

Chapter 5

Classroom Management in Synchronous Online Secondary Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Virtual schooling in the United States has continued to grow since the first virtual schools were established over ten years ago. A review of literature related to online education has largely centered on the experience of students in online classes (Barbour & Reeves, 2009), with little emphasis on the experiences of teachers who teach online classes (Robinson, 2008). The current study fills a critical gap in knowledge for teacher educators faced with the complex questions of how best to educate teacher candidates for the modern challenges of online teaching (Zeichner, 2008). Specifically, this study explores the following questions: How is classroom management addressed in an online learning environment? What are the necessary components of an effective online learning environment? The issues examined parallel Domain B of the Pathwise Assessment (Educational Testing Service, 2006): creating a climate of fairness, establishing rapport with students, communicating challenging learning expectations, establishing

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and maintaining consistent standards for classroom behavior, and making the classroom environment conducive to learning. A mixed-methods approach yields quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. The results indicate that the skills teachers acquire managing classroom behavior in traditional classroom settings do not transfer to online environments. Additional results suggest that the role of the facilitator, the students' schools, and technology that allows equitable access is critical to the success of teachers creating an effective online learning environment. A discussion and implications for future research are also included.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Arkansas Department of Education Distance Learning Center

Davis & Roblyer (2005) suggest that a need to provide equal access to rural, under-served, and at-risk populations precipitated the first virtual schools. Online classrooms can be broadly categorized by two different delivery methods, asynchronous and synchronous. Asynchronous delivery methods are more common in online schools and are characterized by interactions that allow students and teachers to work independently at their own pace, whereas synchronous delivery methods utilize real-time technologies such as chat, video conferencing, instant messages, and real-time audio conferencing (Barbour & Reeves, 2009). In the synchronous classroom, educators become facilitators of the content, technology becomes the catalyst in launching students on their path of discovery, and students are engaged in expanding and satisfying their intellectual needs.

Arkansas is a state in the southern region of the United States with over 37% of students in rural school districts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). In an effort to better serve its rural student population, the Arkansas Department of Education established a Distance Learning Center (DLC) to provide online learning instruction in all content areas to school districts across the state. The DLC provides synchronous, interactive teaching/learning experiences in real time through Compressed Interactive Video (CIV), internet, and document camera images displayed

on computer monitors (Arkansas Department of Education Distance Learning Center, 2009).

The primary focus of the DLC is to assist secondary schools (grades 9 through 12) that cannot find teachers qualified in specific subject areas and to provide flexibility in class scheduling for students. During the initial year of operation in 2001, the DLC employed five Spanish teachers, one mathematics teacher, and one language arts/journalism teacher. Currently, at the completion of the eighth academic year of operation, the DLC employs 25 teachers who provide elementary and secondary content to schools throughout Arkansas. All of the teachers are located at the main DLC facility in Maumelle, Arkansas. The DLC provides all of the state-required units of instruction except music and physical education.

During the 2008-2009 academic year, the DLC instructed close to 3,000 secondary students representing the majority of school districts across the state. In one class period, a teacher may have students from as many as four different locations across the state of Arkansas. While students and teachers are geographically separated, the lack of physical proximity does not prevent the teachers and students from developing personal connections. In addition to synchronous online classroom interaction, teachers also meet students at venues around the state for enrichment activities, and students sometimes visit the DLC to meet their teachers.

The DLC content is designed to meet the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks and National Standards, with major assessments that measure what the students have been taught over the course

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