

ARE YOU A DREAM COME TRUE OR A NIGHTMARE? DESIRED CHARACTERISTICS IN THE FACE TO FACE AND ONLINE INSTRUCTOR

**Dr. Barba Aldis PATTON
Dr. Teresa LESAGE
University of Houston-Victoria
Victoria, Tx USA**

ABSTRACT

All instructors would all like to be a "Dream Come True" but unfortunately many come across to their students as a 'nightmare'. The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics in effective and successful online and/or face-to-face instructors. Characteristics as perceived by pre-service teachers in each setting were investigated in the survey. Results revealed that students in both types of learning environments desire and appear to need communication (or contact) with the instructor in order to be considered effective and successful in their studies. However, students held face-to-face instructors to higher standards on their knowledge than the online instructors. Survey information was divided into five categories and provided very different information. Although this was a limited study, it provided valuable information that instructors cannot view teaching both online and face to face classes as one-fits all type approach.

Keywords: Online education, face to face education, instructor characteristics, teacher education

INTRODUCTION

The demand for online courses is increasing worldwide, which has raised quality issues among educators. It is no secret that many institutions rushed onto the electronic super highway have floundered in the delivery of web-based instruction. Many were of the opinion that online classes were the way of the future and if you did not get involved at the beginning there would not be another chance. Although some university distance education programs have failed, it is expected that there will be major growth in higher education delivered electronically. Experts project that electronic learning will transform the way learning occurs in most, if not all, college classrooms (Allen & Seaman 2006; Carnevale, D. 2006; Newman & Scurry, 2001), thus it is very important to understand how virtual students learn and the differences/similarities between them. In 2005, about 70.2% of all college students (3.2 million) in the United States took at least one online course, which was an increase of 39 % from 2004. Worldwide, nearly 19 % of the population has been internet penetrated (Internet World Stats, 2007 & Pew Research Center, 2007).

Students participating in web-based courses have different cognitive learning styles and individual differences. Although one or more learning and thinking styles may be suited for electronically delivered content, others may actually hinder learning in an electronic environment. Some students in web-based courses may have characteristic primary personality preferences that are better suited for the electronic learning environment, thus requiring no learning style adaptations and those students who do not have a natural tendency to learn in the electronic learning environment will be at a disadvantage. (Authors 2008)

With this in mind it is utmost important that instructors be apprized of needs and desires of their students, both online and face to face. The online instructor begins with several distinct disadvantages however. Online instructors do not have the benefit of body language and voice tones, opportunities for spur of the moment communications, etc. With this in mind it is more important and ever that in order to be an effective and successful instructor, one must be aware of his/her students.

Significance of the study

Accessing education on the "go" is quickly becoming the norm in higher education. College students are early adapters (natives) and heavy users of the internet (Jones, 2002), while most instructors are digital immigrants. Many educators question if college students can learn as well in an electronic environment as they can in the traditional classroom. Education delivered virtually is in its infancy (a little over 10 years) compared to instruction delivered face-to-face over the past thousands of years. Higher education institutions are offering web-based courses without investigating if students are successful in this environment.

In this study, the researchers examined what the students perceived as the characteristics of effective and successful instructors for both online and face to face instructors. The researchers believe that every instructor wants to be effective and successful (A dream come true and not a nightmare). These data, although limited by the size of the study, will provide instructors information so they can become more effective and successful instructors.

Literature:

Just as the type of delivery methods for classes has evolved so has the role of the instructor. Years ago, the instructor was there to impart knowledge for the student to memorize. However, today instructor is a facilitator or guide as students construct their own knowledge. Teaching was and is still today a very complex undertaking (Helterbran 2008). Teaching is all about learning and that is sometimes forgotten (Polk, 2006). The reciprocation of teaching and learning makes the two inseparable for the effective and successful instructor. Jeremy Polk (2006) states, "It is the teachers' responsibility to grow as practitioners, stay current in their field and continually evolve as professions. It is this professional development that is considered paramount to successful teacher." Polk makes it clear that the instructor needs to change with the changing times and different delivery methods. There is no place in the teaching field for the 'professor who has been in the classroom for 20 years only to have one year's experience as he has taught in the exact same way for the last 20 years' but there is a need for the progressive professor who as truly had 20 years of experiences.

People tend to revert to a familiar trait when facing a trying or unfamiliar situation. Many tend to revert to a lower stage of development (Piaget) when we are trying to determine the area of a room. Few will just take the measurements and compute the area but most will resort to making a drawing prior to doing the computation. Classroom teachers are no exception to this. They tend to resort to methods or styles of their own student days and do not consider that many of those methods are pastiche of great teaching on one end of the spectrum and the poorest of teaching on the other end. Novice teachers who have many of the newest and best teaching methods in their personal repertoire will quickly revert to those old methods to stay on the safe side when they finally arrive in the classroom. Therefore they need the information derived from this and similar studys in order to make changes to move toward the effective and successful (Stigler & Hiebert, (1999).

According to Heltebraun, students and instructors have basically the same definition or job description of the effective and successful instructor.

Polachek (2006) espoused that one of the most important roles of the effective and successful instructor is to have student-centered learning which is engaged or focused on active and meaningful experiences. However, a problem arises when the instructor is evaluated by administrators. The instructor want to be viewed as successful but the opinions and rubrics from each population are not constructed using the same metric.

Krueger (1997) found that administrator and students agreed on some aspects almost light-years away from each other. Both agree that it is important 1) to getting the point across clearly and 2) giving very clear directions; however, the students felt that the instructor's content knowledge should be ranked about third while administrators ranked it as nineteenth. The administrators ranked listening as third. This almost seems like the administrators live in 'days gone bye' as they are wanting instructors who will not challenge the administrator but just listen and listen without any confrontation.

Reeves and Kazelskis (1985) found that professionally young educators appeared to focus more on the affective than on the cognitive issues. The work of Gorham (1988), and McCroskey, Richmond, Sallinen, Fayer and Barraclough (1995) found that teacher effectiveness would likely include traits such as closeness, enthusiasm and warmth.

'When teachers take the time to follow up on and explore student ideas, even patently incorrect ideas, they send an important message to students: *It is okay to take intellectual risks in this classroom.* In this way, even when mistakes are made, students come to view mistakes as important sources of information rather than something to avoid at all costs' (Beghetto 2007 p. 268). It is equally important that the instructors of face to face classes are aware of meeting the needs of their students in order for them to be success and the online instructors must do the same.

METHOD

The subjects in this study were undergraduates enrolled in an early childhood Math/Science methods class at an upper level university. All 32 were females between the ages of 22-40 who responded to the survey concerning the online instructors. There were about 60% anglo, 38% Hispanic and less than 5% African-American. This class rarely has any males enrolled and the ages and ethnicity are typical of several semesters. This class is a required one and is one of the last the students take prior to student teaching. The second survey had the same questions except the word face to face was substituted for online. Only 20 students responded. The demographics were 60% anglo and 40% Hispanic and age range was again 22-40. The students were given a very small extra credit bonus if they completed the surveys. The surveys were online and strict security of privacy was adhered. For this research the questions, "What do you believe is an effective online course instructor?" and "What do you believe is an effective face to face course instructor?" Students were asked to list five components or characteristics which they believe an effective or success teacher should possess. The students were asked to complete the surveys the first day of class and to have it completed before the second class meeting which was a week later. Since the question was open-ended, the responses would have to be reported in a descriptive manner.

RESULTS

The students' responses were categorized into five areas which were 1) Communications, 2) Emotional, 3) Motivational, 4) Rules/Grades and 5) Teacher Skills after compiling the data. Due to some students not providing five responses to each question, there will not be exactly five answers per student.

In addition, some students' comments were only in one or two of the categories. The tables below include only a sampling of the responses.

Table: 1 Student Comments Related to Communications and the online instructor

Communications (positive comments)	Communications (negative comments)
Responses in a professional and courteous manner to the students	'Smart' replies
Sends check-up emails	Did not give other contact than email ...phone number and office hours would be nice
Efficient with returning emails	Some have ineffective communication skills.

Table: 2 Student Comments Related to Emotional and the online instructor

Emotional (positive comments)	Emotional (negative comments)
Understanding of events which could not be stopped or changed	Need to understand that computer may fail at times or be down.
Flexible	Not bending no matter what
Willing to help	Need to help all students and not just a few

**Table: 3
Student Comments Related to Motivational and the online instructor**

Motivational (positive comments)	Motivational (negative comments)
caring	None listed
Engaging	None listed
encouraging	None listed

Table: 4 Student Comments Related to Rules and Grades and the online instructor

Rules and Grades (positive comments)	Rules and Grades (negative comments)
Fair	unfair
Grades in a timely fashion	Grades but no feedback
Time to complete assignments	Flexible on rules to some and not to others

Table: 5 Student Comments Related to Teacher Skills and the online instructor

Teacher Skills (positive comments)	Teacher Skills (negative comments)
Clarity with instructions	Wordy, not clear instructions
Thoroughness of syllabus	Not prepared
Keep tentative schedule	Not organized

Table: 6 Student Comments Related to Communications and the face to face instructor

Communications (positive comments)	Communications (negative comments)
Available	No office hours
Answers emails/phone calls	Not friendly
Answers questions after class	Do not answer messages in a timely manner

Table: 7 Student Comments Related to Emotional and the face to face instructor

Emotional (positive comments)	Emotional (negative comments)
Caring attitude (supportive)	Hard, un-caring
Courteous and respectful	Rude
helpful	Not understanding of circumstances beyond the student's control

Table: 8 Student Comments Related to Motivational and the face to face instructor

Motivational (positive comments)	Motivational (negative comments)
Willing to help students	Instructor-centered
Enthusiastic about subject	Not really interested in the material
engaging	No extras to class.. just textbook

Table: 9 Student Comments Related to Rules and Grades and the face to face instructor

Rules and Grades (positive comments)	Rules and Grades (negative comments)
Fair	bias
Realistic when assigning tasks	Teacher's pets
Same rules for all (both students and instructor) i.e. on time for class	Busy work

Table: 10 Student Comments Related to Teacher Skills and the face to face instructor

Teacher Skills (positive comments)	Teacher Skills (negative comments)
Teach for mastery and understanding	Does not give personal examples
Student centered	Does not know content
Organized	No classroom management skills

Table: 11 Comparison of the Categories

Category	Online	Face to face
Communications	55 out of 160 comments (34%)	15 out of 100 comments (15%)
Emotional	35 out of 160 comments (22%)	21 out of 100 comments (21%)
Motivational	20 out of 160 comments (12.5%)	14 out of 100 comments (14%)
Rules and Grades	5 out of 160 comments (3%)	8 out of 100 comments (08%)
Teacher Skills	40 out of 160 comments (25%)	28 out of 100 comments (28%)

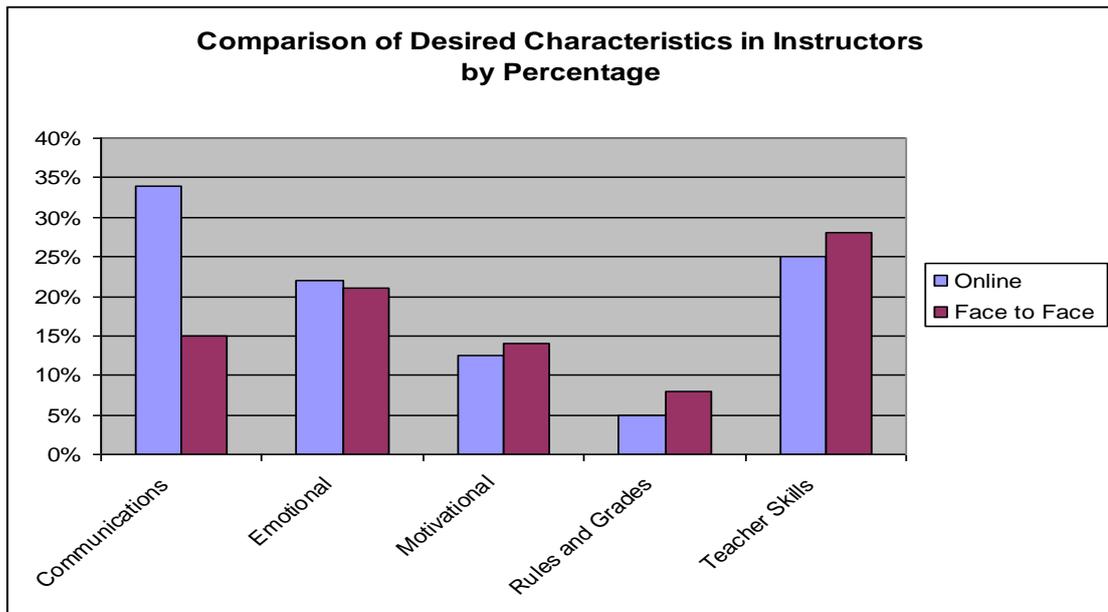


Figure: 1
Graphic Illustration by Percentages of the Desired Characteristics by Categories

CONCLUSIONS

The information gained from the survey data should give the college professor an insight into his teaching and possibly even give the knowledge of character traits which need to improve. The pre-service teachers can also gain from the data by utilizing the information in their future classrooms.

Even though the surveys were given to pre-service teachers about instructors and most likely these pre-service teachers presumed that they were describing the effective and successful university instructor this information could be vital to any and all instructors. While many instructors are effective and successful today, everyone can use some improvement.

This study provides a sketch of the positive and negative characteristics of the effective and successful face to face and online instructor. Having an understanding of the traits (comparative and declarative knowledge) and putting those traits into the environments (actualized and procedural knowledge) is the tasks at hand for all instructors to be effective and successful in any delivery method.

Recommendations:

The first recommendation is for instructors to communicate with their students. In the day of technology there can be almost constant contact, with total disregard to the distance between the instructor and student. However, instructors need to set some limitations such as specific hours which messages will not be answered or they will be online 24/7. With the specific hours students will have prior knowledge and will know when to expect or not expect a reply.

“When teachers take the time to listen to what their students are saying they will make strides towards creating an environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their unique interpretations and ideas (Beghetto 2007 p. 268). This very likely is a major point which instructors of online and face to face classes much remember on a daily basis.

Although there are several studies examining the effective and successful instructor, none was located which had any quantified results to document the findings. The researchers thought that at least one study would have included some type of test scores from the classroom of the 'ideal' effective and successful instructor.

In conclusion this study was limited by the small number of participants; however, this work could be utilized as a pilot study for a much larger one. The results could be very important to the professionally young educator and to the seasoned one who is now embarking on teaching in a different setting such as the online delivery.

BIODATA and CONTACTY ADDRESSES of AUTHORS



Barba Aldis PATTON, Ed. D, is an Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education and Human Development at the University of Houston-Victoria, Victoria, TX USA. She was the recipient of the university's Outstanding Service Award in 2007. As a former school administrator, her research interests are teacher quality, educational equity, mathematics education and online education. She has published seventeen articles during the last three years on the state, national and international level (refereed). She has presented presentations at local, state, regional, national and international conferences for many years. She is a regional director for the Texas Council of Teachers of Mathematics and on the board of directors for the American Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators. She has served on the Texas State Mathematics textbook selection committee and is presently serving on the state committee to review the 'End of Course Algebra II' items.

Dr. Barba Aldis PATTON
University of Houston-Victoria, Victoria, Tx USA
Office phone: 361-570-4271
Home phone: 361-578-1414, Fax: 361-578-8132
Email: Pattonb@uhv.edu

Teresa A. LE SAGE, Ed. D., is an assistant professor of Science Education and Curriculum and Development, University of Houston-Victoria. She has over 10 years teaching experience in public and private schools, published in refereed journals, presented at local, state, regional, and national conferences and currently a Board member of the National Social Sciences Association

Dr. Teresa LESAGE
University of Houston-Victoria, Victoria, Tx USA
Office phone: 361-570-4303
Email: lesaget@uhv.edu

REFERENCES

Allen, E. I. & Seaman J. (2006). Making the grade, online education in the United States, *Sloan Consortium 2006*
http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/making_the_grade.pdf

Beghetto, R. A. (2007). *Ideational Code-Switching: Walking the Talk About Supporting Student Creativity in the Classroom*. *Roeper Review*. 29, 4, 265-270.

Carnevale, D. (2006). Company survey suggests strong growth potential for online education. *Chronicle of Higher Education*.53 (13) A35.
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i13/13a03502.htm>

Carnevale, D. (2006). Online courses continue to grow, report says. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. 53(14) 36.

Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teaching immediacy behaviors and student learning. *Communication Education*, 17, 40-53.

Helterbraun, V. R. (2008). The Ideal Professor: Student Perceptions of Effective Instructor Practices, Attitudes and Skills. *Education* 129 (1) 125-138.

Jones, S. (2002). The internet goes to college. <http://www.pewinternet.org/>

Internet World Stats (2007) <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/cn.htm>
<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/en/index/00/index.htm>

Kruger, R. J. (1997). Oral communications skills necessary for successful teaching: The student's perspective. *Educational Research Quarterly*. 21(2) 13-26.

McCroskey, J. C. Richmond, V. P., Sallinen, J. M. Fayer & Barraclough R. A. (1995). A cross-cultural and multi-behavioral analysis of the relationship between nonverbal immediacy and teacher evaluation. *Communication Education*. 45, 200-211.

Newman, F. & Scurry, J. (2001). Online technology pushes pedagogy to the forefront. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 7/13/01 B7
<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v47/i44/44b00701.htm>

Pew Internet & American Life project (2007).
http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband%202007.pdf

Polk, J. A. (2006). Traits of effective teachers. *Arts Education Policy Review*. 107(4), 23-29.

Polacheck, D. (2006) the interactive college classroom. *International Journal of Learning*. 13 (5), 61-67.

Stigler J. W. & Hiebert, J, (1999), *The teaching gap*. New York. The Free Press.