question, skip a question, formulate new questions, follow up on emerging leads, and probe for more detail from a respondent” (2022, p. 23). This kind of interview procedure generates the adaptability and flexibility mentioned above.

Helfferrich (2022) defines interviews as communication situations which generate text through interaction. According to her, the goal of qualitative interviewing is not authenticity but to generate and reconstruct subjective truths about the life-world of the interviewees. It requires constant reflection on the specific context in which these texts emerged and serves as a testimony of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Openness is achieved by allowing the interviewees to say what they feel is relevant in their own words. However, openness is also restricted through the structuring of the interview, e. g. when informing the interviewees about the goal of the interview or through the way questions are posed or the prompts that are provided. The interviewees may pick up on these hints and act accordingly when answering. According to Helfferrich, the motto “as open as possible” needs to be completed with “as structured as necessary” (Helfferrich, 2022, p. 879).

Due to the distance between the home location of the researcher and the interviewees, online video conferencing with Zoom was chosen as the preferred mode of communication for the interviews. Other reasons are flexibility and the economical use of time. Limited mobility on the part of the interviewees would be a further obstacle to face-to-face interviews. The normalization of online communication in today’s life after COVID19 pandemic makes it possible to interact with people in distant places as an economical solution (Döring, 2023). Disadvantages are the lack of personal cues in the online situation, which can lead to an impersonal feeling in the course of the interview; rapport is harder to establish; and (lacking) internet connectivity can cause problems. Silence as a prompt towards the interviewee in order to have them go on explaining can be easily misunderstood as a connectivity issue (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022). Despite these drawbacks, the practical advantages of online interviewing prevail, because face-to-face interviews would not be realizable for this thesis.

#### **4.4.2 Selection of Sampling Procedure**

For this thesis presented here, Jesuit Worldwide Learning has granted access to students at one Community Learning Centre in the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi. Dzaleka is one of the

most densely populated refugee camps worldwide (*Malawi Factsheet June 2023 - Malawi / ReliefWeb*, 2023). For 2021, the UNHCR documented the following statistics:

Dzaleka is a protracted camp with a monthly average of 300 new arrivals (62% are from the DRC, 19% Burundi and 7% Rwanda and 2% other nationalities). 45% of the PoCs [People of Concern] are women, and 48% are children. The camp was initially established to host between 10,000 to 12,000 PoCs but now hosts over 52,000 individuals. [...] (*Malawi - UNHCR*, 2001-2024)

JWL Geneva selected this camp and introduced the researcher to the coordinator of the Community Learning Centre in Dzaleka. As a “gatekeeper” (Döring, 2023, p. 335), the coordinator offered to find volunteer interviewees according to defined parameters. JWL assured that there would be no repercussions to the participants because they were known to the gatekeeper (see chapter 4.3). A disadvantage of the use of a gatekeeper could be the introduction of a potential bias due to the selection of students (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022).

A reconstruction of the lived reality of individual cases requires a smaller sample than in a quantitative study because of the effort which has to be put into these cases (Döring, 2023). Considering time as a resource for this thesis, this study is limited to eight participants: two women, two men in their first year and two women, two men graduating. This “criterion sampling” (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022, p. 57) will enable comparisons and add diversity towards a well-rounded research, however it will not be representative of the whole population. It allows for a qualitative sampling plan with three criteria, namely age, gender and duration of programme participation (Döring, 2023). This can be viewed in Appendix 6.

#### 4.4.3 Semi-structured Question Guide

Brinkmann & Kvale describe the interview question per se as two-dimensional: “A good interview question should contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 64). With this in mind, the semi-structured interview guide follows Morgan Brett & Wheeler (2022) and uses Helfferich’s SPSS method. SPSS here stands for collecting and examining the questions and subsequently sorting and subsuming them („Sammeln von Fragen“, „Prüfen der Fragen“, „Sortieren“ und „Subsumieren“; Helfferich, 2011, pp. 182–189, 2022, p. 884). Turning research questions into interview questions requires “a lot of conceptual and practical work” (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022, p. 35). Departing from the research questions, the theory chapter (see chapter 2) of this thesis was used as a stepping stone for deriving potential interview questions. These were then processed and iteratively reformulated in everyday language. The wording was adjusted towards positive connotations to not influence the interviewees negatively (“What makes studying at JWL enjoyable” instead of “What is it like to study at JWL?”). Closed questions

were reformulated as open ones. Morgan Brett & Wheeler's "Characteristics of well-worded questions" (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022, pp. 48–49) were used for a cross-check. In the sorting process, duplicates were eliminated and a flow established. Morgan Brett & Wheeler recommend that novice interviewers prepare more questions than might be needed, because it might be hard to come up with spontaneous follow-up questions. The final interview guide can be found in appendix 4. It was structured according to the interview stages of introduction, warm-up, main body, winding down and conclusion (Morgan Brett & Wheeler, 2022).

After a "Small Talk / Icebreaker" section, which concluded with questions about the consent form and the students pseudonym being entered into the Zoom status option, questions about the demographics followed and the permission to record was obtained. The broad topics of the interview guide covered are:

- Studying with JWL
- Online / on-site description
- Social Space
- Social interactions with peers online
- Social Presence
- Care

The Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* was operationalised partly by using the concept of care in higher education and partly by elements of *cura personalis*. This approximation was necessary since the literature on *cura personalis* alone did not yield enough to examine the topic at hand. "Care," "support," and "help" as near synonyms were used to ask about *cura personalis*, as it was assumed that the Latin term and the concept "*cura personalis*" might not be identifiable to the students. For more on the interview guide, see appendix 4 and chapter 5 and 6.2.2.

Additionally, a postscriptum form was prepared (Lamnek & Krell, 2016), to be filled in by the interviewer after the interview (see appendix 5). It serves as a memory aid and is used to record in written form what was being said before and after the interview and to make a note of special occurrences during the interview, the conduct of interviewer and interviewee, and any other information that might help to recall the interview situation later in the analysis stage. For the researcher, this eases the empathizing with the text and situation ("Fremdverstehen").

#### **4.4.4 Data Preparation**

During data preparation phase, the interviews as raw data are transformed into data sets for further analysis. To achieve good data set quality, an examination, verification and active production of data sets followed the interview situation. The quality is not inherent in the raw



data. Thus, the data produced have to be handled as transparently as possible, so that unreliable results and later flaws are avoided (Döring, 2023, p. 573). The postscriptum, in which the interview situation was described after the interview, served as a commentary to the interviews (see appendix 5). A full transcription of all interviews had been produced according to the transcription system presented by Rädiker & Kuckartz (2020, p. 19). For better understandability, the transcripts were smoothed slightly, “accommodating written standards” (2023, p. 163) without changing the interviewee’s meaning or choice of words.

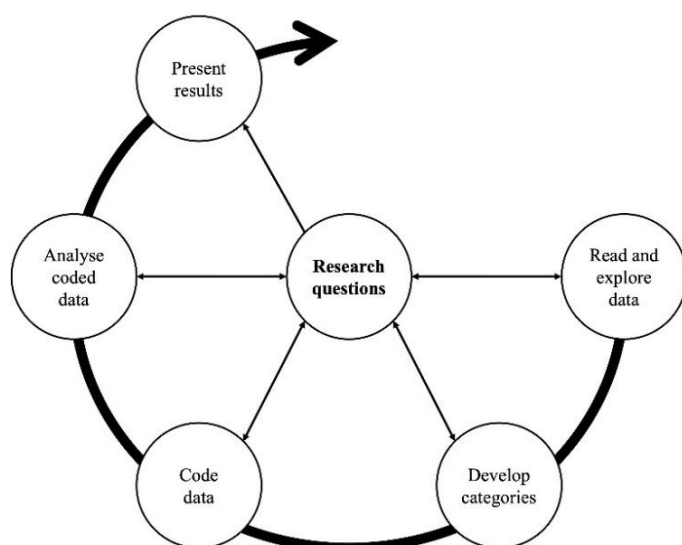
Due to the pseudonym procedure described in the consent form (see appendix 3), which prescribes the use of a pseudonym from the start of the Zoom recording, the students are not identifiable without a list connecting the pseudonym to the name of the student. Video files were deleted right after the interview, so only the audio files were available for transcription. Once the quality of the transcripts was deemed satisfactory, the audio files were deleted. The file containing the list of students was saved on an encrypted stick which was destroyed on August 31, 2024. Thus, the pseudonymized data are anonymized (Werner et al., 2023).

Anonymization and data protection measures were applied. In line with data economy and data minimization (Werner et al., 2023), the demographical data collected was reduced to age, gender and duration of studying in the interview guide. As the coordinator and the on-site facilitator of the Learning Centre in Dzaleka had been given a list of interview appointments to help reminding the students of their interview appointment, students received random letters as pseudonyms for protecting their identity towards JWL. The additional numbering of the interviews in the MAXQDA project file was left out of the results presentation and discussion to protect the students’ identity. For further internal anonymization, the pronouns of the students were adjusted to “he/she” in the results presentation. Names of persons mentioned in the interviews were replaced by a description in brackets, either as [name of person] or stating their function, e.g. [name of on-site facilitator]. One of the interviewed students also works as an on-site facilitator, his/her answers have been excluded whenever he/she referred to his/her job as on-site facilitator, also due to inner anonymisation (see chapter 4.4.4).

#### **4.4.5 Selection of Analysis Procedure**

To be able to derive significant results from the interviews, a stringent method for data analysis must be used. There are several different types of methods for analysing communication contents, among them Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) and Objective Hermeneutics (Oevermann, 2004). The one used in this thesis is *Qualitative Content Analysis* (QCA) which is “more question-related and rule-based” (Mayring, 2021, p. 48). Schreier (2012), Mayring (2021), and Kuckartz & Rädiker (2023) are the most known representatives of this type

of data analysis. Their approaches vary in the way the investigation takes place. What they have in common is the systematic application of deductive and inductive categories or codes to the prepared data. These are assigned in a circular fashion and follow rules (Mayring, 2021).



**FIG. 5. General process of qualitative content analysis**

Source: Kuckartz & Rädiker (2023, p. 81)

Rädiker & Kuckartz' (2020) *Focused Analysis of Qualitative Interviews with MAXQDA* offers a QCA method of analysing interview projects which is systematic and focused as well as practicable. It is tailored to the software to be used for this thesis, MAXQDA. They speak of a systematic approach when all interviews obtained are used for analysis; when these are analysed in the same fashion; when instruments like the question guide, the analysis and the procedure of the research are openly discussed; and when quality criteria are applied to safeguard transparency and understanding. The interviews are analysed as texts by assigning codes to the passages in the text to condense the meaning and complexity of the statements and allow structuring the segments according to deductively or inductively derived categories (p. 14) (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). The terms "category" and "code" are used interchangeably; these are arranged hierarchically within the software and the resulting Code Book.

## 4.5 Implementation

### 4.5.1 Data collection with Semi-structured Interviews

As mentioned in chapter 4.4.2, a gatekeeper was used to establish contact to the interviewees. The gatekeeper provided a contact list for 8 students. Appendix 6 provides an overview of the interview sample. To establish initial contact with the students, a general letter to all and

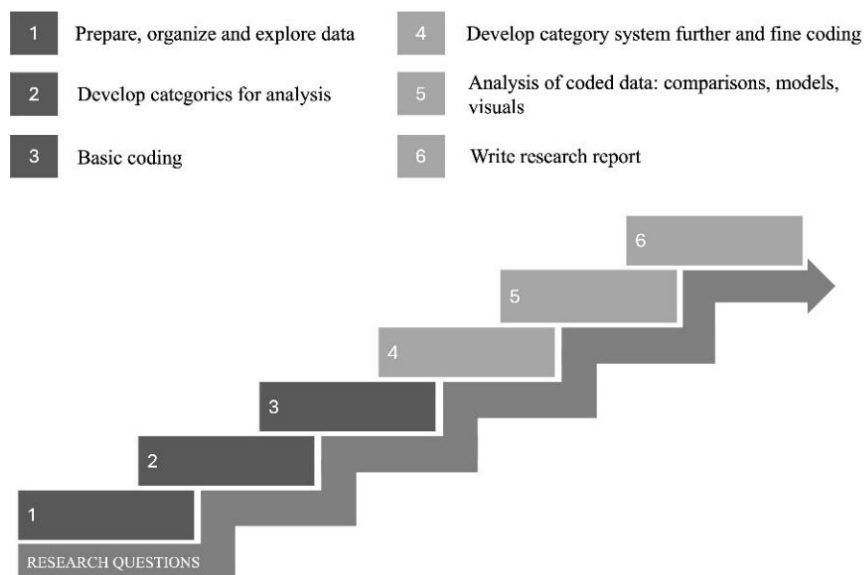
individual emails were sent out with more detailed information on the research objective of the thesis and a consent form (see appendix 1 and 2). The students were then contacted individually and accepted to take part in the interview, appointments were set up via email. For the interviews, Zoom was used, which is a video conferencing software application well known to the students. Trial interviews were conducted with several people not connected to JWL and questions were refined in turn.

The interviews were carried out between July 31 – August 7, 2024. Due to internet connectivity or technical problems in the refugee camp Dzialeka, there were disruptions in the process of collecting the interviews. Eight students were to be interviewed. Unfortunately, only seven students could be interviewed, as the eighth person encountered severe internet problems and did not establish contact again for a new appointment. The length of the interviews varied from 25 minutes to 62 minutes, with a mean of 43 minutes. The consent form had either been sent in by the students directly or by the on-site facilitator who went over the form with a group of students in preparation for the interview. Some participants arrived up to thirty minutes late for their appointment, so the phase of getting to know each other and for clarifying any problems or questions had been cut short in some interviews. The first two participants experienced technical problems with their speaker volume and had trouble understanding the interview questions. The interviewer reacted by raising his/her voice. This kind of measure is indicated in the transcripts by the use of capital letters. In the first interview, technical readjustments also improved the situation. However, in the second interview, the volume situation could not be improved.

After the collection of the demographics, the interviews started with consenting to being recorded with Zoom. The interviews started out as videocalls. Due to internet quality issues, most students switched off their camera so that the remaining interview was then conducted with a black screen showing the pseudonym of the student. During the interview itself, the interview question guide was used as an aid. It turned out to be helpful for keeping the interview flow going, but because the lack of visual contact to the interviewees, the interviewer focused more on the guide than would have been the case in real videocalls. After the first two interviews, questions and the order of the topics were readjusted (see appendix 14 for the different versions of the interview guide). With each interview, the interviewer became more flexible and less dependent on the interview guide. In the MAXQDA project file (see appendix 14), the order of the interviews is indicated with 01 – 07 in front of the pseudonym. For anonymisation reasons, these numbers have been left out in the results and discussion chapters (see chapter 4.4.4). A postscriptum was used for brief notes describing the situation. The respective files can be found in the appendix 14.

#### 4.5.2 Focused Analysis of Qualitative Interviews

The focused analysis of interviews in six steps was applied to the transcribed data sets as suggested by Rädiker & Kuckartz (2020). A visual overview can be seen in FIG. 6. For Step 1, they recommend initial working with the texts to arrive at a better overview and to maximize understanding. After the initial transcription, a thorough re-reading, combined with repeated re-listening to the audio files of the interviews for further corrections, was followed by writing initial case summaries. These are “fact-oriented and based on what was said, not a hermeneutic or psychological interpretation of the story” (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023, p. 95). During this familiarization process, important statements were highlighted in the texts.



**FIG. 6. Focused analysis of interviews in six steps**

Source: Rädiker & Kuckartz (2020, p. 17)

After the data sets were uploaded into the MAXQDA project file, an initial deductive category system was created (step 2) based on the interview question guide’s rough thematic blocks, the theory introduced in chapter 2 and the research questions presented in chapter 3 (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020). “[Starting] with seven to twelve categories, where we do not count the structuring categories” (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020, p. 51) is recommended, because more categories from the start may make the whole category system impractical. Four structuring categories (JWL, SIPS, Blended Learning and Care) were subdivided into twelve subcategories. All of these subcategories were marked by a red triangle on the respective code memo in the MAXQDA project file in the digital appendix, indicating that they are deductive categories.

In the ensuing basic coding process (step 3), these structuring categories and subcategories were used for coding each transcript. When coding two general rules were applied. Firstly, whenever it was not possible to fully understand what the interviewee was saying without the respective interview question, the question was also included in the coded segment. Secondly, it was decided to code relevant content whenever it occurred, even if that meant repetition. Initially, only three interviews were coded. For basic coding, all segments were included that could potentially be relevant regarding the research questions. Segments which could not be sorted into the deductively derived category system were initially put into the subcategory "Other". Code memos were created to provide category definitions. No specific weight values were assigned to the individual segments.

Then, in step 4, the coding system was further developed by using the MAXQDA Smart Coding Tool to analyse existing codings and to further differentiate existing codes. With the help of coding comments it was possible to get a better overview of the content of coded segments. This helped to adapt the category system inductively. The new inductive codes (labelled with green triangles in the respective code memos) were then applied when fine-coding the data. Whenever a subcategory contained more than 10 items, it was checked if further differentiation was needed. When it became clear that several categories with similar meanings could apply to one segment, the categories and/or category definitions were checked to see whether further differentiation was necessary. The overlapping categories "C-TSR – Teacher-Student Relationship" and "BL-F – Facilitator," for example, were re-examined and the code definitions adjusted. In the end, whenever students referred to the quality of the relationship to a facilitator, the segment was coded with the C-TSR category, and whenever the students talked about the role of the facilitator, it was coded with the BL-F category.

For step 5, the analysis of the coded data was carried out using MAXQDA's simple coding queries by activating the respective codes and interview segments by students or student sets, i.e. sorted by first-years and graduating students. Step 6 included a deeper analysis of the data sets while the findings were fixed in written form.

## 5 Results

In this chapter, the results will be presented following the structure of the research questions as outlined in chapter 3. The results presentation for each research question is followed by a short summary focussing the respective hypotheses. A category-oriented analysis has been chosen to better focus on the themes of this thesis. The individual quotes have been selected due to their thematic relevancy. When there are several quotes illustrating the same point the most relevant has been selected. The respective categories are mentioned in quotation marks. As demanded by the title of this thesis and the research questions, the students' perspective is looked at here exclusively. The students are either refugees living in the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi or Malawians living near the camp who are allowed to study with JWL. For a better understanding of the interview quotes it is important to know that Malawians are allowed to work and enjoy unrestricted movement, whereas the camp refugees are not allowed to work and have restricted rights to leave the camp due to a policy change in 2023 (Kateta, 2023).

### 5.1 How the Educational Setting is Described

Before focusing on the results for the individual research questions, a brief overview over the courses offered by JWL is provided for better understanding. For this, the categories "Different Course Models" and "Comments/Peer Feedback" have been used (appendix 7). According to the interviewed JWL students, their stackable 8-week courses can have differing designs: some courses are carried out purely on-site (Student E, Pos. 31) or with weekly Zoom meetings (Student E, Pos. 105). However, these two types of courses are not very common. Student K explains that typically, the courses include on-site facilitation and are based on research tasks. The student elaborates:

It's all about just doing some research. With the way they developed our courses, we usually have a discussion board where you are supposed to post your assignments, and then you have to engage with different students, as I said. [...] (Student K, Pos. 29)

Before being submitted for feedback and grading by the online faculty, these assignments receive peer feedback on the discussion board of the LMS.

[...] for some assignments, more especially on the discussion board, they usually request us to comment on someone's work. If you fail to comment on someone's work, it means that the grades will be deducted. There are grades that are given to students when they interact with other students. (Student K, Pos. 49)

Student Q mentions tutorial meetings for some courses:

On the part of online, it was also good because we know that there are some courses that we could have tutorial meetings. We could meet the online facilitators and all students globally, and they talked about the course that we are taking at that time. If we had any questions about the course or somewhere where we didn't understand it, we could also directly ask the online facilitators and it was very, very good. [...] (Student Q, Pos. 31)

## 5.2 Use and Effects of Cura Personalis (RQ1)

### 5.2.1 Results Presentation for Research Question 1

**RQ1. How is cura personalis expressed in the online format and what are the effects on the individual student?**

The subcategories for this open, exploratory research question have been deduced inductively. A rich description of how care for the whole person is used in the online component of the JWL blended learning setting has emerged from the interview data. An overview of the categories being used and the case-based and category-based coding frequencies can be found in appendix 8 and 9. The table shows the hierarchically arranged coding system for the category "Care", but also illustrates the way this section is being structured. For reasons of clarity, the following part has been subdivided into two subsections, which are named "Methods of Care" and "Effects of Care on the Individual Recipient."

#### 5.2.1.1 Methods of Care

To be able to distinguish the different aspects of care, the category "Methods of Care" was divided into the subcategories "Personal" and "Structural". As can be seen in appendix 8, five students mentioned "Asking the facilitators for help". For four students, this is the last step in a chain of requests for help with study-related tasks: students first reach out to their classmates, then to the on-site facilitator and as a last resort to the online facilitator (Student H, Pos. 21). On-site facilitators generally seem to buffer a large number of requests and give assistance to the individual students.

There was this time I had an assignment, I could not understand what was needed to be written on that assignment. I asked [name of on-site facilitator], and then [name of on-site facilitator] said that, "The way I understand this assignment, you should write it this way, this way, this way. You should also ask the online facilitator so that he can give you proper guidance apart from what I said." I did exactly what [name of on-site facilitator] said. (Student H, Pos. 25)

You can send an email to your online facilitator, but sometimes, you cannot get the message or the information from him or her. Sometimes, you have to talk directly to your on-site facilitator to help you out. If the on-site facilitator doesn't understand the question, he or she usually directly texts the online facilitator to help you out so that maybe you can understand the assignment and you can solve it. We usually have the right to write to them so that we can understand the assignments and work on them. (Student K, Pos. 51)

In the beginning, when the students embark on their academic journey and still need to learn how to study online, they received extensive help step by step ( “Initial help in the beginning”). Two students mention this early phase of studying.

Yes, at first it was difficult because it was my first time learning online. It was a new thing, so it was difficult. The good thing was we were being helped step by step on how to do the courses, on how to do... On how to learn online. I had a wonderful... The people that helped me were very wonderful. They were very helpful in every aspect because every question or everything that I found difficult, they could help. (Student H, Pos. 99)

Five students talked about helping their peers, be it online or on-site. A closer look at the category “Students help students” will be taken in chapter 5.5.

Online facilitators provide feedback for the finished assignments, the students’ perspective of this is given in the category “Providing Feedback”. By the time of submitting the assignments, they have already been commented on by the other students online and refined by the original creators. Three students talked about receiving feedback and how it helps them:

I feel good. I feel nice because... It doesn't offend me. That comment, I take it like (unclear) it's usually assisting me. (Student Z, Pos. 61)

One student mentioned that they receive “close study help” during the final Bachelor’s project by a facilitator. Student W described being connected to one student online from Kakuma (a large refugee camp in Kenya) in that phase, also doing the B.A. project.

Also during the project, I was connected with someone from Kenya, Kakuma. We were having discussions mostly once a week online with a facilitator. (Student W, Pos. 35)

Talking about the facilitator, the same student said:

Each week we had online meetings, and she assisted me a lot in making my project successful and completed successfully. She inspired me because of her dedication and also how she helped me learn because she was always there for me, helping me in my research, providing constructive feedback, and also areas for change. (Student W, Pos. 94)

“Structural” elements of care include the “Applicability / relevancy of the courses and topics.” Five students stressed that the B. A. program in Sustainable Development was highly applicable to their communities, both within the refugee camp and outside (for the Malawian host community).

In the area where I live, there is a problem of water, even in Dzaleka, there's a problem of water. It's my desire to look for a permanent solution. The learning... That course was insightful. It helped me a lot. Yes, it helped me discover other ways that we can make water sustainable. We can make water useful, and then other ways that everybody can be able to access water because water is a very big problem in Malawi. (Student H, Pos. 51)

One student mentioned his/her dissatisfaction with one course because it was more tailored to developed countries.

I found that course somehow not very relevant to the way my country is. The way our situation is. I found that the course, most of the things which it was explaining were very relevant for the developed countries. [...] (Student Q, Pos. 81)



The “Didactic approach / IPP” of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) was mentioned by two students.

I said it was making us think and do something, not just to learn and it ends there, but we should think and do something. (Student Q, Pos. 168)

Providing the possibility of offering university level courses (“Providing university education”) to study in a refugee camp was mentioned by two students.

The course itself, in my opinion, it has been a very good course. I paid nothing, but it was a very good course. I was like, “Wow, these people have done us something that is very good.” (Student Q, Pos. 138)

One student talked about how he/she was given a room to study temporarily for him/herself as “On-site support” in order to concentrate on the assignments when he/she needed to (Student K, Pos. 59). Not only the learning environment is provided by JWL at the Learning Centre and online, but also the hardware (“Laptop, internet and technical support”), which three students talked about. At first, students could borrow computers or tablets, however, this was restricted as some students ended up using the hardware for different purposes and many more students applied for studying at JWL (Student Q, Pos. 134).

I feel supported in my studies. (.) First of all, there's online learning, and it requires more resources to make it successful like having a laptop and having the internet. So, I felt supported first of all by JWL because it provided us with the resources that were required to support our learning, like the laptop and also the internet network to which we have access. It is free. (Student W, Pos. 112)

Student Q talked about how the restriction to use JWL computers and tablets only at the Learning Centre affected some of their fellow students.

[JWL] could say no because there were many students, so they could not manage to give every student a laptop, and this gave us a lot of challenges. Some people ended up dropping out of the course. Some people stopped. They could not even finish because they were away, maybe sometimes because of work or some other circumstances, but they had no chance to a computer which they could be using or network. It really affected us. (Student Q, Pos. 132)

Changes in the hardware policy caused distress to some of the students who could not be accommodated as before. Other challenges are energy blackouts and insufficient internet connectivity (“Internet issues”) Three students reported this.

As I have said, sometimes we could have unstable internet. Sometimes we could miss some meetings online, or some tutorials online just because of the internet. This challenge is very big here. You find that even at our centre sometimes you can have... You can spend a week without stable internet. It was really challenging. (Student Q, Pos. 103)

One student, Student L, mentioned the “help desk” of JWL:

Another thing, maybe when the JWL website is not working properly, I send an email to the help desk. They see it and then they respond and at the same time resolve the matter. (Student L, Pos. 35)

### 5.2.1.2 Effects of Care on the Individual Recipient

The “Effects on the individual recipient of care,” the students of JWL, are manifold. This overview by no means claims to be conclusive; it is based on what was mentioned by the students in the interviews. The following description is based on the categories as depicted in appendix 9.

Feedback as a method of care in JWL provided by the online facilitator has its effect on the students; this is mentioned by two students (“feedback empowers”). Student E said that positive feedback raises his/her confidence levels, and negative feedback makes him/her try harder:

[...] Whenever I submit an assignment, I do get the feedback. That helps because I get to know where I miss their point where I get the point, where I fail, or where I do wrong or good. With that feedback, it makes me feel good or feel confident whenever I'm doing something because I get to know where I am going. Without feedback, someone cannot have the confidence to write an assignment again. You will be feeling like maybe I'm not getting what I-- I'm not writing, like there is no sense in what I write at the time so I'll just stop. When I get that feedback it gives me confidence. It gives me the power to continue writing my assignment because I know that whenever I have written the assignment I will get feedback. Whether it is good or bad, whenever it is positive it gives me confidence and power. Whenever it is negative, I will make sure that next time or next assignment I will do well and get good grades. (Student E, Pos. 113)

The students reported that they experience (individual) help being given freely. Part of *cura personalis* is valuing the other person in need of help. Six students felt valued in different aspects (“Feeling valued”). The assistance they receive whenever they ask for help and being treated with respect by the JWL team and fellow students are part of this. A Malawi student from the local host community feels fully integrated into the online and on-site programme:

They saw me as part of JWL. They saw me as that I could contribute the same way they could contribute. (Student H, Pos. 107)

When receiving care, he/she said

It makes me feel wanted. It makes me feel to be like part of the thing, this thing would not work if I wasn't part of it. It makes me feel that I'm part of the reason why this thing is ongoing. (Student H, Pos. 139)

Asked if these kinds of care inspire the students to help others (“Inspired to help others”), five students confirmed passing on the care received. One of them replied that the impact of the courses he/she had done with JWL on him/her was such that he/she felt a moral obligation to do so.

Yes, I have to do that because that's mandatory as a human being. I learned human ethics in a Certificate in Liberal Studies and in human ethics, human rights, and women's rights. (..) Also in Sustainable Development, we have so many courses that talk about equal treatment, treating other people, and promoting equality and equity in the community. (Student W, Pos. 127)

Five students helped others (“Inspired to help others”). But not only is this help returned within the student body (see chapter 5.5 for RQ 4), but also to the larger communities. The realization

that they are being given the tools of becoming “agents of change”, as Student Q (Pos. 54) called it, is a direct effect of the applicability and relevancy mentioned earlier in methods of care. This experience of self-efficacy is not only relevant for him/herself, but also for the community.

I liked this course [Global Poverty and Development] mostly because I am in a country where poverty is extreme. It encouraged me a lot like, "Wow, I think I can be an agent of change." I can do something to change my community because the way we understand poverty is not the way I understood it in this course. I understood it in another way like, "Oh wow, poverty is really bad. We have to do something to fight against poverty." I was influenced to think of starting something on my own in my community that can help in one way or another to fight against poverty because it's extreme in my country. (Student Q, Pos. 54)

One tool to become an “agent of change” is learning how to communicate (“Communication/ Language”):

[...] Yes, having this being (...) in this community, really, we learned through talking to people, talking to other people in the community because they help us to connect the content with the situation. The real-world situation that is going on here in our community. Also having that is really important, and it helps us to learn and also be engaged in this online environment. (Student W, Pos. 71)

Three of five students reported that before they joined the programme, they were not good at communicating with others and that the programme had been really helpful with that. It is not clear if that is because of communicating in a foreign language, English. “Personal growth” goes hand in hand with the realization of being able to effect change. Student L, first year, has become a person who now likes communicating and connecting with other people.

Yes. (...) Actually, I can say JWL has really changed my behavior. First of all, when I joined JWL I was someone who wasn't feeling very flexible speaking to different people, but when I joined the centre, it's a multicultural centre, so having different people. Whether you like it or not, you just speak to people and that's how it changed me. Up to now, I'm someone who likes speaking to different people. I like connecting with new people in my life which is very good (.) and I like that. (Student L, Pos. 43)

From the graduate perspective, Student W explains that being exposed to different cultures and working with them at JWL helped him/her grow.

Okay. (.) What made me grow is (..) the learning process, first being in an environment where we have students from different countries, we have students from different ethnicities, we have students from different backgrounds, so that's the first thing that helped me grow because I learned from them. We share the experience. I learned from them in terms of behaviours, in terms of treatment, treating others with dignity and respect. So, I also learned, (...) the online environment helped me grow with the courses that we took. The content was really important. They helped me grow in one way because the Sustainable Development Goals program covered a lot, which helped me grow professionally and mentally. (Student W, Pos. 181)

“Treating others” differently is part of realizing one’s own self-worth and being in the world. Three students, when asked, reported that due to studying at JWL, what they had learned and how they were cared for made them consider treating other people differently.

[...] Within the discussion forum, whenever I read someone's post, I do get something new. I do get something new, for example, maybe someone from Kenya. He was writing there about like he was a refugee. Then he explained there was a time that he was explaining himself about what he has passed through and how other people helped to change into who he is now. About that time, when I read that post, I got something like, oh, in life it is indeed to help each other. It is good to help each other because you never know who he is, who she is, or what she is going through (Student E, Pos. 101)

A central aspect of *cura personalis* is the relationships between the teacher – here the facilitators – and the student (“Teacher-student relationship”). In the interview, the interviewees were asked for one’s favourite facilitator and one they did not like, as this was deemed an indicator for TSR. Since there are two facilitators, one online and one on-site, in this blended learning arrangement, students were asked to describe both and what makes them special. Six students responded to this. For answering this part, a differentiation between on-site and online facilitator is necessary.

[...] We had [name of on-site facilitator], who is our on-site facilitator. He has been a very good person and an inspiring person to us because he was always there for us. He was there always whenever we had any challenges. If he sees that maybe I'm behind, I'm not performing well, he could always come like, "My friend, how can I help you? I can see you are behind. You have not submitted this. I can see this in the course this week. You did not do well." I can say he has been a very good person throughout the course, for me. Online, we also had some facilitators who were very good. For instance, there is one facilitator we call [name of online-facilitator] who is from India. He was the one facilitating the Global Poverty course, and he was also very friendly. He could share with us his WhatsApp numbers. We could communicate in person and ask him some questions. I liked him a lot, he was very friendly to us. (Student Q, Pos. 71)

The on-site facilitator seems to be very tangible to the students, whereas the online facilitator may be sometimes hard to get in touch with. Also, the online facilitators may change every eight weeks when a new course starts, while the on-site facilitator stays with them during the whole duration of their studies. Talking about his/her online facilitator, Student L says

Student L: Maybe speaking about [name of facilitator] who is my current facilitator, I can say, "I liked the guy." He is someone who is very flexible. When you send him a message, he responds quickly and also he explains any topic. He explains it well and asks you questions, he keeps on asking you questions to see if you have understood the concept (.) and he's very supportive.

Interviewer: HOW FAR DOES HE SUPPORT YOU?

Student L: In the same way, he makes sure that you understand the course. Mainly, if you ask a question and also he's someone when he grades you, he gives you some comments on your

assignment saying, "No, you need to improve here, It was amazing, I like it." (.) When he gives the comments, it helps us to improve on the next assignment. (Student L, Pos. 59-61)

Responding to emails, giving good explanations, timely support and giving good feedback seem to be the main factors which make a good online facilitator.

Belonging in the care main category, "Accompaniment" as part of the Jesuit practise is mentioned by two students, one for in-person support and the other for online support. The latter, a Malawian studying in the camp, applied for an internship in Japan:

When I ask for support in anything, I do get help. Last... In June, I was looking for internship in Japan, and then they were asking for a lot of recommendation from the school and other documents, so I asked the online faculty. They did help with that. (Student H, Pos. 129)

### 5.2.2 Summary of Results for Research Question 1

The summary of results for RQ1, "How is cura personalis expressed in the online format and what are the effects on the individual student?" will be focused on Hypotheses 1.

**H1. There are distinct expressions of showing cura personalis online and there are identifiable effects on the students by that.**

In chapter 5.2.1 it was shown that the interviewed students feel that care/cura personalis is present in the way they are being educated. The findings portrayed above illustrate that both "Personal" and "Structural" ways of expressing care are perceived by the students. Online feedback, support from on-site and online staff and from fellow students are mentioned as factors that help the individual student. This, according to the students, results in a closer attachment to the programme, and a closer relationship to the on-site facilitator and the local peers. Online, the bonding seems to be not as strong as on-site, yet this may vary from person to person and the length of time a student has been enrolled in the programme. The role of the online facilitator is more distant. Students experience self-efficacy through the relevancy of the programme and the application of the contents.

## 5.3 The Role of Cura Personalis in Social Presence/Social Space (RQ2)

### 5.3.1 Result presentation for Research Question 2

**RQ2. What is the role of cura personalis in social presence/social space?**

An overview over the categories and its case and code frequencies which were used for this section can be found in appendix 10.

To answer this research question, the study will first take a look at the students' perceptions of social presence and social space. Then, the focus is placed on care/cura personalis to see if these and social space influence each other. (For how students use it among themselves, see chapter 5.5.) Within the main category of SIPS in MAXQDA, especially in the categories "social presence" and "social space", it is not immediately apparent that there are segments that also refer to "cura personalis". One reason for this is that within the question guide, no question was asked for both items together.

The interview transcripts show that the different cohorts, first-year students and graduating students, responded differently to the questions on social presence/social space. The following section is organised according to the individual interviewees and their study progress, i.e. first-year or graduating students.

Six students referred to "Social presence." Student E, a first-year of the BASD programme, described his/her impression of Social presence like this:

By using online communication (.) it's a bit okay. Sometimes it can be uncomfortable because you can be talking to someone who is far and there can be an interaction, but not what you can feel when the person is there. (Student E, Pos. 23)

For him/her, distance or closeness to online peers is defined by the way students interact with each other, and this is done exclusively via the comments section of the discussion forum. He/She sees it as "more distanced" (Student E, Pos. 109), although there is a "sense of community" (Student E, Pos. 107), and he/she has made online friends, "but only when we are talking about school things like what we are studying" (Student E, Pos. 89).

Student L, also a first-year student, affirmed feeling close to online classmates, feeling integrated and having made friends online, while it seems difficult to keep in touch with them due to his/her "crazy schedule" (Student L, Pos. 104-117) in which he works and studies. He/she was positive that "if I want to establish any friendship, that cannot be very hard for me." (Student L, Pos. 117).

Student Z, first-year, although he/she feels integrated in the online course (Pos. 94), responded to the question of whether he/she feels a sense of community:

No. No. No because I just read their post, the discussion, but I don't even know them. We don't even... Sometimes, yes, there is no... I can say no. (Student Z, Pos. 93)

For him/her, commenting in the discussion forum is "always on topic, because we don't go far." (Student Z, Pos. 101-103). He/she favours the online modality because he/she can work on the assignments at night, "at [one's] own pace" when one feels "mentally free, emotionally stable," (Student Z, Pos. 91).

Social presence as expressed by the group of graduating students is closer, two of seven repeatedly spoke of being like a family ("Sense of community/Like a family"), which is also due to the fact that they spent time together in the courses they took during the three years of the B.A. programme, as Student K explained:

So far, I can say that I feel like I'm close to my classmates even though we are in different countries because of the way we interact. For example, the classes I usually have are the same students that I've been having since my first year. I get to know them better, and then I'm able to know how to interact with them. [...] I just feel like they are close to me, and they're just part of my family. Whenever I want to write about something based on the course we are taking, I have to post it, and then they are there to comment, and we're able to interact. (Student K, Pos. 91)

Student W, graduating, when asked about the challenges of only being able to communicate via typing ("limitations"), talked about aspects of social presence like this:

[...] it's somehow boring because when typing, you don't feel really close to the person to whom you are talking because it's all about only typing. You can't speak. He cannot hear my voice. I can't hear his as we are doing it here, so I feel like there is a limit, some limitation which made us not really feel like we are close to each other and the facilitators. (Student W, Pos. 147)

For this student, "feeling close to another" (Student W, Pos. 77) in the global learning environment was like a safe space:

When we are in the online or the global learning environment, it helps us to feel safe, to feel like we are in the same family as we are used to doing it on-site. (Student W, Pos. 79)

At the beginning of each course, it was important for Student W to see the list of fellow students in the same course on the LMS, because that way he/she knew who he/she could get in touch with again in the sense of "family" (Student W, Pos. 135).

It's really feeling that I'm in a family whereby someone can listen to me, someone can read my ideas, someone can comment on my work. Like that. (Student W, Pos. 167)

Student Q, graduating as well, talked about how difficult it was for students in the beginning and how he/she felt put off by some of the comments on his/her assignments and how this affected his/her sense of presence ("limitations"). He/she explained the difficulties of text-based communication, i.e. typing, as follows:

I can't say [typing in place of speaking] was normal, maybe because we were used to. Four years is a long time. In the end, we were used, but in the beginning, it was really difficult because some people were coming from a background where they had never used a computer, and this was their first time using a computer or a smartphone to communicate and to do their studies. In the first years, I can say it was really difficult. We could not express what we could do when it was virtually, but in the end, we were used so we could do it normally. At first, it was difficult. (Student Q, Pos. 5)

[...] I remember in some cases where you could go online, post something, and then you are told, "Oh my friend, I think you did not answer it well. You have to come again." So yes, it was influencing us in that way. (Student Q, Pos. 109)

Student H, who is in his/her final year of study, reports how different accents or language skills were a challenge for him/her to feel present ("limitations").

What we normally ask, or even the instructor (.) normally asks if (.) we cannot understand the question or what they are explaining, it's better just to write it in the comment box so that people can read it, because as it is easier to understand something that is written than what people are talking about verbally. (Student H, Pos. 89)

All in all, six students talked about "limitations." In week 1 of each new 8-week course, "Introductions" provide an opportunity to learn more about the other participants. The activities and assignments in the first week are designed to foster connections online between the globally dispersed students. "I think that is the main thing that makes us connect" (Student E, Pos. 85). Three students mentioned this aspect. "Keeping in touch" with online peers was reported by six students. Student H, graduate student, said:

[...] I will not say that we do socialize a lot. We keep in touch. I would say that we keep in touch. We have a WhatsApp group that connects us from... students from Kakuma, Myanmar, Zambezi, Dzaleka. We have that group that we keep in touch, but we don't socialize that that much unlike when we are at the centre. (Student H, Pos. 43-44)

Social space does not necessarily consist of socializing, but this staying in touch is an indicator that there is a social aspect to their communication that is also present in the online space provided. Further, there is evidence that social aspects of online learning are more pronounced in the graduate cohort.

Student H talks about how much help the students received in the beginning ("initial help in the beginning"), which was talked about by two students.

Yes, at first it was difficult because it was my first time learning online. It was a new thing, so it was difficult. The good thing was we were being helped step by step on how to do the courses, on how to do... On how to learn online. I had a wonderful... The people that helped me were very wonderful. They were very helpful in every aspect because every question or everything that I found difficult, they could help. (Student H, Pos. 99)

The task of the facilitators online and on-site is to create a positive atmosphere in the courses and thereby to impart *cura personalis* ("introductions"), reported by 3 students:

For the first week, the facilitator usually creates a conducive environment for every student. The way the facilitator introduces himself or herself is when we can also comment on the introduction when we can also comfortably talk about ourselves. [...] (Student K, Pos. 43)

Student W described the "teacher-student relationship", which is part of *cura personalis*, in more detail when asked about his/her favourite facilitators. All in all, six students mentioned TSR.



[...] and also coming online (...) there are facilitators who really inspired me. Who were really dedicated and mostly having these online facilitators, we always reached them through emails, (..) and when they gave us feedback, a few of us had online meetings for some of the courses [...] (Student W, 93)

Furthermore, the conditions for a successful learning experience are such that the success factors for this online space are co-created by all involved: the students, the online and on-site facilitators, the JWL staff and, more indirectly, other people in the camp and the surrounding area ("Sense of community/Like a family").

When having people here in the (.) community when talking to people and having them. It helps us to feel like we are in a learning family (..) because it helps us to create a good learning environment whereby we also learn from one another. We share ideas, we learn from one another, and also that is trying to connect us to the online learning environment because that one, when we have one another here in the camp we do not come from the same places. However, when we are here in the learning environment, we get connected to each other, we share knowledge, and we feel like we are close to one another. (Student W, Pos. 77)

### 5.3.2 Summary of Results for Research Question 2

The summary of results for RQ2, "What is the role of *cura personalis* in social presence/social space?" will be presented on the basis of Hypotheses 2.

**H2. The better the students feel cared for, the more social presence is realized and a sound social space is established and maintained online.**

Whilst there are only a few interview quotes that mention these constellations together, an understanding has emerged between the students who have been studying together for some time, they see each other as a learning family. Factors that are seen as detrimental to social presence or social space are writing messages instead of face-to-face communication; receiving negative feedback from peers; or insufficient English language skills, especially at the beginning of their studies. The feeling of security in the learning environment, the positive atmosphere and the help and support that students receive can be seen as an expression of *cura personalis*.

Although there is clear evidence of social presence, social space and the influence of *cura personalis*, the second hypothesis cannot be answered in its "the more, the better" relationship. It is difficult to prove with this qualitative data set.

## 5.4 Influence of the Blended Learning Format on Social Space (RQ3)

**RQ3. How does the in-person onsite format contribute to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students?**

### 5.4.1 Result presentation for Research Question 3

A table giving an overview of the categories used for answering RQ3 is available in appendix 11. A similar question to the research question, “How does the social aspect of the on-site component help with the online component?” was included in the interview guide (see chapter 6.2). Ad hoc paraphrasing was used for clarification in the interviews. For instance, the question was rephrased like this: “The dynamics of the on-site course, does that influence the online course?” (Interviewer to Student L, Pos. 96) and “Socially, do you feel you get connected to others more easily when you have both classes?” (Interviewer to Student L, Pos. 100). Six out of seven students answered this question categorized as “Reciprocal effects.” For answering this research question, a case-based approach is used.

Student W said that “getting to people, talking to them, this is how we learn” (Student W, Pos. 67), so for him/her, the social aspect of the on-site component is expressed in learning to communicate with others, which helps him/her with the online part of this blended learning setting (“Reciprocal effects”).

[...] Yes, having this, being (...) in this community, really, we learned through talking to people, talking to other people in the community because they help us to connect the content with the situation. The real-world situation that is going on here in our community. Also having that is really important, and it helps us to learn and also be engaged in this online environment. (Student W, Pos. 71)

Communication helps him/her to connect to others, to create a learning family in the on-site and online experience, feeling like being close even though there is geographical distance between them (“reciprocal effects”).

When having people here in the (.) community when talking to people and having them. It helps us to feel like we are in a learning family (..) because it helps us to create a good learning environment whereby we also learn from one another. We share ideas, we learn from one another, and also that is trying to connect us to the online learning environment because that one, when we have one another here in the camp, we do not come from the same places. However, when we are here in the learning environment, we get connected to each other, we share knowledge, and we feel like we are close to one another. (Student W, Pos. 77)

Student E responded to the question “Is there anything you bring from the on-site component into the online component?” with an example related to studying (“reciprocal effects”):

I'll just give an example. Most of the time we have discussions on-site. When we have those discussions we get some ideas and sometimes transfer those ideas into our assignments or into

our assignments online. When someone reads that assignment he or she can be helped and maybe get some of the points that I write in the assignment, using the idea or using what I learned on-site. (Student E, Pos. 61)

Not just for him/her, the aspect of studying is mentioned. Student L weighs the blended learning aspect and shared responsibility between the two components (“reciprocal effects”).

Student L: The only support that exists there is in terms of sharing responsibilities. There are some of the courses maybe which are very hard and you find that the online facilitator did not elaborate on something in detail. The on-site facilitator's duty is to make things easier to understand on behalf of the online facilitator. For me, I can say there exists a very good connection between the online facilitator and the on-site facilitator.

Interviewer: How is that for you? Are there people you make friends with online easier than with on-site people?

Student L: You meet at any time [on-site], as I explained earlier rather than the online one. Sometimes you can have the intention of maybe being connected to someone online, but that person would not respond to you at the time that you wanted. With the on-site one, you have something at the time that you desire and you get to be responded to at the time that you want. (Student L, Pos. 93-95)

Comparing meeting people on-site to meeting people online, Student L explained that he/she prefers the on-site contact as these people are present, contrary to the online contacts who are not always online at the same time and do not respond in a timely manner (Student L, Pos. 95). Socially, he/she sees the connection in the deadline approaching when all students are online.

[...] we all are required to meet the deadline. For example, we are being given an assignment that may be posted on the discussion portal and the deadline is maybe at the end of the week. We all make sure that we submit that particular assignment at the end of the week and you know that on Monday, we are all required to submit our online work and you meet and visit different discussions coming in at that particular time and you can get to exchange with learners or facilitators that moment because you know that this is the deadline and people are sending in their responses. You can know that this person is online. If I respond to him, he also responds back to me. (Student L, Pos. 100-103)

For Student W, the question “How does the social aspect of the on-site component help with the online component?” was related to learning to communicate and for feeling like being in a “learning family” (Student W, Pos. 77) when the on-site space reaches into the online space. A pragmatic approach was taken by Student E who sees the connection between online and on-site in the transfer of ideas from the on-site discussions into the online discussions which might help online students there. Student L referred to the “shared responsibilities” (Pos. 93) of the on-site and online facilitator and the timing. The value of the online learning social exchange with other students is often considered as less by the students as they have the companionship in person in their location:

But online wasn't much compared to the on-site. On-site was very great. (Student Q, Pos. 147)

### 5.4.2 Summary of Results for Research Question 3

The summary of results for RQ3, “How does the in-person onsite format contribute to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students?” will be portrayed on the basis of hypothesis 3.

**H3. The in-person onsite format contributes to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students.**

This hypothesis about social space in the specific blended learning setting of JWL cannot be evaluated, since the data does not provide sufficient insights for a more thorough analysis. Only one of six students referred to the social aspect by saying the online community feels like a learning family. Thus, no direct relation between the on-site and the online format could be determined.

## 5.5 Social Interactions Using Cura Personalis (RQ4)

**How do students use cura personalis in social interactions with other course members while sociability in the online component is limited?**

### 5.5.1 Result presentation for Research Question 4

An overview of the categories used and their case and code frequencies can be found in appendix 12.

For this research question, the two categories “Sociability” and “Social interactions” are considered, focussing on the students’ use of cura personalis when helping other students. The question of interest here is “What kind of interactions are there between you and the others online?” It also discusses the challenges and limitations of the online approach and switching to different media (modality switching), which is discussed towards the end of this section.

Student Q illustrated the online interactions in detail (“sharing ideas and experiences”). Four answered in this category.

There are a lot of interactions in the online classroom. Like, we could always have a discussion room where if you have a question or something where you need assistance, you could post your questions there and then your fellow students and/or facilitator could come in and help you. At the same time, in most cases, we were having questions that facilitated interaction between the students, where we could post our stories and our experiences online, and then we responded to other people's experiences in the stories online. I can say it was a good interaction. (Student Q, Pos. 87)

In the eyes of Student E, there is one main interaction online, namely the mutual commenting of contributions in the discussion forum (“comments / peer feedback”), which 5 students referred to.

The one interaction that we use is when we are commenting on each other's posts - only in the discussion. When in the discussion forum it's like a connection to share some ideas. Maybe this means to share some points, or maybe someone's assignment or someone's posts about the discussions. That's when you get some connection with the online student. (Student E, Pos. 95)

For this Student, as for the others, peer feedback from other participants is found to be very helpful and an exchange of ideas improves the individual assignment that must be submitted at the end of each week. If necessary, the task is clarified either by other students (online and on-site) or by the facilitator on-site or online (“assignments and feedback”). Six students responded in this category.

It is also helping because we submit our questions, we submit our assignments [on the discussion forum] and someone will comment like maybe this and this, maybe this means this. Maybe I didn't know that the assignment that I was writing, maybe I missed some points and someone can collect me, that maybe this point should be there also. When doing that I am getting something from them. It is also helping because we are sharing ideas through the online platform. (Student E, Pos. 43)

For Student W, collaboration between online students helps them learn, familiarises them with other perspectives (Student W, Pos. 33) and leads to positive outcomes; the category “international aspect” was used for 7 students.

I really appreciated having that learning environment of students from different countries, sharing different knowledge and experience, it's really helpful. It was really collaborative, which helped us to make a productive, good result. (Student W, Pos. 31)

Out of five students, he/she described that he/she feels valued by his/her fellow students because he/she receives their support (“students help students”):

Also, I feel valued because of my fellow students. Having this environment they always assist me when I have a question to ask [...] First of all, I have to ask my fellow students about this when I have doubts about a certain content, I can first reach out to my fellow student and ask him how he or she understood the content, and the student will give me feedback, which helps me in my learning process. Therefore, because of that, I really feel like I'm valued. (Student W, Pos. 119)

The activity of commenting on each other's online work is usually graded, as Student K said (“comments / peer feedback”). This category was used 5 times:

If you fail to comment on someone's work, it means that the grades will be deducted. There are grades that are given to students when they interact with other students. (Student K, Pos. 49)

Student K answered the question about his/her preference for online study over face-to-face on-site study as equally good. He/she then explained that there is always someone from his/her

course who is willing to help online (“students help students”) Again, five students referred to this.

Both, because sometimes your classmates will not be there [on-site]. If you try to post something online, classmates will be available, and they'll comment on your work. We need on-site and online support. (Student K, Pos. 117)

When asked what kind of interactions take place in the online classroom, Student H replied that in addition to the assignments, the “grievances” of studying are also dealt with (“comments / peer feedback”). Five students’ replies are coded in this category.

Mostly, it's all about the assignment and discussing where we find the things difficult. Where we could not understand, we can discuss that, but mostly, that's all we do discuss with them. Yes. Apart from discussing our grievances, some of the things we find that are not helping us or some of the things that we see that will hinder our education. We do discuss those. Yes. (Student H, Pos. 77)

Student E expressed empathy as his/her motivation to help others (“students help students”):

[...] Within the discussion forum, whenever I read someone's post, I do get something new. I do get something new, for example, maybe someone from Kenya. He was writing there about like he was a refugee. Then he explained there was a time that he was explaining himself about what he has passed through and how other people helped to change into who he is now. About that time, when I read that post, I got something like, oh, in life it is indeed to help each other. It is good to help each other because you never know who he is, who she is, or what she is going through (Student E, Pos. 101)

These explanations for mutual help in the interaction can be seen as a sign of *cura personalis* among students.

“Limitations” of this learning arrangement are mentioned by six students. When asked about the challenges of interacting when only being able to type, Student E replied that Zoom classes would be helpful.

Yes, I think there are challenges because- (..) Maybe we can have a class, an online class where we can set a time to have the Zoom meeting where we would be seeing each other. Online class, we see each other and interact with each other. I think that can help because we only interact with them using text. Maybe someone can have another idea that he can talk online. There are some other ideas that we cannot say or we cannot write, but they can just come at that time to talk to someone online directly. However, we cannot have the mind of writing to him or her. This is because we only get a chance to type. If you can have an online class that will be interacting with them, like talking, seeing each other, and sharing ideas, I think that can help. (Student E, Pos. 103)

Student Q referred to the difficulties in the beginning of his/her studies when asked about the challenges of typing; this illustrates the initial challenges that had to be overcome.

I can't say [typing] was normal, maybe because we were used to. Four years is a long time. In the end, we were used, but in the beginning, it was really difficult [...] We could not express

what we could do when it was virtually, but in the end, we were used so we could do it normally. At first, it was difficult. (Student Q, Pos. 104-105)

Student Z also reflected on the differences in communicating with people face-to-face and online:

[...] What I would like is talking to people (.) because sometimes when we are typing, we don't really convince... We don't use words to convince. We try to make it professional, too much professional, but when we are seeing face-to-face, we can try to convince in another way. Yes. Myself, in the part of discussion, I will try to do it... I would prefer to do it face-to-face. (Student Z, Pos. 119)

When asked whether the impression of others is rather abstract for him/her online, Student W answers,

Yes, because when we just write, we don't have time to meet, or we don't have time to hear the voice of one another to see one another, so it seems like being abstract. Let me use this and what seems like being abstract, because I can't even see the face of the facilitator, (...) so we don't have the time and you can't see his or her face. [...]

That's why when talking about the one whom I learned the most from, I started by mentioning my on-site facilitator because he's the one whom I can see, I can talk, I can (...). Everything and I learned a lot from him. (Student W, Pos. 149/151)

Challenges in online communication were also mentioned by Student H, who in addition to language aspects also spoke about a solution to the problem of not being able to properly understand the English of people from different camps in other regions/countries:

What we normally ask, or even the instructor (.) normally asks if (.) we cannot understand the question or what they are explaining, it's better just to write it in the comment box so that people can read it, because as it is easier to understand something that is written than what people are talking about verbally. (Student H, Pos. 89)

Students can communicate with other students online via various channels that differ in terms of their functions and sociability. In the LMS, students use the asynchronous discussion forum and connect via the comment function to work together on assignments. This communication should be task-related (Student H, Pos. 77). For social – not necessarily course-related - communication, there is the option of a “weekly chat” (Student K, Pos. 95) in the discussion forum where students can communicate without their facilitators seeing (hereafter this is referred to as the students’ board). In addition, the online facilitators can provide space in Zoom sessions for the group to learn more about each other (Student K, Pos. 95). Another possibility is the use of WhatsApp groups initiated by facilitator or students (“switch to different media”), which was talked about by six students. The graduating students mention the active use of WhatsApp more frequently, while first-year students seem more reluctant. Student Z, a

first-year student, sees the disadvantages of being online in general, and social media and WhatsApp in particular:

Someone can be addicted. (.) Also, when you are studying online, suppose (..) that you have WhatsApp, it can distract someone because let's say you have WhatsApp, at the same time, you are studying with your WhatsApp, with your Facebook, all the social media, and then you can be focusing and there you find the message popping up, telling that someone has texted you, blah, blah, blah. You get directly distracted. You cannot focus again. Also, it makes people do other things rather than studying, watching, spending time on YouTube, doing some other stuff. Things like that. (Student Z, Pos. 115)

Student E, first-year, rejects it completely.

No, no. Only when we are at the campus. No Teams, no WhatsApp. (Student E, Pos. 91).

Student Q, graduating student, explains

Sometimes we could just talk about the courses, but we had some times where we could communicate in person with those people. We could share our contacts. If you wanted to know more, like what happens in their country, and how life is in their country, we could do that. Sometimes we could exchange phone numbers, communicate on WhatsApp, and learn from each other. [...] (Student Q, Pos. 45)

When asked how he/she gets on with his/her classmates, Student H replied that he/she exchanged phone numbers.

We get along very well to the point that we (..) even exchanged phone numbers. At first, we could communicate through email, and then (.) we exchanged numbers. We communicate directly through phone. (Student H, Pos. 75)

He/she also mentioned an active WhatsApp group,

We have a WhatsApp group that connects us from... students from Kakuma, Myanmar, Zambezi, Dzaleka. We have that group that we keep in touch, but we don't socialize that much unlike when we are at the centre. (Student H, Pos. 43)

### 5.5.2 Summary of Results for Research Question 4

The summary of results for RQ4, "How do students use *cura personalis* in social interactions with other course participants while sociability is limited in the online component?" is given on the basis of Hypotheses 4.

**H4. Students use *cura personalis* in social interactions with other course members even though sociability is limited.**

The online interactions between the students are limited to what the online space and the students' abilities to use the computers allow. Initially, it was difficult to deal with the individual components required for online learning. Some students compared online learning to face-to-face activities where they can meet and socialise in a more natural way. *Cura personalis* is being



used in online interactions: This could simply be helping each other, but also showing empathy for fellow online students. Within the limitations and challenges of communicating, students express themselves and sometimes switch to different media for a more personal experience. There is a difference between first-year students and graduating students: Two out of three first-year students were negative about modality switching, while graduating students' responses were more balanced.

## 5.6 Difference over Time in Using Cura Personalis (RQ4a)

### RQ4a. Is there a difference in behaviour over time?

#### 5.6.1 Result presentation for Research Question 4a

Appendix 13 provides an overview of the categories used and their code and case frequencies. This research question was posed as a sub-question to RQ4, which focused on the online component of the Jesuit concept of cura personalis in relation to social interaction and limited sociability. Asking for the behaviour of the students, which develops holistically in both the online and the onsite component in the course of studying, the category "Personal growth" was only partially used, as students there were referring to personal changes, not necessarily exchanges. The direct question if returning care was different at the beginning of their studies ("Difference over time") was only answered by three out of four students briefly. With regard to the categories "Social interaction" in chapter 5.5, "Personal growth" in chapter 5.2, and the category "Effects on the individual recipient" in chapter 5.2, which have already been looked at in more detail, a change in behaviour towards others is reflected here.

Student Q, graduating, stated that after being with almost the same people throughout the four years (Liberal Studies and then BASD), he/she knew exactly whom to ask for help ("students help students"). Five students replied to this.

I can say for some people it was more like a family because in four years we were together. We started it together. We did interact each and every time. We reached a certain point where I could know, like, if I need this kind of assistance, let me approach this person. If I wanted to do this project with somebody, this person would be the best. We were close to many of the online team. We are coming closer and closer. (Student Q, Pos. 123)

As proof of how close they were, he/she said that he/she no longer knew where his/her online conversation partner was or where he/she came from at times.

Sometimes you could even forget like, "Wow, this one is from Jordan and I'm from Malawi." You could just be, "My friend, can you help me in this way?" You can see we were close to each other. (Student Q, Pos. 129)

During the interview, he/she talked about giving something back to the community in which he/she lives (Student Q, Pos. 149-151). When asked “Was that different in the beginning, and did that change over time?” (“Difference over Time”) he/she replied:

Okay, I can say before joining JWL, I did not have that in mind but after joining JWL, it's when I had that mind and that initiative and I started doing it when I joined JWL. (Student Q, Pos. 160)

Three out of four students answered this in total. Student W (Pos. 129) and Student H (Pos. 143), both graduating students, affirmed the question if there is a difference over time and generally talked about giving back the care they received. Student K explains that his/her interaction with other people has changed (“Personal growth”), which six students reported about.

[...] I'm able to learn and grow, especially in my studies. I can say that I've improved because had it been that you found me in my first year, I could have (unclear) to speak the way I'm speaking. I'm growing with my studies and the way I interact with different people. (Student K, Pos. 124)

Student W, graduating, also changed during his/her study experience:

Okay. (.) What made me grow is (..) the learning process, first being in an environment where we have students from different countries, we have students from different ethnicities, we have students from different backgrounds, so that's the first thing that helped me grow because I learned from them. We share the experience. I learned from them in terms of behaviours, in terms of treatment, treating others with dignity and respect. So, I also learned, (...) the online environment helped me grow with the courses that we took. The content was really important. They helped me grow in one way because the Sustainable Development Goals program covered a lot, which helped me grow professionally and mentally. (Student W, Pos. 181)

Both Student K and Student Q mention a specific part of the BASD programme, the Peace Leader course, which is both a professional course in JWL and also a part of this programme (“Course descriptions”). Two out of five talked about this part.

[...] In the past course session, we were doing the first part of Peace Leader, and it is also a professional course in JWL, but now I'm doing it in BA. This course, rather than just talking about how to become a successful peace leader, was just talking about (.) a human being, by the way. It tackled some of the points about how you can care for yourself before you become a peace leader. I like the point that it also focused on the side of caring for yourself before you care for others. I learned that we are supposed to work on ourselves before we try to work on others because sometimes you fail to effectively help someone because you don't really know your strengths or your weaknesses. Now, we are doing the second part, and this is the first week we are learning about the BA coaching. I also learned different skills that can enable me to become a successful coach. (Student K, Pos. 71)

[...] Maybe what I can add is this course has been the best because there was one part where we could learn how we can be peace leaders, where we could understand that if development has to happen, then there must be peace. We were training on how are we going to be peace leaders so that wherever we go we can be doing what we are doing, but at the same time, we

have to facilitate peace because development is related to peace. I also liked that part much, to say, it was nice to go through this course and it was good. (Student Q, Pos. 171)

Student Z, first-year student, participated in the Learning Facilitator professional programme and subsequently studied BASD. It is clear for him/her that he/she has changed his/her behaviour (“personal growth”):

So my behaviour has changed, and I think up to when I'll finish, it will change totally.” (Student Z, Pos. 71)

### 5.6.2 Summary of Results for Research Question 4a

The summary of results for RQ4a, “Is there a difference over time?” is presented on the basis of Hypotheses 4a.

**H4a. There is a difference in behaviour between the students who have been exposed to cura personalis for a longer period of time and students who are only starting to be exposed to cura personalis.**

Looking back on the years of study, the growing familiarity with other online students led to more personal interaction among online students. Interactions with other people are changing, including with fellow students. The international environment encourages students to learn more about different cultures in the Dzaleka refugee camp, the country and the online environment. A specific course in the BASD programme, Peace Leader, was named as a favourite course and illustrates how changing one's behaviour towards oneself and others is taught at JWL.

## 6 Discussion

The results of the coded interviews were presented in chapter 5. In this discussion chapter, the findings of this thesis will be discussed based on the theoretical findings of chapter 2 before the methodological procedure and the limits of this thesis will be reflected on.

### 6.1 Discussion of the Results

#### 6.1.1 RQ1 - Discussion

**How is cura personalis expressed in the online format and what are the effects on the individual student?**

As laid out in chapter 2.3.1, care is used as an ancillary concept for operationalising cura personalis. For this discussion, the theoretical framework of Al-Freih & Robinson (2023) is used to categorise the presentation of results. This will first contextualise the methods of cura personalis in the learning environment (chapter 5.2.1.1) before looking at the effects of cura personalis (chapter 5.2.1.2). Al-Freih & Robinson (2023) use Noddings' four elements model of care as a framework, which consists of the elements modelling, dialogue, practise and confirmation, and add a fifth category of anticipation. These elements will be used to structure and discuss the results of RQ1. The following description is based on students' answers in the interviews. The weekly web-based training units cannot be considered here.

*Modelling:* In the interviews, the students stated that the presence of a facilitator for the online part is not always as intensive as the students wish for. Sometimes, there are special course models (see chapter 5.1) where a more personal approach is provided, such as during the final project, or when an online facilitator offers a more open approach to communication with the group through a WhatsApp group created by the online facilitator. A good TSR (chapter 2.3.2) between online facilitator and students in this blended learning arrangement depends on the amount of contact with the online facilitator, in an eight-week course this is limited. The blended learning is complemented by an online discussion forum for the students which serves as alternative. The discussion forum is also used for peer feedback and mutual improvement when students help each other. The role of the on-site facilitator eases perceptions of being distant to other students in the beginning and serves as a personal contact and tutor. The on-site facilitator intercedes when questions or problems arise – in understanding the course content, the learning process or technical issues. Modelling care through course design can also be found on the structural level, where the applicability and relevancy of the course content stand out. Opportunities for synchronous interactions seem to be highly valued by the students,

but due to the technical arrangement these are limited. In this blended approach, the teaching practise is student-centered and based on the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm; the Malawian students favour the blended learning courses compared to their traditional universities because it teaches them critical thinking skills.

*Dialogue:* The dialogue between online facilitator and students is reduced due to the sociability of the LMS and the feedback options available; email; and discussion forum. Dialogue with the online facilitator is replaced by face-to-face dialogue with the on-site facilitator and peer students. Personalized feedback by the online-facilitator is valued by the students, as is peer-feedback in the forum. The extent of instructor presence in the discussion forum depends on the individual facilitator. Other means of communication such as the use of e-mail and the feedback functions of the LMS were not discussed in detail in the interviews. Relationships between first-year students in the online part are rather loose, whereas graduating students refer to their peers as “family.” The students communicate on-task by commenting on each other’s assignments and off-task in the students’ section of the board among themselves or they switch to e.g. WhatsApp, which may or may not be setup by a facilitator.

*Practise:* The interactions between students are limited and mostly take place on the discussion board by commenting and posting the individual assignment. Students’ online participation is included in the grades they receive for their assignments. In some courses, online group work is allowed; however, group work is one typical element of the on-site activities. At the beginning of every new eight-week course, an introductory programme allows the students to present themselves and to get to know coursemates and the facilitator better, accordingly the assignments focus on familiarizing with each other.

*Confirmation:* The online facilitators provide feedback every week for the weekly assignments. This is especially important for first-year students as confirmation for persistence in studying.

*Anticipation:* The overall design of this blended learning arrangement has been refined since its inception in 2010 (McFarland, 2014, p. 3). Forethought and anticipation in the design and the technical setup could be viewed as an indication of care that JWL has put into its conceptual design and implementation.

The effects of care for the whole person were described by the interviewees in chapter 5.2.1.2. The category “Effects on the individual recipient” of care includes feeling valued, which is a way of showing care and respect within Jesuit culture (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 60). The inspiration to help others, of returning care, in the students’ accounts is not only based on helping other students, it is also about improving the community. Through the care experienced, a “mentality

[of care]" (Noddings, 2012a, p. 232) is produced. With the realization of becoming an "agent of change" (Student Q, Pos. 54) and the experience of self-efficacy and with the tools given through studying, the students' situation is improved further, especially in the regard of their own livelihood and their community. One basic tool or skill which was mentioned by the students was the ability to communicate. A new self emerges in the course of studying and this personal growth leads to empowerment. The setting by JWL invites networking with other students on the margins, located in other refugee camps abroad or in poor areas. Lasting personal contacts with students from other locations - for this group of interviewees - are only sometimes established. The in-person support the students receive does not stop with the study aspect, in the Jesuit tradition the accompaniment offered by taking a personal interest in the lives of the students "helps to show they are valued as a human and [is] a basic step towards improving well-being" (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 66). Since the research question was exploratory in nature, hypothesis 1 "There are distinct expressions of showing *cura personalis* online and there are identifiable effects on the students by that." cannot be confirmed or rejected.

### **6.1.2 RQ2 - Discussion**

#### **What is the role of *cura personalis* in social presence/social space?**

In the theory section, the connection between the individual elements of Kreijns' model (2022) and the SIPS model (Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017) was explained (Chapter 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). This will be taken up again in this part of the discussion. In order to answer RQ2, the students' perception of social presence and social space was determined as part of the study and analysed in relation to hypothesis 2 (chapter 5.3). The theoretical starting point is the simplified SIPS model (chapter 2.1.3, FIG. 2). The relationship between social presence and social space and the influence of *cura personalis* on these two elements will be examined here.

According to Kreijns, social presence is realized when the other is perceived as "real" in a technologically mediated space, and when social factors like personality, motivations etc. come through. Practically, a basic sense of social presence is given when students "compar[e] notes and correct[] misunderstandings as well as [help to build] trust and communities of learners" (Kreijns et al., 2024, p. 2). In this sense, the students' communication options like the students' discussion board serve as a basic means to create social presence among the globally mixed audience. Further, social space, which is dependent on social presence, is described as the "group attribute" (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 159). Group cohesion and a sense of community is built through "socioemotional interaction" (Kreijns et al., 2013, p. 231), like collaboration on cultural artefacts and shared values (Kreijns et al., 2022). The students are asked to collaborate on their weekly assignments in the discussion forum and this interaction can be seen as on-task, the

participation through feedback is graded. Off-task, the students' section of the forum is used for commentary as a sort of back channel, or switching the modality, some graduating students communicate by the use of WhatsApp. Cura personalis in Jesuit education is expressed in "relationship-rich environments" (Rao et al., 2021, p. 73), which create a feeling of social connectedness among the students. The social aspect at JWL is especially put in focus in the first week of each 8-week course, when students are occupied with on getting to know their fellow students.

Hypothesis 2, "The better the students feel cared for, the more social presence is realized and a sound social pace is established and maintained online," can be confirmed in terms of its content, but not in its "the more, the better" relation. There was no connection in the sense of "the more, the better" to be found between feeling cared for, social presence and social space. This is probably due to the fact that the interview guide for this qualitative study does not contain a question that combines these two aspects, and no overlapping segments were found. There are, however, indicators that social presence/social space is perceived by the students, and that care or cura personalis is practised. This differs between first-year students and graduating students. While the first-years seem more cautious, the graduating students refer to their online peers as "family," which in itself is an expression of care. One reason for this difference could be the initial difficulties with computers, typing, and speaking in a foreign language at the same time even after one year of Liberal Studies prior to the Bachelor in Sustainable Development. Kreijns et al. (2024) points out that

"[students] may come from various parts of the world but study at the same higher education institution. Consequently, they may be complete strangers to one another and differ in multiple aspects, including language and cultural background. [When collaborating,] these differences may play a role in shaping how they experience the social presence of their peers." (Kreijns et al., 2024, p. 3)

Social presence and social space can be established in the beginning of studying through the use of cura personalis because it helps reduce the initial feeling of alienation among students online. Most of the students interviewed felt integrated into the online course community, yet more or less distanced.

### 6.1.3 RQ3 - Discussion

**How does the in-person onsite format contribute to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students?**

In this exploratory question, it was to be tested if the social climate among students in the on-site part of this blended learning arrangement carries over into the online part and is

expressed in terms of social presence/social space. In “traditional” blended learning, there usually is the same group of students who meet online and in person, thus connections and social presence/social space are more easily established because the students have more options of getting to know each other. This is complicated through the specific set-up of Jesuit Worldwide Learning where online and on-site activity cater to separate audiences, the students located in the same space and the internationally situated group of students.

Due to the level of difficulty of the question asked in the interview, three views on this topic emerged: that having learned how to communicate in the on-site helps to communicate online, that this helps to build a “learning family” (Student W), that there is a shared responsibility between the facilitators and an anticipation of all students being online shortly before the assignments have to be handed in (Student L), and that it is helpful finding answers for the assignments in the on-site, which one can use for the commenting online (Student E). Of this, Student W’s answer seems the most applicable one to answer this question. Since no theory was identifiable to apply to this specific setting, i.e. two different groups within blended learning, further research in the field of social space and blended learning with disparate groups is recommended to answer this research question more exhaustively. Hypothesis 3, “The in-person onsite format contributes to the establishing and maintaining of social space in the asynchronous online format with a different group of students,” cannot be confirmed thus.

#### **6.1.4 RQ4 - Discussion**

**How do students use *cura personalis* in social interactions with other course members while sociability in the online component is limited?**

As described in the theory section, the empirical part of this study was based on the model of Kreijns et al. (2022) and the SIPS model by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017) for social presence. To answer the research question, the students' perspective on social interaction and sociability will now be examined. Both sociability and social interaction act as preconditions for social presence and social space, which can be seen in the simplified SIPS model (see FIG. 2 in chapter 2.1.3). Collaboration or commenting as one form of online learner-learner interaction can lead to an improvement of student learning; it falls into the category of designed interaction and is graded (Borokhovski et al., 2012). Contrary to this, contextual social interaction wants the students to self-reflect, share different points of view and resources, and obtain informal feedback (Koskey & Benson, 2017). Sociability, seen as the “medium attribute” (Kreijns et al., 2022, p. 160), describes the technical possibilities of the learning environment as well as its social affordances, which facilitate social-contextual aspects in the environment. Kreijns et al. (2022) as well as Walter (1992) describe the sociability function as positive, even though a



learning environment may be restricted to text-based, asynchronous interaction, students make the best use of it. In recent years, modality switching (Stone & Logan, 2018) has become an option to increase synchronicity and add to the available sociability potential.

The results analysis showed that hypothesis 4, “Students use *cura personalis* in social interactions with other course members even though sociability is limited.” can be confirmed. Typical forms of social interaction are commenting on other students’ assignments, using the students’ section of the discussion board, writing about themselves in the introductory week for each course and completing other online assignments. Both variants of interaction can be identified in this study: contextual interaction takes place on the student’s board, and designed interaction is used when fulfilling the task of commenting on other’s assignments in the discussion forum or collaborating. The question of interaction centred on students helping students was used as an opportunity to see whether a “mentality [of care]” (Noddings, 2012a, p. 232) is fostered, whether *cura personalis* not only extends into students’ lives but is actively used in exchange with each other and with others. The results show that, despite the limitations of the online medium, a concept of care is being employed. The impression is that the students see the exchange of ideas and collaboration in the conceptualisation phase of assignments not only as obligatory, but also as valuable and helpful and thus as a form of care. This weekly exchange of experiences and ideas can lead to a sense of connectedness, as expressed by the graduating students, and thus to more social presence/social space and more empathy for the situation of the fellow students.

The students showed that focusing on the sociability of the LMS for communicating has its limitations for them, e.g. typing messages may not fully convey what one wants to express. Adapting to the communication environment was expressed by several students, however, personal expressions for creating social presence and a degree of intimacy in communication (Walther, 1992) could not be provided with this empirical data. It would require a more thorough investigation with examples of students’ written communications, but such a procedure is hard to justify and would require the approval of an ethics board. Adapting to the sociability restrictions, a switch to other media (modality switching) is only sometimes favoured. Some of the students participate in WhatsApp groups and/or use their mobile phones for communication to enhance their experience of social space and social presence through more synchronous (and perhaps even video) conversations. In this way, they can create informal learning spaces to further connectedness, feel less monitored in the LMS and “retain the ownership of [these spaces]” (Stone & Logan, 2018, p. 46).

### 6.1.5 RQ4a - Discussion

#### Is there a difference in behaviour over time?

In chapter 2.3.1, it was pointed out that teachers who care want to change their students' behaviour (Noddings, 2012b; Walker & Gleaves, 2016). Within the Jesuit frame of reference, a transformation of the students is aimed at (Rega et al., 2024). The students interviewed in this study have shown that change is possible. The changes in behaviour towards others could be due to care/cura personalis and general empowerment through their students' educational journey. A particular course programme within the BASD programme, the Peace Leader, was mentioned by two students. This is an example of how introspection and learning promotes behavioural change through a course programme provided: "[this] course is designed around three core themes of Self-awareness and Cultural awareness; Conflict resolution and reconciliation; and Servant-leadership<sup>4</sup> [Capitalizations in original]" (Jesuit Worldwide Learning, 2024b). It is a stand-alone course offered by JWL as a professional course, but it is also included in the BASD programme.

Hypothesis 4a, "There is a difference in behaviour between the students who have been exposed to cura personalis for a longer period of time and students who are only starting to be exposed to cura personalis," can only partly be substantiated for this sample group. It is hard to determine a difference in behaviour for this sample of students, as they are of different ages, have different previous experience with JWL professional and English courses and the first-year bachelor students have already completed the one-year Liberal Studies programme which is a prerequisite for the Sustainable Development degree. This means, that the idea of using "experience with the JWL BASD programme" as a criterion for achieving an equivalent of a pre- and a post-test, i.e. a comparison of the students at the beginning with less or no previous experience regarding cura personalis and students towards the end of the Bachelor programme who have almost completed their studies, is difficult but not impossible. It is an indicator for the scope of students' experience with JWL and thus a good sample of the population.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a leadership concept developed by Robert K. Greenleaf (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). In this approach, leaders aim at sharing power and see themselves as servants to their employees.

## **6.2 Critical Reflection**

### **6.2.1 Field of Research and Sample**

This investigation was carried out at the Community Learning Centre of Jesuit Worldwide Learning in Dzaleka, Malawi. The students participated in the JWL blended learning program of Higher Education in Emergencies, the Bachelor of Arts for Sustainable Development. The focus of this study has deliberately been directed at the student's perspective, to see how *cura personalis* and care is perceived by them. The perspectives of facilitators, other staff and JWL headquarters was not taken into account. The initial sample selection aimed at inner representativity (see chapter 4.4.2). Even though only 7 out of 8 interview partners participated, it was possible to reach a good balance of male and female candidates as well as first year and graduating students. A possible bias introduced because of the selection of interviewees by a gatekeeper could not be detected by the researcher, but is possible, nevertheless.

The small size of the sample does not allow for generalizations. JWL students at other locations or students of other Higher Education in Emergencies programmes may not share the same experiences and challenges as students in Dzaleka, Malawi. The results of this thesis can therefore only represent a section of the field of study and must be understood in the context of the specific conditions and at the time this study was conducted.

### **6.2.2 Data Collection Method and Method of Analysis**

Since there was no adequate, already validated instrument available from prior research in the field, a semi-structured question guide was created through deduction from the theory chapter. It was tested in trial interviews beforehand and questions were refined. The online interview situation is described in chapter 4.5.1. Due to technical problems on the part of JWL Dzaleka, the interviews proved to be a particular challenge for the interviewer and influenced the course of the interviews. As a result, many carefully formulated open questions from the interview guide were inadvertently asked as closed questions. One interview question was too close to research question 3, the wording was too scientific and abstract for the lived experience, so that the students had difficulty answering it: "How does the social aspect of the on-site component help with the online component?"

When talking about "risks, mistakes and typical conflicts" (Hopf, 1978, p. 97) in qualitative interview research, problems arise from sticking too rigidly to the interview guide or from a guide that is too extensive, cannot be managed in terms of time and puts the interviewer under considerable pressure (Hopf, 1978). Morgan Brett and Wheeler (2022) recommend that novice

interviewers have additional questions ready to use if necessary. In retrospect, the interview guide for this research project was too packed, which made it difficult to use.

The use of the Focused Interview Analysis (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020) for research under limited time resources proved to be practicable. Especially the step-by-step guidance was helpful. This made it possible to explore and to reconstruct the subjective viewpoints of the students, as laid out in chapter 5. With a different approach to the data, e.g. the Grounded Theory approach, the object of investigation would probably have been analysed more deeply. However, this would require more time and personal resources and could therefore not be realised within the scope of this thesis.

### 6.2.3 Use of Methodological Principles

Döring's five epistemological principles were applied as quality criteria in this thesis (Döring, 2023). The *everyday life-world* of the students at Dzaleka's Community Learning Centre served as a starting point for exploring the topic of this thesis. According to Döring, qualitative research can capture what is accessible through communication and interaction by using a measuring instrument, the interview guide. Here, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on students' perceptions and experiences of everyday education. Thus, the requirement of life-world research has been fulfilled. A *relative or critically reflected openness* is required, so that the researcher can either reject or build on the original presuppositions, questioning and finding new ways to look at the object of research. In the initial search for a suitable theory to approach the research topic, the researcher made theoretical assumptions about the object of study (see chapter 2), which led to limitations of the openness in the research approach. The fact that the interviewer ended up asking more closed questions than intended also limited the openness. Nevertheless, the students were able to speak freely about their experiences and to add anything that seemed important to them. All in all, it was still possible to achieve a critically reflected openness in various stages. The relative openness leads to methodological *flexibility*, which is reflected in the *circularity* and adaptability of this research project. Carried out iteratively, adjustments could be made to the interview guide in the early stages and misconceptions could be corrected, new perspectives could be incorporated. Thus, the reflection led to a constant improvement in the research process and contributed to the design of this work. The principle of research as *communication and cooperation* describes the co-operative relationship between researcher and interview partner. The linguistic, cultural and technical challenges slowed down the development of a trusting relationship and understanding. This was sometimes made more difficult by the researcher sticking to the interview guide and the order of the questions. The time allowed for answering the individual

questions was also too short. One reason for this could certainly be the researcher's limited interview experience. In the qualitative paradigm, *self-reflection* is at the basis of knowledge production. After the individual interviews, the researcher recorded her reflections in a private research journal, also taking into account the challenging situations of the interviews. With regard to the students, a tendency for providing socially desirable answers is possible. In conclusion, the use of the methodological principles according to Döring lead to a better quality and understanding of qualitative research in this thesis.

## 7 Conclusion

This thesis investigated the connection between the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* and the educational research theory of social presence in the context of Jesuit Worldwide Learning. For this, a systematic literature search for social presence and *cura personalis* was carried out to identify possible theories and studies. The model by Kreijns et al. (2022) and its extension, the SIPS model by Weidlich & Bastiaens (2017), were chosen because of their division of the socio-psychological phenomenon of social presence into the four components of social presence, social space, sociability and social interaction. This made it possible to analyse JWL's blended learning arrangement in smaller research units while maintaining the integrity of the whole. In order to examine the use of the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*, care in education as a concept was used in this study for a scientific approach to the concept of *cura personalis*.

At the centre of the research interest was the question of how the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis* is put into practice in the blended learning arrangement of JWL and how *cura personalis* affects the student's perception of social presence. A review of the literature on *cura personalis* showed that this perspective of *cura personalis* "in action" (Stadnyk, 2021, p. 74) had not been researched so far.

This thesis provides answers of how *cura personalis* is used online in a refugee context and what impact this has on the students. Creating a "mentality of care" (Noddings, 2012a, p. 232) occurs on both personal and structural levels at Jesuit Worldwide Learning: on the personal level, the students receive initial help in the beginning of their studies; they ask facilitators for help; they help each other; they receive personalised feedback from the online facilitator; and they receive support for their final project. In terms of structural factors, the following aspects could be mapped out: the applicability of courses and topics; the didactic approach of Ignatian Pedagogy; the provision of tuition-free university education; and accessibility of hardware and its support as well as physical space at the Community Learning Centre. These aspects help students in achieving a university degree while living in a refugee camp. With the help of the framework of Al-Freih & Robinson (2023), going back to Noddings (2012a), the results were portrayed. Care and/or *cura personalis* represent not only a way of dealing with each other, but also cover the attention and care put into the design of a course. Further, the data analysis shows that the practical relevance of the content of the bachelor programme in Sustainable Development, which caters explicitly to JWL's student audience, leads to the direct experience of self-efficacy on the part of the students. The interviewed students reported that they use the contents learned in this blended learning setting and extend the care received not only to other students but also to the larger community, changing the situation for many more people.

Another finding was that the students experience social presence in the discussion forum, yet most of the interviewees put an emphasis on the on-site component. Individual preferences favouring the online or on-site component in this smaller sample cannot speak for the whole student body. The collaborative character of the discussion forum in the LMS asks for the learners' ideas and critical thinking skills. This form of peer learning leads to mutual improvement and helps the students to refine their assignments before submitting them for grading. Through this process of commenting on each other's work, students become acquainted with one another online. The metaphor of a (learning) family was used by the graduating students when talking about their perceptions of social relations within their cohort. The cultivation of social presence and the group attribute social space were affected by the initial difficulties experienced when online learning was new to the students. Such difficulties occurred when using a computer; typing; and speaking in a foreign language, English. To create group cohesion, an introductory week for each 8-week course is provided with tasks and assignments focusing on getting to know each other and presenting oneself. The feeling of community develops gradually through the sharing of social space online. The social interactions online help develop a sense of community, as well as respect and tolerance. They consist primarily of commenting on each other's assignments, asking questions and helping others. Both designed interaction and contextual interaction are used in the JWL online context.

Regarding sociability, the research showed that text-based, asynchronous communication is seen as less attractive by the students than on-site communication. Typing and the conception of written content in a foreign language was perceived as disadvantageous to free in-person expression and took time getting used to. Modality Switching, the use of different forms of electronically mediated communication such as the messenger service WhatsApp, was only favoured by a few of the graduating cohort, while the first-years rejected the idea. One research question regarding the aspect of blended learning, namely if a feeling of community in the on-site format can be transferred onto the online part and its social space with disparate groups, cannot be answered satisfactorily on the basis of the available results. The degree of abstraction required for answering the corresponding interview question was deemed too difficult.

The use of the ancillary concept of care in higher education opened up possibilities of operationalising the Jesuit concept of *cura personalis*. One of the findings is that care is a relevant factor for student retention and connectedness in this blended setup. *Cura personalis* is used by the students for each other and serves as an inspiration on treating other people differently. All students interviewed described elements of personal growth leading back to this programme. Increasing social presence can be achieved by working on the creation of a sound

social space through social interaction online. This can possibly compensate for the limited sociability of the discussion forum.

Further aspects which could not be covered in this thesis include how social presence is constructed in a JWL course with a deeper analysis of the comments in discussion forum of the LMS. A look at the complete hybrid course system of JWL, an analysis of the culturally sensitive web-based trainings, and learner engagement offers topics for additional research. A comparison of the Jesuits' pedagogical approach and its Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm with other pedagogical and didactic approaches is still pending. Social presence in multi-ethnic learning communities and internationalisation of the online classroom is an interesting but separate topic for further studies. It would be interesting to research from a comparative point of view the Higher Education in Emergencies programmes, and to compare the JWL programme with other NGOs engagement in tertiary education on basis of computer-mediated learning.

Jesuit Worldwide Learning as an NGO for Higher Education in Emergencies provides knowledge, hope, dignity and a future for refugees, displaced people and their host communities. Although this cannot change the reasons for flight and displacement, it can at least mitigate the consequences.



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## Appendix

### Appendix 1– Letter to Participants 1

July 18, 2024

Dear Participant,

**[name of coordinator]** has kindly established this contact between you and me. Thank you for considering taking part in my research project. My name is Ulrike Kersten. I am a master's student in an online programme called Educational Media at the University of Duisburg Essen in Germany and I am currently working on my master's thesis. For this, I would like to interview you.

My subject is, broadly speaking, social presence and *cura personalis* (the Jesuits' Latin term for 'care for the whole person'). The full title of my thesis is "The perception of Social Presence in a Blended Learning Programme of Higher Education in Emergencies – An exploratory study on the influence of *Cura Personalis* and Teacher Care."

**Social Presence** is described as the perception if others in an online setting are perceived as real, if a social space among students and facilitator can be established online and how far technology forms these exchanges.

**Cura Personalis** is a basic value of Jesuit education. As care for the whole person, it is part of the holistic approach of Ignatian Pedagogy. In this thesis, the influences of this care and social presence will be investigated alongside, to find out if there are interconnections between them. The focus will be on the students' perceptions in the online component.

This Zoom-interview will last between 30 - 40 minutes. What you say will be strictly confidential and will be further anonymized in the transcription process. Nothing you say will appear with your name on it, quotes will be anonymous.

If you have any further questions about this or anything else regarding the research study, do not hesitate to contact me at [ulrike.kersten@gmx.de](mailto:ulrike.kersten@gmx.de).

Your sincerely,

Ulrike Kersten

## Appendix 2 – Letter to Participants 2

Hello **[name of participant]**,

again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview-based study for my master's thesis.

Your interview will take place on **[day, date and time]** via ZOOM, a video conferencing tool. You can use the following link for the ZOOM call:

LINK:

Meeting-ID:

Code:

Your pseudonym is: Student **[capital letter]**

Please use this **pseudonym** to change your screen name during the interview.

Please plan with **one hour** and select a quiet, undisturbed place for the interview.

You will find the **Participant Consent Form for Interviews** attached to this email. This form is necessary for me and my research to prove that scientific standards are being followed before, during and after the interview. It is also important for you to know that you can stop the interview at any point and/or decide not to answer certain questions. To participate in the interview, you have to sign the form and send it back to me ( [REDACTED] ). Desire Iraguha at the Learning Centre will help you with any issue. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

In the interview I will ask you about your experiences with the online component of your studies and I am particularly interested in **your own perceptions and opinions** of your online experience. It is my goal to find out if *cura personalis* ("the care for the whole person") is influencing social presence in the online component of the blended learning setting at Jesuit Worldwide Learning. Social presence is the perception of others as being real in an online learning environment, as well as you yourself feeling connected to your peers socially. The resulting social space can be influenced by the media you use to communicate and how you communicate. *Cura Personalis* ("the care for the whole person") is a way of treating others in a Jesuit context. I would like to learn more about this care from you, how you experience it, to see if there are interconnections to social presence.

Should there be **any problems with the internet connection**, we can turn off the cameras. If you need to switch internet providers, please rest assured that I will wait for you to return to the ZOOM call. My mobile number is [REDACTED], if there are any additional or short-term difficulties feel free to contact me on WhatsApp or Signal.

I am very happy about your participation, and I do look forward to meeting you online.

Kind regards, Ulrike

## Appendix 3 – Consent Form

### Participant Consent Form for Interviews

**Full title of Master Thesis:**

“The Perception of Social Presence in a Blended Learning Programme of Higher Education in Emergencies – An Exploratory Study on the Influence of *Cura Personalis* and Teacher Care”

**Name, position and contact details of researcher:**

Ms. Ulrike Kersten, Master Student (Educational Media), Learning Lab of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at University of Duisburg-Essen / North-Rhine-Westfalia, Germany

**Personal address:**

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**Project objectives:**

The study explores the role of *cura personalis* (the care for the whole person) / teacher care in higher education in emergency settings and how *cura personalis* / teacher care influences the perception of social presence in the online component of the blended learning environment, with a focus on the perspective of Bachelor students of Jesuit Worldwide Learning.

**Procedure:**

The research is interview-based.

**Interview recording and consent:**

The interview will last around 30-40 minutes and will be conducted online using ZOOM, as licensed by the University of Duisburg-Essen / Germany. The University of Duisburg-Essen has reviewed the compliance of ZOOM with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union, the data protection laws of the German state of North-Rhine-Westfalia and further data protection rights and has made the necessary modifications on its servers.

**The meeting link will be sent to you by e-mail. Before the session, please replace the name appearing on your Zoom display window with the pseudonym that I have sent, so that your identity does not appear.**

You will be notified before the recording starts, and you will be asked to confirm your agreement to the recording and your consent to be interviewed. The recorded file will only be saved/stored locally on the password-protected computer of the researcher (not in the ZOOM cloud) and only be used for scientific research. The video recordings will be destroyed immediately after the interview, only the audio recording will be used for this research.

The list matching your pseudonym to your identity will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected USB key. This key will be stored in a locked drawer in Ms. Ulrike Kersten's home office. This list will not be accessible to any other person and will be destroyed in August 2024 as part

of the data anonymization. As a result, I will no longer hold any personal data about you and will no longer be able to match your answers of the interview to your identity. Consequently, after this date I will no longer be able to destroy your data if you request that.

**Data anonymization:**

The collected data will be anonymized in the transcription process, meaning that all personal data that might make it possible to identify you will be deleted from the text files one week after the interview collection. The audio file will then be deleted. Thus, if you wish to remove an excerpt from the interview or decide that you want the whole interview deleted, please contact the researcher within 7 days of the interview recording. The anonymized data may be used for future research and/or shared with other researchers. This consent form will be kept for 2 years in a locked drawer locally, in case of a compliance review by the data protection office of the University of Duisburg-Essen.

**Results access:**

If you are interested in the results of the research, please contact Ms. Ulrike Kersten via the e-mail address [REDACTED]. Should you wish to receive a copy of the transcript of the interview, please indicate this within 7 days after the interview.

**Risks and vulnerabilities:**

In this interview, you will be asked to reflect on your learning journey in higher education. During this conversation, you may be asked questions that you may not feel comfortable answering or that may trigger some unpleasant and unwanted emotions or memories. **Please note that you have the right to stop your participation in the interview at any moment and you can choose not to answer any question.** If you need support, you can always reach out to your local coordinator, [REDACTED], at your community learning center or an external safeguarding contact person (more information available here: <https://www.jwl.org/governance/greater-good-principles>). Anything you say in the interview will be treated with confidentiality. There will be no negative consequences for you due to what you say or if you choose not to participate or not to answer any given question.

**Your consent:**

I confirm that I am 18 years old or older.
I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and I have had an opportunity to ask questions.
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in this research activity at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).

I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:

being audio recorded during an interview

my words may be included in print and digital publications/reports, as well as on social media.

I understand that if I withdraw from the study, I will be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study **except** from where my data has already been anonymized (as I cannot be identified) or where it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed. In case I wish to withdraw from the study, I will immediately reach out to the researcher and inform her.

I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the researcher to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
(BLOCK CAPITALS)	(dd/mm/yyyy)	

__ULRIKE KERSTEN__	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature
(BLOCK CAPITALS)	(dd/mm/yyyy)	



## Appendix 4 – Semi-structured Question Guide

### Interview Guide: Social Presence and *Cura Personalis*

Ulrike Kersten, Version 01.08.24, 09:21 AM

Questions	Probes and prompts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hi, I'm Ulrike from Germany.</li> <li>• thank you for being here</li> <li>• thanks for helping</li> <li>• curious</li> <li>• <b>How are you today?</b></li> <li>• Did you have any <b>difficulties</b> getting into this meeting?</li> <li>• <b>Small Talk! Icebreaker!</b></li> <li>• What's the <b>weather</b> like today in Malawi?</li> <li>• <b>Tell me about yourself.</b></li> <li>• Do you have any <b>questions</b> for me before we officially start?</li> <li>• Please ask when you don't understand something or questions come up on your side.</li> <li>• Have you read and signed the <b>consent form</b>? Any questions?</li> <li>• Please use your <b>pseudonym</b> for Zoom before we go on to the recording.</li> <li>• I will take <b>brief notes</b> during the interview which should hopefully not distract you.</li> </ul>	<p>Probes: Nonverbal</p> <p>Could you tell me more about this?</p> <p>What happened then?</p> <p>How did it go on with...?</p> <p>In what ways do you ...?</p> <p>What do you mean by that?</p> <p>Could you elaborate?</p> <p>How did that show itself?</p> <p>To what extent...?</p> <p>There is no right or wrong. I am interested in your opinion. Everything you say is anonymous and no one will be able to trace it back to your person.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the statistics, would you tell me <b>how old</b> you are?</li> <li>• Do you identify as <b>man, woman or other</b>?</li> <li>• Do I have your permission to record now?</li> </ul>	

### START RECORDING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When did you <b>start studying</b> with JWL?</li> <li>• What is your <b>field of study</b>?</li> <li>• (What experience did you have with <b>computers</b> when you started?)</li> <li>• (How <b>confident</b> are you using <b>computers/tablets</b>?)</li> </ul>	
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<b>Studying with JWL</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you <b>enjoy</b> about your studies at JWL?</li> </ul>	What's <b>good</b> ? What's <b>bad</b> ? Where is it <b>difficult</b> for you?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do you think of <b>using online communication</b> for learning and interaction?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does a <b>typical week</b> look like for you <b>study wise</b>?</li> </ul>	How much <b>time</b> do you usually spend online per day in the online classroom?
<b>Online / on-site description</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you <b>describe the online/on-site component</b>? How does that work out for you?</li> </ul> <p><b>I would like to focus on the individual parts now:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you please describe how the <b>online part</b> of your studies takes place?</li> <li>Can you please tell me more about the <b>assignments</b>?</li> <li>Can you please tell me more about the <b>on-site activities</b>?</li> <li>Which do you <b>prefer</b> personally, online / onsite?</li> <li>What are the differences for you between the <b>online faculty</b> and the <b>on-site facilitator</b>?</li> </ul> <p><b>Now this is a difficult question:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the social aspect of the <b>on-site component</b> help with the online component?</li> </ul>	Why? What is <b>good</b> about that? Where do you <b>feel best supported</b> ?  What is it what you <b>do online exactly</b> ?  Is this always <b>individual work</b> or in <b>groups</b> ? More online or on-site?
<b>Social Space</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please describe the course you have felt <b>most confident and comfortable</b> in so far. (on-site and online)</li> </ul>	What makes this course <b>special</b> ? What <b>elements contributed</b> to this course being special?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please describe your <b>favourite facilitator/faculty</b>. (on-site and online)</li> </ul>	What <b>behaviour and actions</b> make him/her special?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Would you say this is true for <b>most of the facilitators/faculty</b>?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was there a course you did <b>not like</b> at all?</li> </ul>	<b>Why</b> was that so?

Social Interactions with peers online	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you have interactions within the online classroom for <b>getting to know each other</b>?</li> </ul>	Have you made <b>friends</b> with online peers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you get along with your online <b>classmates</b>?</li> </ul>	Where do you <b>hang out</b> with your online peers? Do you <b>switch to WhatsApp</b> or another messenger service?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What kind of <b>interactions</b> are there between you and the others <b>online</b>?</li> </ul>	Are these interactions mostly <b>study-related</b> ? Why are there <b>no social interactions</b> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does the <b>faculty initiate</b> interactions among students?</li> <li>How do you <b>communicate with your peers and with faculty</b>?</li> </ul>	Do you feel <b>supported by your faculty</b> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which forms of interaction do you <b>personally use</b>?</li> <li>Which <b>challenges</b> do you encounter in these interactions with your communication partners?</li> </ul>	Why/why not? Can you <b>easily contact</b> your classmates for <b>spontaneous conversations</b> ? To what extent do you agree that online communication can be <b>more intimate</b> than in-person communication?
Social Presence (explicitly)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent do you feel that a <b>sense of community</b> is established in your courses?</li> <li>Do you generally <b>feel integrated</b> in the course community?</li> </ul>	Do you think the others <b>feel the same</b> ?  Do you feel you <b>get along with the others</b> ? Can you <b>talk with them freely</b> ? Did that <b>evolve / change</b> over time? To what extent? And to your <b>on-site peers</b> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much <b>distance or closeness</b> do you feel between you and your online peers?</li> <li>How much <b>distance or closeness</b> do you feel between you and your online faculty?</li> </ul>	And to the <b>on-site facilitator</b> ?

Care (explicitly)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you <b>feel supported</b> in your studies?</li> <li>• When you <b>need help</b>, whom do you turn to?</li> </ul>	<b>Why/why not?</b> Online / offline?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways do you <b>feel valued</b>?</li> </ul>	Do you <b>value the contributions</b> of your peers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What <b>types of care</b> have you encountered on-site during your studying so far?</li> <li>• What <b>types of care</b> have you encountered <b>online</b> specifically during your studying so far?</li> <li>• How do you <b>feel about that</b>?</li> </ul>	Can you give me <b>some examples</b> ?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does this inspire you to <b>return this care</b>?</li> <li>• To what extent has this <b>changed your way of treating others</b>?</li> </ul>	How do you <b>give back</b> ? And to <b>students</b> ? Only <b>online/only offline</b> ? How was that in the <b>beginning of your studies</b> ?
<b>And now my last questions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has <b>motivated</b> you to do these studies and what <b>keeps you motivated</b>?</li> <li>• What makes you <b>grow</b>?</li> </ul>	
<b>Is there anything</b> you would like to add? Maybe there is something you feel we should have talked about, but wasn't asked in my interview questions?	

## Appendix 5 - Postscriptum

### **Postscriptum – Pseudonym, Gender, Age, Field of Study**

Interviewer:

Date of Interview:

Place of Interview:

Starting Time of the Interview:

Finishing Time of the Interview:

Duration of the Interview (in minutes):

Pseudonym of Interviewee:

File name of Recording on Zoom:

Interview situation:

---

Special occurrences during Interview:

---

Conversation before recording started:

---

Conversation after the recording finished:

---

Behaviour of Interviewing Person:

---

Behaviour of interviewed person:

---

Other Peculiarities, Information or else:

---

**Appendix 6 – Overview of the Interview Sample**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Duration of Studying</b>	<b>Field of Study</b>
f	22	first-year	BA Sustainable Development
f	24	graduating	BA Sustainable Development
f	36	graduating	BA Sustainable Development
m	23	first-year	BA Sustainable Development
m	23	first-year	BA Sustainable Development
m	27	graduating	BA Sustainable Development
m.	31	graduating	BA Sustainable Development

**Appendix 7 - Category Overview for the Educational Setting**

(own representation)

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Case frequencies</b>	<b>Code frequencies</b>
<b>BL - Blended Learning</b>		0
BL-Dcm – Different course models	5	9
<b>SIPS</b>		0
SIPS-Soi – Social Interaction		0
SIPS-Soi-CF – Comment/Peer Feedback	5	7

## Appendix 8 – Category Overview for RQ1, chapter 5.2.1.1

(own representation)

Categories	Case frequencies	Code frequencies
<b>C - Care</b>		<b>0</b>
<b>C - MoC - Methods of Care</b>		0
<b>C-MoC-P - Personal</b>		0
C-MoC-P-Ask - Asking facilitators for help	5	10
C-MoC-P-I - Initial help in the beginning	2	3
C-MoC-P-S - Students help students	5	13
C-MoC-P-PrF - Providing Feedback	3	5
C-MoC-P-StH - Close study help	1	3
<b>C-MoC-S – Structural</b>		0
C-MoC-S-App - Applicability / relevancy of courses and topics	5	12
C-MoC-S-Da - Didactic approach	3	3
C-MoC-S-Uni - Providing university Education	2	2
C-MoC-S-OnS - On-site support	1	1
C-MoC-S-LIT - Laptop, internet and technical support		0
C-MoC-S-LIT-Lap - Use of Laptops and tablets	3	6
C-MoC-S-LIT-Ii - Internet issues	3	4
C-MoC-S-LIT- Hd - Help desk	2	2



## Appendix 9 – Category Overview for RQ1, chapter 5.2.1.2

(own representation)

Categories	Case frequencies	Code frequencies
<b>C - Care</b>		<b>0</b>
<b>C-Ei - Effects on the individual recipient</b>		0
C-Ei-F - Feedback empowers	2	3
C-Ei-V - Feeling valued	6	10
C-Ei-Ins - Inspired to help others	5	6
C-Ei-Pg - Personal growth	6	11
C-Ei-To - Treating others	3	4
<b>C-TSR - Teacher Student Relationship</b>	6	11
<b>C-Acc - Accompaniment</b>	2	4
<b>ComL – Communication / Language</b>	5	14

## Appendix 10 – Category Overview for RQ2

(own representation)

Categories	Case frequencies	Code frequencies
<b>SIPS</b>		
<b>SIPS-SP – Social Presence</b>	6	8
<b>SIPS-SoSp – Social Space</b>		0
SIPS-SoSp-F – Sense of Community/Like a Family	7	13
SIPS-SoSp-Li – List of students	1	2
SIPS-SoSp-I – Introductions	3	4
SIPS-SoSp-Kit – Keeping in touch	6	6
<b>SIPS-So – Sociability</b>		0
SIPS-So-Lim-Limitations	6	10
<b>C - Care</b>		
<b>C-MoC – Methods of care</b>		
<b>C-MoC-P - Personal</b>		
C-MoC-P-I - Initial help in the beginning	2	3
<b>C-TSR Teacher-student-relationship</b>	6	11

**Appendix 11 – Category Overview for RQ3**

(own representation)

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Case frequencies</b>	<b>Code frequencies</b>
<b>BL - Blended Learning</b>		0
BL-RE – Reciprocal effects	6	7

## Appendix 12 – Category Overview for RQ4

(own representation)

Categories	Case frequencies	Code frequencies
<b>SIPS</b>		0
<b>SIPS-So – Sociability</b>		0
SIPS-So-Swi - Switch to different media	6	11
SIPS-So-Diss – Discussion forum/LMS	5	8
SIPS-So-Lim – Limitations	6	10
<b>SIPS-Soi – Social Interaction</b>		0
SIPS-Soi-CF – Comments / Peer feedback	5	7
SIPS-Soi-Fii -Faculty initiating interaction	3	3
SIPS-Soi-Sh – Sharing ideas and experiences	4	5
SIPS-Soi-AfA – Asking for assistance	1	1
SIPS-Soi-Gw – Group work online	1	1
SIPS-Soi-M – Moderating	2	2
SIPS-Soi-O – Other	3	5
<b>C - Care</b>		0
<b>C-MoC - Methods of Care</b>		0
<b>C-MoC-P Personal</b>		0
C-MoC-P-S - Students help students	5	13
<b>BL – Blended Learning</b>		0
<b>BL-OnL – OnLine</b>		0
BL-OnL-Ass - Assignments and Feedback	6	12

## Appendix 13 – Category Overview for RQ4a

(own representation)

Categories	Case frequencies	Code frequencies
<b>C - Care</b>		<b>0</b>
<b>C-MoC - Methods of Care</b>		0
<b>C-MoC-P Personal</b>		0
C-MoC-P-S - Students help students	5	13
<b>C-Ei – Effects on the individual recipient</b>		0
C-Ei-Pg – Personal growth	6	11
<b>C-Time – Difference over Time</b>	4	5
<b>BL – Blended Learning</b>		
BL-Cd – Course descriptions	5	10

**Appendix 14 – Digital Appendix: Table of Contents**

<b>Folder</b>	<b>Files</b>
<b>1 – Semi-structured Question Guide</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Documentation of the Two Versions of the Interview Question Guide used in the Interviews</li><li>• Interview Question Guide: Social Presence and Cura Personalis - <i>explained</i></li></ul>
<b>2 - Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transcripts</li><li>• Postscripts</li></ul>
<b>3 – Analysis files</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• MAXQDA project file (including Logbook and Memos for coding)</li><li>• Coded Interviews</li><li>• Initial Coding Guide</li><li>• Finalized Codebook</li></ul>

## Eidesstattliche Versicherung

Hiermit erkläre ich, dass ich die Arbeit selbständig angefertigt habe und keine anderen Hilfsmittel als die in dem Quellen- und Literaturverzeichnis sowie im Anmerkungsapparat genannten verwendet habe.

Stellen, an denen Wortlaut oder Sinn anderen Werken entnommen wurden, sind unter Angabe der Quellen als Entlehnung kenntlich gemacht.

Ludwigshafen, 08.12.2024

\_\_ULRIKE KERSTEN\_\_

(Vorname Nachname)

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☐ Hiermit erkläre ich mich einverstanden, dass die von mir verfasste Prüfungsarbeit (ggf. nach Ablauf der unten benannten Sperrfrist) öffentlich, auch auf Internetseiten der Universität Duisburg -Essen, zugänglich gemacht wird.

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Ludwigshafen, 08.12.2024

\_\_ULRIKE KERSTEN\_\_

(Vorname Name)