

This article should not be reprinted for inclusion in any publication for sale without author's explicit permission. Anyone may view, reproduce or store copy of this article for personal, non-commercial use as allowed by the "Fair Use" limitations (sections 107 and 108) of the U.S. Copyright law. For any other use and for reprints, contact article's author(s) who may impose usage fee.. See also [electronic version copyright clearance](#)
CURRENT VERSION COPYRIGHT © MMXVII AUTHOR & ACADEMIC EXCHANGE QUARTERLY

Teacher Candidate Needs in Online Hybrid Program

Scott Robinson, UH Mānoa, HI

Robinson, Ph.D., is Specialist within the College of Education.

Abstract

This case study examines the emotional and psychological needs of three teacher candidates enrolled in an online hybrid teacher preparation program. The online hybrid model contains courses that combine face-to-face and synchronous online meetings. Data are derived from emotion diary entries and semi-structured interviews. Results suggest that face-to-face classes promoting the development of a caring cohort community are essential for establishing trust that may transfer to online seminars as candidates discuss their challenges, struggles, and successes during student teaching.

Introduction

Supporting the emotional and psychological growth and development of learners in online courses is a concern among social science researchers as digital technology takes an expanding role in course delivery (MacFadden, 2007; Regan et al., 2012; Reilly, Gallaher-Lepak, & Killion, 2012; Robinson, 2010; Zembylas, 2008; Zembylas, Theodorou, & Pavlakis, 2008). This concern has emerged, in part, due to minimal face-to-face interactions that occur in courses taught entirely or predominately through online computer-based technology. Wosnitza and Volet (2005) noted that the social context plays a role in the nature of emotional disclosure, and they called for research into emotional disclosure in online learning environments. The current study was conducted to examine these concerns based on the following research questions.

1. What impacts students' emotional disclosure in online hybrid course contexts?
2. What is the relationship among the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy in regards to academic performance, well-being, and health?
3. How can teacher educators promote healthy emotional climates in online hybrid learning environments?

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). "SDT is a theory of the proximal causes of motivational states and processes formulated in terms of immediate social contexts, developmental histories, and individual differences" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 252). Accordingly, motivation is driven by a set of psychological needs premised on competence, relatedness, and

autonomy. Competence is defined as attaining a sense of mastery and being able to successfully adapt to changes in physical and social contexts. Relatedness refers to care and connection within the larger social group. Deci and Ryan (2000) add:

SDT proposes that people will tend naturally to internalize the values and regulations of their social groups. This tendency is facilitated by feelings of relatedness to socializing others, as well as feelings of competence with respect to the regulation being internalized. (p. 238)

Autonomy is the degree to which an individual regulates actions through internalized choice rather than through externalized control.

Methods

This case study took place in the fall of an academic semester for graduate students seeking initial teacher licensure in a secondary subject area and special education. Students were enrolled in a two-year online hybrid teacher education program. The research focuses on a student teaching seminar course that consisted of weekly 2-hour synchronous online seminars and three 3-hour face-to-face Saturday seminars. Seminars featured a generative discussion of the challenges and successes students encountered in their high school student teaching. The researcher who authored this paper served as the online hybrid seminar instructor.

Out of nine graduate students enrolled in the teacher education cohort, three volunteered to serve as research participants. These students were completing their subject area student teaching. Research participants ranged in age from late 30's to early 40's, and all were female. (The students who served as research participants are called candidates hereafter.) Candidates were emergency hire full-time teachers in high schools, and each candidate resided on a different island in Hawaii.

Research methods consisted of candidates' written reflections of their emotions as well as audio-recorded interviews with each candidate. Candidates' written artifacts included entries in an "emotion diary" (Frenzel, Becker-Kurz, Pekrun, & Goetz, 2015). Diary prompts addressed candidates' feelings and emotions regarding their field seminars and student teaching. Audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed. (Interviews ranged in length from 20 to 45 minutes.) An interview guide based on the research questions prompted candidates to speak about their emotions and their sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The first interview generated ideas and the second interview served to confirm, clarify, and elaborate the meaning and intent of what was said during the first interview.

Data, in the form of emotion diary entries and transcribed interview texts were analyzed based on a constant comparative method to find emerging categories through prefigured and emergent coding (Creswell, 2013). Candidates reviewed a draft of this paper to member-check its accuracy (Creswell, 2014).

Results

Results are organized on the three research questions.

1. What impacts students' emotional disclosure in online hybrid course contexts?

The first finding is that the hybrid nature of the student teaching seminar and other teacher education coursework set the social conditions for emotional disclosures. Some of the prior face-

to-face meetings in year one promoted positive and caring classroom environments by fostering collaboration and trust based on Tribes activities (Gibbs & Ushijima, 2008). One candidate said:

I think that if we did not have the face-to-face component we would not have the depth of emotional connectivity that we do now. If I didn't have the experience of knowing these people [other students enrolled in the teacher education cohort] in person, I would not have as rich an online discussion experience. I wouldn't feel quite so open. That is because being in the same physical location periodically is absolutely critical to our relationship building.

Another candidate noted the importance of face-to-face seminars to see the emotional expressions of others when stating:

I guess it is a little different online, I am still there, listening, but in [face-to-face] class, I can see if others are tired. When online I can't tell if I am the only one feeling stressed or burnt out.... I can't see their expressions.

(Feeling stressed was a common theme woven throughout the emotion diaries which will be addressed later.) The third candidate described how it might be easier to sit back and listen during online seminars rather than actively participate because of mental exhaustion following a long day of teaching and the high degree of anonymity when listening during online seminars without others being able to see you.

2. What is the relationship among the psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy in regards to academic performance, well-being, and health?

Candidates connected competence to their teaching experiences and to their physical health. One candidate said, "I definitely feel like the more competent [I am] in what I am doing academically, the healthier I feel physically." In the emotion diary, this candidate noted the importance of physical exercise in coping with the demands and responsibilities of teaching full-time while taking a full load of graduate courses. The other candidates felt that being able to exercise while student teaching could reduce stress, maintain better life balance, and promote feelings of academic competence. However, being a full-time teacher and graduate student could interfere with plans for staying physically active and healthy. According to one candidate, "I am pretty sure my physical health is not as good [during] the last two years of the program. I stopped working out; I use all of my time for work." This candidate mentioned that, due to being tired and exhausted, she once fell asleep during an online seminar. Good naturedly, the candidate exclaimed, "I had my headphones on and I fell asleep during the middle of it [online seminar]. I conked out, and they were still going and I felt OMG [Oh my God!], what did I miss?"

Relatedness was a basic psychological need for becoming a licensed teacher and for completing the teacher education program in the teacher education cohort. One candidate explained: "My sense of relatedness – connecting with the kids, connecting to other teachers, connecting with my professors, and cohort members – that is make it or break it with me." The importance of the face-to-face component of the hybrid program was critical for building relationships according to another candidate who proposed that by the second year of the program "we have had time to build our cohort relationships ... to get to deep levels of conversation, to be honest, and [to be] sharing the difficulties in class and the good stuff." Another candidate noted the importance of being empathetic with high school students to better understand the challenges and struggles they sustained in the classroom based on the candidate's own frustration with meeting some student teaching expectations. These frustrations were highlighted in the emotion diary as the candidate

wrote about the fear of not being able to meet the needs of a field supervisor who was new to the teacher preparation program and unfamiliar with program expectations.

Regarding autonomy, one candidate stressed the primary importance of face-to-face seminars and the secondary importance of online seminars. This candidate said “the face-to-face portion is where autonomy happens, that is where the magic happens, vent [and] state your opinions when you see one another...” Later, the candidate suggested that this kind of sharing could happen in online seminars too. Another candidate linked the importance of feeling autonomous and confident in being able to speak about individual experiences during online seminars. This candidate defined autonomy as feeling “comfortable in being honest to trust people to care for what you are saying.” One candidate mentioned that she often chose to listen to online conversations and not say too much since she either did not want to offer an undeveloped idea or repeat what someone said. This candidate mentioned that having sidebar conversations during face-to-face seminars was a more natural way of communicating and that was not an option in whole group online discussions.

3. How can teacher educators promote healthy emotional climates in an online hybrid learning environment?

One candidate suggested that “small groups are good for engagement because it is easy to have fluid conversations when there are less people in online formats. You feel more free to discuss and not worried about monopolizing the mic[rophone].” This candidate went on to say that having breakout rooms in online seminars can facilitate small group discussions. Another issue repeated from earlier was that the face-to-face component of hybrid courses was vital since it made online time together more productive and meaningful. This resulted from candidates being more trusting of one another from their previous relationship building.

Discussion

During the student teaching semester, candidates felt stress from the burden of responsibilities they assumed as emergency-hire teachers and full-time graduate students. This stress was a manifestation of the fear associated with not being able to meet their responsibilities and with judging themselves or feeling that others might judge them negatively.

A contextual issue of online synchronous seminars is that the nature of whole group discussions focuses attention on a single speaker while others are asked to listen. This method of communication does not allow for sidebar conversations whereby students may spontaneously question, clarify, or extend ideas with one another in a more covert manner as can happen in face-to-face formats when students are seated near one another. Sidebar conversations might have occurred under more limited conditions through the use of text chatting during online classes since a chat box was a feature often used on the web conferencing software. Text chatting could reveal a need for candidates to offer comments and questions to one another while others speak on the microphone.

The face-to-face component of the hybrid online seminar that included relationship building activities was essential for developing supportive emotional environments where candidates could feel more competent and confident to the point of disclosing vulnerabilities when discussing their challenges and struggles during student teaching. This level of relatedness was

central to meeting the psychological needs of candidates so they could share a common purpose and feel supported by other cohort members who became their intellectual friends and confidants.

There was general consensus that autonomy meant offering choices including opportunities to openly express one's self to peers and course instructors. As noted above, face-to-face classes enabled candidates to feel more confident when they chose to share when they met online since basic bonds of trust had been established. Autonomy in this context also meant given the choice to listen rather than speak on the microphone especially for those who felt exhausted at the time of the seminar or believed that they had nothing significant to add to the conversation.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Findings from this case study of three research participants are not meant to be generalized. Rather, the study aims to offer insights into the candidates' experiences in an online hybrid teacher preparation program, and it remains for readers to determine the credibility, authenticity, and transferability of what is reported here.

In the area of competence, a candidate struggled with feelings of incompetence and gained a deeper understanding of some of the challenges that confronted her own high school students. This might suggest that having candidates persist with critical challenges can in the long run be helpful to not only identify and overcome perceived weaknesses but also to gain deeper insights into the psychology of students. However, a stressful situation like this resulting from the fear of failure cannot be recommended or endorsed since it devalues candidates and can place them in an unenviable position of feeling powerless and incompetent. A topic for future study might examine the relationship among identity, occupational goals, and the skills and knowledge needed to achieve desired outcomes in light of the challenges and struggles encountered by student teachers when they are physically isolated from the teacher education campus.

Autonomy is fundamental for individuals to feel that what they are learning is relevant to their own goals so they can assume ownership of desired knowledge and skills (Furtak & Kunter, 2012). This study did not address the impacts of the accountability reforms in the schools where the candidates completed their student teaching. A general topic for future research could examine what Friedman, Galligan, Albano, and O'Connor (2009) describe as teacher response to education reforms and the varying degrees of autonomy regarding the implementation of reforms among student teachers and teacher educators in online learning environments.

Conclusion

Online hybrid teacher education programs may be convenient or even essential for those who may not live near college campuses that offer such programs. In this case study, students located on different islands could enroll and complete their teacher education program together through courses combining online synchronous and face-to-face meetings.

Regardless of the course delivery method, goals for candidate learning and measured outcomes of their growth and development may minimize candidate anxiety and fears by building on their psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. This can be accomplished in online hybrid programs as teacher candidates establish a supportive community network with

their peers and professors who invite one another into an open and free exchange of ideas drawn from their teaching experiences.

References

- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.
- Deci, E. L., Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L.G., & Ryan, R. M. (1991). Motivation and education: The self-determination perspective. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3&4), 325-346.
- Frenzel, A. C., Becker-Kurz, B., Pekrun, R., & Goetz, T. (2015). Teaching this class drives me nuts! – Examining the person and context specificity of teacher emotions. *PLoS ONE*, 10(6), 1-15. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0129630
- Friedman, A. A., Galligan, H. T., Albano, C. M., & O’Connor, K. (2009). Teacher subcultures of democratic practice amidst the oppression of educational reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10, 249-276. doi: 10.1007/s10833-008-9090-x
- Furtak, E. M., & Kunter, M. (2012). Effects of autonomy-supportive teaching on student learning and motivation. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 80(3), 284-316. doi: 10.1080/00220973.2011.573019
- Gibbs, J., & Ushijima, T. (2008). *Engaging all by creating high school learning communities*. Windsor, AC: CenterSource Systems.
- MacFadden, R. J. (2007). The forgotten dimension in learning: Incorporating emotion into web-based education. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 25(1-2), 85-101. doi:10.1300/J017v25n01_05
- Regan, K., Evmennova, A., Baker, P., Jerome, M. K., Spencer, V., Lawson, H., & Werner, T. (2012). Experiences of instructors in online learning environments: Identifying and regulating emotions. *Internet and Higher Education*, 15, 204-212. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.12.001
- Reilly, J. R., Gallagher-Lepak, S., & Killion, C. (2012). “Me and my computer”: Emotional factors in online learning. *Teaching with Technology*, 33(2), 100-105.
- Robinson, K. (2010). Students’ appraisal of emotional and relational experience whilst collaborating online using text based communication. *Computers & Education*, 54, 799-807. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2009.10.004
- Wosnitza, M., & Volet, S. (2005). Origin, direction and impact of emotions in social online learning. *Learning Instruction*, 15, 449-464. doi: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2005.07.009
- Zembylas, M. (2008). Engaging with issues of cultural diversity and discrimination through critical emotional reflexivity in online learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(1), 61-82. doi:10.1177/0741713608325171
- Zembylas, M., Theodorou, M., & Pavlakis, A. (2008). The role of emotions in the experience of online learning: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Media International*, 45(2), 107-117. doi:10.1080/09523980802107237

