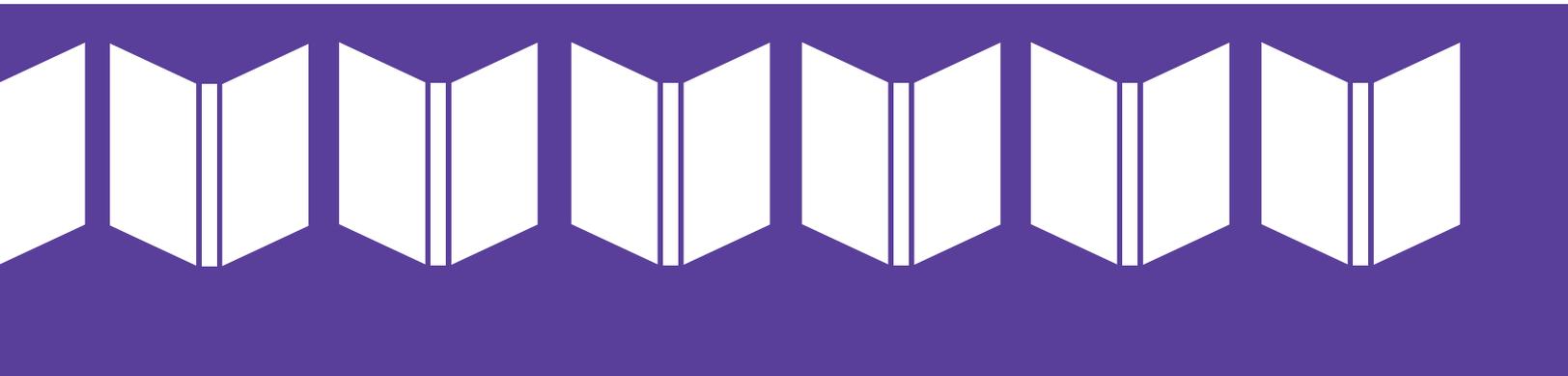


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Online Education: A Growing Educational Paradigm Looking for An Administrative Structure

Guest Editor: Tweed W. Ross

No doubt about it: online education, by its various names, is a growing phenomenon in both K-12 and higher educational across the country. In 2009, 44 states had online learning programs (iNACOL, 2009). The Sloan Corporation in 2007-2008 estimated 1.3 million K-12 students were enrolled in online learning. (Picciano & Seaman, 2008). Furthermore, not only are numbers of K-12 students engaged in online increasing, there seems to be evidence that the quality of the instruction is as good or better than traditional classroom instruction. According to Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia and Jones "...students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction" (2009, p. ix). For these reasons alone it seems safe to believe that the exponential growth curve in online learning will continue.

There are many factors driving growth in online K-12 education. Some of them may relate to public perceptions of the education offered in traditional schools. Others relate to the availability of technological resources to enable families and students to participate in high quality instruction via computers and the Internet. In 2007 the Pew Research Center reported that 80% of Americans use computers, with a 76% ownership rate (2007). Additionally the Social Data Network reported there were over 80 million broadband subscribers in the United States (Socrata, 2009). If all this technological innovation isn't driving the new emphasis in online learning it is certainly enabling families and students to participate in new educational opportunities. When you couple the access to technology innovation with young peoples' ability to work and play in innovative digital media it is little wonder that online schools are making inroads into traditional face-to-face educational opportunities. "The demand for virtual schools is driven at least in part by fundamental changes in our society and the students who inhabit it." (Davis & Robyler, p. 409)

The new media formats incorporating video, audio, and animation with coupling to social networks that young people throng to are extraordinarily powerful. As Peters (2003) notes, the new technologies provide a 'carrier media' which changes the structure and pedagogy of instruction. To many, old delivery models are just plain boring (Wesch, 2009). Still others see this trend accelerating as more technologically astute students matriculate through the educational system in the next ten years (Gould, Unger, & Ross, 2009). These 'Millennials,' with a different mindset, coupled with different expectations and technology tools, find the lecture method of teaching neither interactive nor attuned to their learning styles (Fishman, 2007; Sherman, 2006).

What appears to be lacking is an administrative structure to the online K-12 learning environment. The type of administrative structure seen in schools today involves a hierarchy of control and

authority from state government through local schools and hired professional administrators. This structure developed slowly during the past 200 years of American education's history. As Beaudoin (2003) who bemoans the lack of leadership roles in distance education in higher education noted, there seems to be the same lack of leadership in K-12 education. Over 40 states have established some sort of online distance education program in the K-12 arena. Still, there is little effort to prepare teachers, administrators, counselors, and other personnel necessary for effective educational environments for a world of online teaching.

Any standard history of American education contains within it a subset of the development of the structure and culture which proscribes and prescribes the administration, leadership, governance and culture of schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007; Snowden & Gorton, 2002; Sergiovanni, Burlingame, Combs & Thurston, 1992; Spring, 2008; Goodlad, 1984). Others have made the argument that because of the digital technology revolution, schooling as it has been formatted for the last two centuries is over (Postman, 1996; Perelman, 1992; Papert, 1992). The purpose of this volume of *Educational Considerations* is not to resolve this issue about the future of education and schooling, but to begin the conversation about how the administration of this new learning environment can be accomplished.

The administration of online education may be radically different compared to what we as educational professionals are attuned to, or it may be an electronic mirror of today's schools. What we can be sure of is it will evolve and develop into some structure for providing educational services to young people, documenting their accomplishments, advising them on learning paths, providing support services, establishing financial models, and developing quality controls. "In the light of increasing demand for virtual courses and the rapid expansion of schools to meet the demand, it is apparent that there will be a parallel need for teachers who are prepared to teach at a distance from their students. There will also be a need for counselors and other support personnel who understand the unique benefits of the new medium and are prepared to meet its needs and requirements" (Davis & Robyler, p. 409). To this we would add all types of leadership positions from principals to chief area administrators. Students recognized the need for learner supports in online instruction, but "unfortunately...very few studies were found that address the specific needs of K-12 students in the form of student supports"(Rice, 2006, p. 435).

In this effort we have enlisted educational professionals from across a range of experiences to offer suggestions and examples of how online educational services and administration may be offered to young people. These professional educators come from varied backgrounds and professional experiences. What they have in common is a belief in beginning the conversation to create the administrative superstructure of K-12 online education. For this purpose we have solicited five outstanding scholars to begin this conversation: Drs. Jesus Abrego and Anita Pankake from University of Texas-Brownsville and University of Texas-Pan-American; Dr. Trudy Salsberry from Kansas State University; Dr. Nikki Currie from Wichita State University;

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Dr. Teresa Miller from Kansas State University and Dr. Michael Ribble from Unified School District #383, Manhattan, Kansas; and Drs. Robert Moody and Regi Wieland from Fort Hays State University.

Appropriately, Drs. Abrego and Pankake lead off this issue with the role of school leaders in K-12 online schools, the challenges they will face and the best practice that will allow them to be effective school leaders in this new environment.

The issues involved in accreditation of online PK-12 schools are vastly different both in scope and tone than those associated with traditional brick and mortar schools. Dr. Salsberry, who has much experience on North Central accreditation teams, outlines how the online environment poses new problems that require new accreditation standards to establish confidence in these schools.

As students negotiate the complex paths to educational accomplishment and maturity public education has recognized the value of professional counselors working closely in schools. Dr. Currie brings her experience as a school counselor to examine the need, pitfalls, and details of how this counseling relationship can be brought to effectively aid students in attaining the stature expected of young adults.

The education profession recognizes the need for high quality professional development of the teaching staff. This has been largely accomplished by workshops, meetings, and advanced study at the school or nearby higher education and service center units. Now that the teachers will be scattered across the land, it is important that this same high quality staff development be available and part of the expectations of the 'new' online teaching faculty. Drs. Miller and Ribble, staff development experts in their own right outline the issues and a process for ensuring this happens.

As a wrap-up to this initial conversation about PK-12 online learning, it is critical that administration and instruction find ways to blur the isolation that students so often feel in online learning environments. Students often feel isolated from both their instructors and each other. Drs. Moody and Wieland from Fort Hays State University, reflectively examine their practice and experience in overcoming this sense of isolation with a model of social presence.

One final note: The field of PK-12 online education is a developing field, and this is only the beginning of the conversation. We encourage our colleagues in the field and in higher education to continue this conversation until the discussion is a full and rich outline of the administration of PK-12 online education.

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Moving Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Changing the Conversation on Online Education

Teresa Miller and Michael Ribble

Introduction

Online learning has changed education in many ways. This change was not mandated, but instead filled a need expressed by students. Picciano and Seaman (2009) estimated that more than a million K-12 students took an online class in 2007-2008. While this number may seem small compared to the 50 million students in K-12 schools, these numbers have grown rapidly in the past five years. Meanwhile, the education community seems unwilling or unable to keep up with this shift from traditional schools to online courses. In the *Guide to Teaching Online Courses* (2006) a guide collaboratively prepared by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the National Education Association (NEA), the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future, and Virtual High School, Inc., the editors stated that "Teacher preparation programs rarely include courses about online teaching" (p.3). The result is that "Most of the 86,000 new teachers who enter the profession begin without online teaching skills" (p. 3). As the numbers of students taking online classes continues to grow, both practicing and future teachers must be trained in skills to teach online.

A problem with this shift toward online teaching is that it has happened randomly and irregularly within K-12 systems. Demands from students for online learning at both K-12 and higher education levels have not always been met with positive attitudes or proactive gestures. Recent calls for reform in teacher preparation (Levine, 2006) neglected to mention the need for online teaching and learning preparation. However, in order for schools to maintain relevancy and to prepare students for the increasingly online environments of the world of work, new teachers and professors must be trained to teach in these radically different environments. Richardson (2009) described the problem in this way:

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And when many of our students are already building networks far beyond our classroom wall, forming communities around their passions and their talents, it's not hard to understand why rows of desks and time-constrained schedules and standardized tests are feeling more and more limited and ineffective. (p. 3).

Preparing for the Future

How can educators begin making the changes that are necessary to make this educational paradigm shift and move away from a strict bricks and mortar concept? A proactive two-pronged approach is necessary.

First, teacher preparation programs in higher education must include cutting-edge strategies for online teaching and learning in order to even minimally prepare teachers to excel in these new environments. What are these strategies? The *Guide to Teaching Online* (2006) lists these characteristics: instructor-led but student-centered, collaborative, flexible, accessing all the new literacies, clear expectations, cognizant of the variety of student learning styles, using the latest best practices (pp. 6-7). While this description may sound similar to what's going on now, 'accessing all the new literacies' is not currently evident in many U. S. classrooms, at the public school level, or in university teacher preparation programs. Instead, visitors will continue to find paper/pencil assignments, old-fashioned chalkboards (or perhaps the new whiteboards), with Powerpoint presentations considered the 'cutting edge' as far as technology goes. And in many schools, "We take away the powerful social technologies our kids are already using to learn" (Richardson, 2009, p. 3).

Secondly, current teachers need to understand how quickly and significantly the world is changing to make online teaching such a popular choice for students at all levels. An analysis of online practices by Cavanaugh et. al., (2009) found that online students performed better and spent more time on task than those taking the same course with traditional programming. A recent study by Ambient Insight for THE Journal listed 450,000 K-12 students currently attending virtual schools full time, and another 1.75 million taking some courses online (Nagel, 2009). It is past time to look seriously at major revisions for teacher preparation programs.

A Need for Change

Reasons for resistance to these needed reforms must first be understood. Even as online education is different from the face-to-face classroom, there are similar issues between them both. Melanie Clay (1999) identified five reasons, supported by other literature, why higher education faculty members resist teaching online classes:

1. Increased workload (Betts, 1998; Dillon & Walsh, 1992; Eisenburg, 1998);
2. The altered role of the instructor (Dooley, (n.d.); Kaiser, 1998);
3. Lack of technical and administrative support (Betts, 1998; Clark, 1993);
4. Reduced course quality (Betts, 1998; Clark, 1993);
5. Negative attitudes of colleagues (Moore, 1997).

Resistance to online learning results in fewer opportunities for students, related to not being able to have access to courses online, but also by not having models for effective online teaching. As a general rule, teachers continue to teach the way they were taught, so instead of making change, the traditional forms of teaching

continue to be practiced. Such resistance provides insights as to why pre-service teachers are not prepared or comfortable teaching in an online setting. Because of this resistance to changes in practice, the quality of online teaching is not adequate to meet the needs of future online students.

There is some hope for the future. Some schools and colleges of education are now requiring that faculty members teach at least one course online so that they can begin to at least understand the differences in teaching and learning online. Many colleges and universities are adding degree programs focused on teaching online courses (Kearsley & Blomeyer, 2004). The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (2009) has reviewed multiple online programs and found that “Highly effective online teachers are the result of an effective instructional delivery model aligned with the selection and preparation of effective teachers...[and] requires a highly interactive classroom” (p. 4). Further, such teachers are closely connected with their students, highly responsive, adept at using web-based technologies and collaborative communication tools to offer active, constructive, and cooperative experiences for their students (Collins & Zacharakis, 2009).

Previously, students viewed institutions of higher education as the holders of knowledge, but now they require more from their universities than just information. Higher education needs to begin adjusting for a new generation of learners who do not wish to waste their time sitting in lecture halls (Clydesdale, 2009). Online education is an integral part of this transition. Until the teaching of online courses is seen as a priority and schools with colleges of education begin making serious changes in their own teaching, as well as requirements for their graduates, they will continue to turn out teachers trained the same way as decades before.

Support for Online Learning Programs

As budget and accountability concerns continue to cause investigations into cost-saving instructional methods, educational leaders are likely to focus more attention on online opportunities. Difficulties in finding highly qualified teachers to meet state and national requirements may result in an increase. One school district in Maine uses distance education when they “Simply cannot find qualified teachers” (McClure, 2006, p. 2). Imperial County, California, set up a local network to “Use the technology to bring resources to their geographically isolated area” (McClure, p. 4). As costs of updating old buildings (or building new ones) increase, the idea of creating online degree programs to fill the gaps become more enticing. This timing may force educators to move beyond a vision tied to ‘bricks and mortar’ and into the world of online teaching and learning. Institutions of higher education are also beginning to feel pressure and competition from for-profit organizations, such as Phoenix Online ®. Previously, online degrees were seen as less rigorous than face-to-face; however, online courses are becoming more respected as valid educational alternatives to on-campus degrees. Online learning today includes various tools such as instant messaging, discussion threads, online tests, and video interaction, with new applications being developed daily. The benefits of not being confined to certain times or locations, are powerful and can be exemplified by MIT’s OpenCourseWare with multiple options for learners around the world, free of charge (Richardson, 2009).

With all these options, higher education institutions are attempting to support faculty members to get them over those five areas of concern mentioned previously. The variety of support ranges from websites with tips of how to teach online, to instructional support personnel to help faculty to set up and organize online courses. Clay

Table 1
Instructor Stages in Online Instructional Productivity

<i>Faculty Stage</i>	<i>Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Faculty Needs</i>
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how distance courses are offered • why distance courses are offered • how distance program relates to university mission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general information • opportunity to separate fact from fiction • opportunity to ask questions
Consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of distance instruction • drawbacks and benefits of distance teaching • availability of assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultation with experienced distance faculty • published research and articles • opportunity for hands-on practice
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time • course design • student interaction • quality standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaching from other faculty • one-on-one intensive training and course development support • incentives • job-imbedded opportunities
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvement • contribution • recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to assist and mentor others • recognition • ongoing training and follow-up

(1999) identified four stages for instructors (See Table 1) that lead to accepting and being able to use these tools productively with an on-line course, (loosely based on Hall & Loukes [1979], model of teachers adopting a new practice).

Support needs to be provided to faculty so that they can begin to innovate by using these tools in the classroom. Leaders must also realize that not all instructors will accept these stages quickly, and some type of phased training will be required to allow for these differences.

Faculty members in K-12 schools also need to be afforded opportunities on how to best utilize the new literacy tools in a classroom setting. Educators need to understand why online learning is becoming an acceptable option for students, as opposed to traditional schools. Proponents of online education need to show how it adds value to the current educational process, and can result in improved student performance. Finding other options, such as a blended approach may bring the best of both models for students (Reynard, 2009). If less experienced teachers are not being exposed to online teaching and learning, it can be assumed that experienced teachers are not prepared for online teaching as well. Some teachers may have taken online classes for recertification or degree programs, but still may not be aware of the issues that go along with management of their own online courses.

Just as in higher education, staff development and resources are needed to help bring faculty and staff along to move through their concerns with online teaching. Unlike higher education, K-12 classes seem to have fewer incentives for utilizing online teaching as a component of regular teaching. Some schools are utilizing the on-line component for dropouts and credit recovery, and only in dire circumstances (e.g., declining enrollments, rising costs, loss of specialty teachers – foreign language, upper level math and science) have online schools become widespread. One student group that has seen increases in online learning are students being home schooled. A wide range of quality curriculum and online offerings are now available to home-schooled students. The structure and support universities are already actively pursuing online options for their students in increasing numbers (Clark & Mayer, 2003), and Stanford University President Gerhard Casper, predicted “Shifts from in-residence learning to on-line learning” (p. 12).

To help with the growth in online courses, organizations have emerged to help K-12 online schools. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning has been particularly supportive by providing research and resources for the growing number of online schools. According to Cavanaugh, et. al., (2009) one of the most critical aspects for those interested in delivering quality online learning is the identification of specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are required for ‘highly effective’ online teachers.

Not all teachers have the skills or temperament to be online instructors. Just as some people are not destined to be classroom teachers, there are some who should not be online teachers as well. Fuller et. al., (2000) identified these requirements for effective online teaching:

- be able to sit in front a machine for at least an hour or two every day,
- enjoy one-on-one interaction (as opposed to lecturing or group presentations),
- be flexible in teaching approach and willing to experiment, and

- be prepared to do a lot of writing/typing. (pp. 13-14).

Just identifying whether or not someone is interested in teaching online is not enough. There needs to be adequate professional development on the differences in teaching online classes. A number of tools need to be accessed, along with lessons in when to use which tools for the most effective teaching. Too often new teachers in online classes get excited about the new literacies and attempt to use too many tools at once. It is better for new instructors to select one or two tools to focus on and gradually move to adding new skills when they feel they have mastered the others. Blomeyer and Dawson (2005) concede “While most universities and colleges have established programs to prepare their faculty to teach online, school systems are just beginning to address this need” (p. 67).

Many research articles identify that the skills for teaching online are similar to those for teaching face-to-face. While this is true, the differences need to be addressed and resources provided to help teachers to deal with them. Schools and colleges of education need to be held accountable to prepare their teachers for a future with increasing numbers of students taking classes online. While there is no governmental movement for the dissolution of brick and mortar schools, online classes are providing a resource for students who do not fit into the traditional school, and many schools are using online classes to supplement the courses for students to expand beyond the limited curriculum of their schools (especially in rural and impoverished areas). To achieve this end, there needs to be changes both in teacher preparation as well as in the staff development that teachers are receiving in their districts. Another important aspect of teaching online is the support from administrators who can see the need and potential for this method of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Even though there have been few longitudinal studies into online learning (somewhat because of the short time that online education has been a factor), there is more than enough empirical data to provide a starting point for how to prepare our teachers to teach and work online (Kearsley & Blomeyer, 2004). Online learning can no longer be considered a ‘fad’ that may quickly pass. It is likely that the delivery methods will continue to change as new and different tools are created and used, but the future appears to favor those who wish to teach and learn online. It is important that new teachers entering the profession be exposed to the process of learning online, but beyond that they need to understand the process as well. Once they have these skills, schools and districts need to utilize these tools for their students in regular K-12 classrooms. Teaching online does not limit the educational process and, in fact, allows teachers to be creative and expand beyond their classrooms. Students in schools need to understand how and when online courses can benefit them. If schools and teachers wish to stay relevant in these changing times, they cannot see online education as an option, but as a requirement to prepare students for their future, as described by Richardson (2009):

[We] wonder whether, 25 or 50 years from now, when 4-5 billion people are connecting online, the real story of these times won't be the more global tests and transformation these technologies offered. How, as educators and learners, did we respond? (p. 4).

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PK-12 Virtual Schools: The Challenges and Roles of School Leaders

**Jesus (Chuey) Abrego, Jr.
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Introduction

According to Jacobsen, Clifford and Friesen (2002), the expansion of instructional technology is due in part to an increase in demand by local communities to make sure that local schools are effectively preparing students for the technological challenges of the 21st century. In addition, Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia and Jones (2009) cite that “online learning– for students and for teachers– is one of the fastest growing trends in educational uses of technology” (p. xi). In support of this claim, Robyler (2006) reports, “...many people may still not be aware that *virtual schooling* is one of the fastest-growing areas in K-12 education. In its 2005 report, the National Center for Education Statistics found that, as of 2003, 36% of U.S. school districts had students participating in *virtual* courses for a total of more than 300,000 students.(fn. 3) And this number is projected to explode in the coming decade” (p. 1).

The claims of expansion of instructional technology are documented by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (INACOL). They state that “44 states have significant supplemental online learning programs, or significant full-time programs (in which students take most or all of their courses online), or both... and the majority of existing online programs show considerable growth in the number of students they are serving” (2009, p. 1).

In terms of the benefits of successful virtual networks, Berry, Norton and Byrd (2007) share that, “virtual networks are especially powerful because they enable some of the best teaching minds in a state, region, or nation to bond together into powerful professional learning communities” (p. 49). Also, Blomeyer (2002) cited a recent report of the National Association of State Boards of Education claiming that, “E-learning will improve American education in valuable ways and should be universally implemented as soon as possible” (p. 1).

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In a recent article in *Education Week* entitled, “School Sees Better Days in the Future” – the author describes the technology realities at Philadelphia’s School of the Future, a partnership between the local school district and Microsoft Corporation, as follows:

“The [Technology] Reality: Internet access in the first year was unreliable, making the online curriculum unusable and leaving some teachers with insufficient guidance for their courses. Many students and teachers were not adept at using the new tools, requiring additional training that took away from instruction. Lack of structure led to discipline problems.

“The [Leadership] Reality: The principal resigned after the first year for personal reasons, and the school has had a series of leaders since then, most with a different approach to curriculum and instruction. With Mr. Vallas’ departure in 2006, the school lost its high-level champion in the district’s central office” (Manzo, 2009, p. 20).

The author goes on to explain that what most believed to be an extraordinary opportunity – ‘a winning formula’ at the time (Borja, 2006). Over the past three years, this modern high school has not changed to meet the needs of the 21st century, it is “fundamentally no different from a typical high school” (Manzo, 2009, p. 18) except for a modern building.

This, according to Melnick (2002), is precisely the problem with much of the current work in virtual schools. His assertion is that virtual schooling needs a new model. The question he poses is, “...how can this potential [of virtual schools] be realized in the face of present education structures which hearken back to the Industrial Age?” (p. 85). He claims that all of the proposed benefits of virtual schools are for naught unless “new ways of thinking about design, layout, content and user interaction” (p. 86) are recognized and implemented. He pronounces that we must ‘rethink our beliefs around ‘education’ in the context of the knowledge age. He emphasizes that virtual schools require a different model of education—one that is student or community-driven, where the teacher becomes an active, expert participant, rather than simply a conveyor of knowledge or a facilitator (p. 86). He provides a listing of some of the rethinking that needs to occur if virtual schools are to reach their potential. Among the areas to be considered are: the schedule, the technology itself, teacher instructional behaviors and technology skills, and curriculum. For example, because virtual schools are open seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, this completely alters the work patterns of teachers and students—there is no defined work day and all interactions, whether meaningful discourse, informal discussion, or remediation must take place and be supported by technology. If the technology fails, so does the learning.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to proffer a new model for the reordering and restructuring of U.S. public schools, it is possible to share the literature that is beginning to appear regarding some of the new thinking and behaviors necessary to begin this larger, deeper change. Additionally, some documentation of both failed and successful efforts in creating and sustaining virtual schooling at the PK-12 level has been synthesized to offer a status of the current thinking in this area. Specifically an exploration of technological trends documented by organizations and researchers (what has worked, what hasn’t) in efforts thus far to create and sustain virtual

schools at the PK-12 levels is presented. Additionally, the importance of leadership support is reviewed—in particular, the role of the principal and superintendent and how they influence the sustainability of online learning and the change process.

Based on this literature, a focus on the challenges administrators face and the roles they should assume when implementing and sustaining online technology for instruction are developed. These challenges include the principal's leadership role, the need for new kinds and content of professional development, and what appear to be emerging best practices for those interested in creating and sustaining the new teaching and learning environment.

Technology: The 'Virtual' is Reality

"Our children today are being socialized in a way that is vastly different from their parents" (Prensky, 2001b, p.1). For example: Over 10,000 hours playing videogames, over 200,000 e-mails and instant messages sent and received; over 10,000 hours talking on digital cell phones; over 20,000 hours watching TV (a high percentage fast speed MTV), over 500,000 commercials seen—all before the kids leave college (Prensky, 2001b, p. 1)

Certainly from the perspective of today's PK-12 students, technology isn't the future, it is the 'now'. According to Marc Prensky (2001a), "...today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors." They are 'digital natives,' born into the digital age, while adults are 'digital immigrants,' adapting their skills and thinking processes to a new world. These digital natives have fundamentally different expectations of access and interactions with technology (cited in Project Tomorrow 2007, p. 2). Support for this comes from research conducted by Valentine and Holloway (2002). They studied children 6-11 years old "to demonstrate how on-line spaces are used, encountered, and interpreted within the context of young people's off-line everyday lives" (p. 302). They found that the children did not view and operate as if their on-line and off-line worlds were oppositional or unconnected "but rather are mutually constituted. One cannot be understood without the other. Children's use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is embedded in their lives. Their on-line identities, relationships, and spaces are no less 'real' than those encountered off-line" (p. 316).

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education (1999) reported rates of computer and Internet use by children and adolescents had increased rapidly. In 1984, data from the Current Population Survey indicated that 27% of students (from pre-kindergarten through college) used computers at school. By 1989 this number had increased to 43%; by 1997 it was 69%. Internet use by children and adolescents of elementary and high school age has also increased rapidly, growing from about one-third of 9-17-year-olds in 1997 to about two-thirds in 2001 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). In the more recent 2001 report (DeBell & Chapman, 2003) about 90% of children and adolescents age 5-17 (47 million persons) use computers and about 59% (31 million persons) use the Internet. The report also found that computer and Internet use by children and adolescents is widespread and begins at an early age. About three-fourths of children already use computers by the age of five, and a majority use the Internet by the age of nine. Among high-school-age youth (ages 15-17), more than 90% use computers and at least three-fourths use the Internet.

In 2002, Valentine and Holloway, stated, "Statistics suggest that over 40% of U.S. households now own a home personal computer

(PC)..." (p. 303). More recently, in Fall 2007, 70% of students (grades 6-12) responding to Project Tomorrow's 2007 Speak Up survey defined their technology skills as average or about the same as their peers, 23% believed they are more expert than their peers, and 5% considered themselves beginning. Project Tomorrow's 2007 Speak Up surveyed 319,223 K-12 students, 25,544 teachers, 19,726 parents, and 3,263 administrators from 3,729 schools and 867 districts with 97% from public institutions and 3% from private schools. The schools involved were from all 50 United States, the District of Columbia, American Department of Defense Schools, Canada, Mexico, and Australia. The demographics of those involved included locales that were 32% urban, 40% suburban, and 29% rural; additionally, 43% percent of the schools were Title I eligible, and 29% had more than 50% minority population attending. Overall, 74% of 6th-12th grade students reported that good technology skills are important to future success, and half of the 6th-12th grade students said that their school is not doing a good job preparing them for 21st century jobs.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project (2002) found that, in addition to school-related uses of the Internet, teenagers go online for a variety of other activities, including: communicating with friends and family (via email, instant messaging, and chat rooms); entertaining themselves (doing things such as surfing the Web for fun, visiting entertainment sites, playing or downloading games, and listening to music online or downloading it); learning things largely unrelated to school (such as looking for information on hobbies, getting the news, researching a product or service before buying it, looking for health-related information, and looking for information that is embarrassing or hard to talk about); and exploring other online interactive or transaction features (such as going to a Web site where they can express opinions about something, visiting sites for trading and selling things, buying something online, creating a Web page, etc.). Indeed, as Don Tapscott (1998) foresaw in his book, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, there is evidence that many students are more frequent users of the Internet and are more Internet savvy than their parents and teachers (pp. 8-9).

Additionally, the Pew project stressed that, "these students said over and over that their schools and teachers have not yet recognized—much less responded to—the fundamental shift occurring in the students they serve and in the learning communities they are charged with fostering. And, when teachers and schools do react, often it is in ways that make it more difficult for students who have become accustomed to using the Internet to communicate and access information" (p. 12). The project referred to this situation as the 'digital disconnect'. Pew asserted that "the primary reasons for this digital disconnect between how students use the Internet for school and how schools have them use the Internet are tied to the ways that schools and teachers are oriented towards the Internet, their inability in many instances to integrate online tools into schooling, and the real and perceived barriers students face as they seek Internet access" (p.14).

These various reports highlight the proposition that the traditional structures, content and delivery modes of schools are not in line with the needs of students, as students, and as the workforce of the future. The Pew Report (2002) submitted that, "students usually have strong views about how their school experiences could be made better. Their analysis of how the Internet can be exploited in educational settings illustrates this point perfectly. Here is what they say they would like to see happen:

- better coordination of their out-of-school educational use of the Internet with classroom activities. They argue that this could be the key to leveraging the power of the Internet for learning.
- increase significantly the quality of access to the Internet in schools.
- professional development and technical assistance for teachers are crucial for effective integration of the Internet into curricula.
- place priority on developing programs to teach keyboarding, computer, and Internet literacy skills.
- continued effort to ensure that high-quality online information to complete school assignments be freely available, easily accessible, and age-appropriate—without undue limitation on students' freedoms.
- policy makers take the 'digital divide' seriously and that they begin to understand the more subtle inequities among teenagers that manifest themselves in differences in the quality of student Internet access and use" (pp. 23-24).

Similar issues were identified by Robyler (2006) after working with successful virtual secondary schools. Robyler identified five common strategies for success that emerged from discussions with directors of these schools. All have implications for the leadership of virtual schools. The five strategies are:

1. *Prepare students for success.* Part of the driving vision of the *virtual school* movement is the desire to ensure more equitable access to *high-quality* secondary courses for all students, especially those traditionally disadvantaged by lack of local personnel and material resources. However, not all students have the skills and dispositions required to take advantage of the relatively freewheeling, flexible formats of *virtual* classrooms. Good *virtual* programs anticipate these misconceptions. They provide checklists, self-tests, and, in many cases, no-credit orientation programs to give students a taste of what online learning will be like.
2. *Prepare teachers for success.* "...good teachers in regular schools don't always make the leap from face-to-face classrooms to *virtual* ones.(fn. 10) Those who operate good *virtual* programs believe that effective online teachers, mentors, and facilitators are made, not born. Each program has its own rigorous and extensive training, tailored to its own classroom platform and methods, including actually teaching part of an online course with the guidance of a mentor.
3. *Use interactive, flexible course designs.* *Virtual* programs tend to emphasize hands-on, project-based assignments that require students to work together.
4. *Monitor and support teachers.* An interesting feature in nearly every one of these programs is the combination of *high* support for teachers in their work with students, along with constant monitoring to ensure that teachers comply with program expectations and standards.
5. *Monitor and support students.* A *students first* perspective characterizes the climate of all these *virtual* schools. Each program requires that teachers interact personally with

each student, and each program provides support tailored to individual student needs. It is easy to see that the amount of person-to-person contact between instructional personnel and individual students exceeds that in many face-to-face programs. Student success is the focal point of all activities, not just instruction. Flexible registration and pacing options are 'customer oriented' to meet students' schedules. Initial welcoming e-mails and intake interviews help ensure that students will have what they need to learn efficiency. (pp. 35-36).

Both the 2007 Speak Up Project and the 2002 Pew Report stated that the students themselves recognize the most effective way to address the 'digital disconnect' issue. Through the addition of a school leader survey to the Speak Up project in 2007, Project Tomorrow reported that with few exceptions, responses confirmed the digital disconnect between those who lead the schools and those intended to be served by the schools. Likewise, the Pew Report noted that, "Internet-savvy students make clear that school leaders—more so than individual teachers—set the tone for Internet use in their classes" (p.15). Interestingly, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) recently released its National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for administrators. ISTE, like the students in the 2007 Speak Up Project, believes that "administrators play a pivotal role in determining how well technology is used in schools" and furthers the concept that this role can be supported through the implementation of the following leadership standards—visionary leadership, digital age learning culture, excellence in professional practice, systemic improvement and digital citizenship (2009, p. 1).

Addressing the 'Digital Disconnect' Through Effective School Leadership

Numerous instances of research and organizational reports confirm empirically what high school students seem to know intuitively, i.e., leadership plays a critical role in technology implementation and sustainability. Davis (2009), states that, "it takes more than computers to make e-learning work" (p. 25) and that "school districts should be aware that there are many administrative tasks associated with e-education, just as there are with traditional face-to-face learning" (p. 6). Thus managing these complicated e-education administrative issues requires effective leadership at the campus and district level.

LeBaron and Collier (2001) stated that "the successful infusion of technology into education depends on effective leadership and good sense about school culture" (p. xi). Additionally, and very importantly, numerous researchers (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Mortimore, 1993; Scheurich, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Silins & Mulford, 2002; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003; Gezi, 1990; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998; and Hargreaves, Moore, Fink, Brayman, & White, 2003) have conducted studies and elaborated on studies pertaining to a very convincing collection of "empirical evidence that now demonstrates the significant effects of leadership on school conditions and students learning" (as cited in Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2006, p. 59). An effective leader, according to Leithwood and, Reihl (2003), is responsible for not only setting the direction but also providing influence in the organization. A recent study by Brandon supports this concept by sharing that "research provides good evidence that supports quality leadership in a school district as a key to improving the motivation of teachers and the adoption of instructional technology by school leaders" (Brandon, 2008, p. 30). In addition, Perry and

Areglado (2001) further offer that, “technology-supported curricular transformation demands visionary leadership and effective management from school principals” (p. 87).

Too often, according to Ferriter (2009), school leaders “lack a fluent understanding of the tools that are redefining learning [and] can’t provide high levels of instructional leadership to their faculties” (p. 90). Therefore, in order to sustain an administrator’s effective leadership role in technology and to directly assist school leaders in resolving the many challenges they will face with instructional technology, schools and districts must build the leadership capacity in the school, especially for principals. According to Fullan (2005), “capacity building involves developing the collective ability– dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources– to act together to bring about positive change” (p. 4). Thus building capacity of school leaders plays a critical role in influencing how faculty and schools introduce and integrate technology into teaching. However, the successful integration, implementation and sustainability of technology requires building capacity of both teachers and school leaders. (Lambert, 1998).

Of particular relevance to this focus on virtual schools is the perspective on capacity shared by Elmore (2002). He agrees that capacity building requires attention to knowledge and skill; but he goes on to admonish that it “is not just about getting structuring and restructuring to allow people to do what they already know how to do” (p. 40). Rather, the emphasis should be on developing the skills and knowledge for people to do things that they have not yet been able to do nor learned how to do that involves connecting people to sources of knowledge and skill outside of their own workplace. This involves connecting people within the workplace to develop knowledge and skill; and substantially increasing professional development that is focused and designed to enhance student learning. In this conversation about PK-12 virtual schools, implementation of this perspective of capacity is essential. Operating successful PK-12 virtual schools cannot operate in a ‘business as usual’ environment. Educators must move outside their own purview to benchmark practices in other entities operating successfully in a virtual environment (e.g., online retail, NASA, gaming industry, pilot training, medical training, etc.) and then, adopt and adapt these practices to the unique and dynamic context of children’s and youths’ learning and development. Because the premise behind capacity-building involves identifying instructional leadership as everyone’s work (Lambert, 2002) and acknowledging that the learning and leading journey must be shared by stakeholders (Frankel & Hayot, 2001), successful practices must be implemented across a campus and district. These new knowledge, skills, and competencies help counteract what Kearsley (1988) referred to as a “lack of computer sophistication” (p. 66) and inadequate technology training (Dawson & Rakes, 2003) which leads to poor decision-making.

Best Practices: Temporary Solutions for Long-Term Success

With all that has been said before, we offer this section with caution. In the rapidly changing world of technology, it seems somewhat absurd to offer a list of actions that represent ‘the answers’ to creating and sustaining successful PK-12 virtual schools. The very nature of the technology environment is fluid, fast-changing and often even audacious. Thus, means for working with it and within it need to be fluid, fast-changing and perhaps, now and then, audacious as well. With that said, what follows is the best we know ‘for the moment’. Realistically, what is best as we write this article may

not be best by the time it appears in print. Thus we both warn and encourage that you read, consider and implement as appropriate, but more importantly that you follow the wisdom shared in the section on capacity-building. Move beyond what we know now, look for better practices inside and outside the field of education, and do not become so committed to ‘the’ solution that you neglect to address the changing questions and newly posed puzzles technology generates on almost a daily basis. With that caveat pronounced, we move on to sharing what we know to be best practices at this time.

Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (2005), refer to best practice “as a shorthand emblem of serious, thoughtful, informed, responsible, state-of-the-art teaching” (p. vi). However, to truly take advantage of what best practices has to offer, which includes– “student-centered, active, experiential, authentic, democratic, collaborative, rigorous, and challenging schools” (p. vii), teachers and principals should first design professional development that links to student learning (Holloway, 2003) and that is job-embedded (Wood & Killian, 1998). Because “teachers and administrators often view teaching and learning conditions differently– quite dramatically so” (Berry, Wade and Trantham, 2009, p. 81), it is imperative that teachers and administrators work together to create and implement a ‘shared and supportive leadership’ environment (Hord, 1996) that encourages educators to collaboratively and collectively address the challenges as well as promote the value of virtual schools and e-learning. The consequence of creating such a leadership community consisting of principals and teachers “increases the collective power in the school in terms of new knowledge and competencies” (Fullan, 2005).

In understanding the value of virtual schools and e-learning, Blomeyer (2009) shares that there is a, “growing body of evidence that supports the conclusion that when e-learning is deployed with identical attention to the enabling details that characterize high quality face-to-face instruction, it can effectively compliment, enhance, and expand educational options available for K-12 students” (p. 1). Similarly, Robyler (2006) reported, “the evidence from research is fairly consistent on what constitutes effective, high-quality virtual courses” (p. 2). Robyler pointed out that because postsecondary programs have used online learning longer, much of the research is focused on that level. Even, she asserts that “the quality indicators are always nearly identical to those for K-12 programs” (p. 2). She notes that the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) depicts these findings in a framework for virtual school quality. According to Robyler, the SREB framework has criteria in four categories for judging quality. They are:

- Basic assumptions. For example, it is a basic assumption that teachers are Web-trained and that there is equitable access to necessary resources.
- Curriculum and instruction. For example, content of high-quality programs is systematically designed and clearly communicated, and activities are highly interactive and offer opportunities for critical thinking related to course objectives.
- Management. For example, high-quality programs provide technical assistance and ensure that student work is secure.
- Evaluation and assessment. For example, high-quality programs include assessment and have procedures in place for monitoring students during testing.

As Robyler points out, “Not much new here. Most of these sound like criteria that any courses or programs should meet” (p. 2).

Numerous researchers (e.g., Cradler et al., 2002; Ciesemier, 2003; Middleton & Murray; 1999, Lou et al., 2002; Latham, 1999) report that, “using technology does have a positive impact on student learning” (as cited in Steelman, et al., 2004, p.2). According to Collier (2001), “preparing and empowering teachers and administrators to integrate technology in the classroom is an ongoing process” (p. 61). In terms of supporting administrator’s staff development, Collier shares that “staff development can be supported in the following ways: (1) establishing expectations and standards for accountability; (2) adjusting priorities; (3) encouraging assessment of technology use in the classroom, in the context of overall student achievement; (4) providing incentives for exploratory application of technology, ensuring that such efforts are focused on curriculum and designed in a way that wide-scale implementation is a likely outcome; (5) developing their own awareness of technology for learning and exercising their understanding in communication with teachers and staff; and (6) advocating for critical, ongoing technical support in the form of hardware maintenance and upgrades, personnel for technical support in the classroom, system-wide infrastructure, and a working technology plan” (p. 70).

Ultimately, the role of school leaders should be one of building organizational capacity. Fullan (2001) states it best when he stresses that “individual staff development is not sufficient... the role of leadership (in this case, the principal) is to ‘cause’ greater capacity in the organization in order to get better results (learning)” (p. 65). Thus, part of the building capacity process would include preparing administrators to deal with conflict due to organizational changes brought about by differences in values, norms and priorities as a result of moving toward an e-learning and virtual environment. Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) support this belief by stating that to be an effective leader, “school leaders must become adept at leading both first and second order changes” (p.8). Consequently, leading efforts to build the organizational capacity across the campus and district requires a deep understanding between the concepts of change, initiation and implementation. According to Pankake (1998), “this relationship between initiation and implementation is important for principals to know about and understand if successful implementation of change is expected” (p. 36).

As mentioned earlier, a good sense of culture by school leaders plays a key role in successfully implementing technology and change. In other words, the process of leading in a culture of change requires an understanding that “successful strategies always involve relationships, relationships, relationships” (Fullan, 2001, p. 70). Furthermore, Bolman and Deal (2008) make the case that, “an organization’s culture is built over time as members develop beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that seem to work and are transmitted to new recruits. Defined as ‘the way we do things around here’, culture anchors an organization’s identity and sense of itself” (pp. 277-78).

Therefore, implementation of any initiative, and in this case the effective implementation and use of technology, requires that school leaders skillfully and deliberately establish what Hord and Sommers (2008) refer to as ‘supportive conditions’ – that is, physical and structural factors and relational and human capacities that help in initiating and implementing an effective professional learning community. These two types of supportive conditions (Boyd, 1992) contribute to a more productive change and school improvement process. These

physical and relational factors include “availability of needed resources; schedules and structures that reduce isolation; and policies that provide greater autonomy, foster collaboration, provide effective communication, and provide for staff development” ...and “help[ing] staff relate to one another” (as cited in Hord & Sommers, 2008, pp. 13-15) in order to build trust and collegiality, respectively.

Virtually Done: Some Closing Remarks

Thus, in conclusion, building and sustaining a school and district culture that has a technology ‘growth mindset’ (Dweck, 2006) and the implementation of processes that support a technology-specific culture in which, “the role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results” (Fullan, 2001, p. 68), would ensure that teachers and principals collaboratively and collectively acquire specific knowledge and skills that directly support the leadership roles, as well as assist in meeting the varied challenges that most school leaders face when leading e-learning and virtual campuses.

Furthermore, the key to creating buy-in for technology, especially e-learning and virtual schools, will require that university/principal preparation programs work collaboratively with local school districts and national/state technology organizations to build capacity of future administrators and teacher leaders. This is not to say that local and national organizations are not focusing on professional development, but the focus needs to include specific training that ensures that school leaders acquire very specific knowledge and skills on how to reculture their schools and districts as e-learning and or virtual campuses. In addition, professional development for school leaders that deals specifically in addressing first and second order changes is a must. Finally, the implementation and sustainability of technology across a school would not be possible without development of an open climate and culture.

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K-12 Virtual Schools, Accreditation, and Leadership: What Are the Issues?

Trudy A. Salsberry

When I was young, I attended my neighborhood school. It was a square brick building with three floors and was situated on a corner just five blocks from my home. That building was torn down not long ago, and I asked my family to save a brick from that building to remind me of all the experiences I had there learning to read, use math, discover other countries, understand basic scientific principles, and communicate. That brick sits on my desk at home now and evokes all kinds of memories of friends, beloved teachers, and a principal who lived just houses away from the school playground.

Soon, a brick will no longer represent the image of a child's educational experiences. With advances in technology and our commitment to learning in all contexts and at all times of the day or night, the traditional brick and mortar image will fade. With that shift in where learning is housed, and how it is structured, comes a shift in how leaders will influence the teaching and learning in the 'schools' of the future.

Virtual Schools

Virtual schools are as different from each other as traditional schools are different when you move from community to community or state to state. A virtual school typically offers a learning experience via the Internet, may or may not be supported by government funds, and may or may not be accredited. They have been in existence for quite some time but have begun to expand and now offer programs from kindergarten to the twelfth grade (Evans, 2009). According to the U.S. Department of Education, somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 students are enrolled in virtual schools.

Evans (2009) summarizes the kinds of virtual schools available:

- State-sanctioned, state-level virtual schools are often marked as the official virtual school of a given state. They are usually free for in-state students but charge tuition for out-of-state students.
- Regional virtual schools serve a multistate region or even the entire country. They are usually comprised of a network of schools offering online classes.

- Local public schools and district virtual programs supplement public school and are designed to reach out to homeschoolers in the district.
- Virtual charter schools and virtual private schools are simply online equivalents of charter schools and private schools, respectively.
- For-profit virtual schools are run by independent corporations.
- College- and university-based virtual schools offer mostly introductory college instruction, Advanced Placement classes, and high school courses.

In the ensuing discussion of leadership, accreditation, and virtual schools the term 'virtual schools' will be considered as schools that provide online teaching and learning environments where students no longer attend on a structured timeline basis in a physical building or setting.

Accreditation of Virtual Schools

There are a number of organizations that accredit K-12 schools and some have special units or provisions for virtual or distance education schools. The most commonly known accrediting organizations are the six higher education regional associations that have counterparts for K-12 institutions. These six associations include (College Foundation of North Carolina Resource Center, 2005):

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools;
- New England Association of Colleges and Schools;
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools;
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities;
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; and
- Western Association of Schools

Recently, the K-12 units of two of these six organizations (North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement [NCA CASI] and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement [SACS CASI]) merged to form Advanc-ED. This newly merged organization is now "the world's largest education community, representing 27,000 public and private schools and districts across the United States and in 65 countries worldwide and educating 15 million students." (Advanc-ED, 2010). Prior to the merger, the Commission on International and Transregional Accreditation (CITA) accredited public and private schools throughout the world (which included virtual or distance education schools that spanned regional boundaries). CITA was acquired with the merger of NCA CASI and SACS, and the accreditation process has been made more standard across all the school members in Advanc-Ed. Virtual schools are now held to the same standards as all schools in the organization.

Advanc-ED uses a set of research-based standards and a clearly identified process as guides to help schools continuously improve. Advanc-ED recently implemented the newly formed standards where schools must meet high standards, engage in continuous improvement, and demonstrate quality assurance through external review. There are seven standards linked to research that improves student achievement (Advanc-ED, 2007):

- Vision and Purpose;
- Governance and Leadership;
- Teaching and Learning;

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- Documenting and Using Results;
- Resources and Support Systems;
- Stakeholder Communications and Relationships; and
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement

The process of accreditation enacted by Advanc-Ed is similar to the many other organizations that accredit K-12 and virtual schools and serves as the framework for the next section of this article on the discussion of leadership issues in the virtual school environments.

Leadership for Virtual Schools: Issues to be Addressed

Virtual schools must meet the same accreditation standards as any other type of school that is a member of the Advanc-Ed organization. Although the continuous improvement process emphasizes the involvement of all stakeholders, the leadership of any school is ultimately responsible for making certain that standards are met. In the following discussion, issues associated with each of the seven Advanc-Ed standards are raised as it pertains to the formal leadership role in the school. The discussion is provided not as a comprehensive list of issues impacting leadership, but as a catalyst for further discussion and the potential need for subsequent changes in policies and practices impacting the continuous school improvement process.

Vision and Purpose

Standard 1: The school establishes and communicates a shared purpose and direction for improving the performance of students and the effectiveness of the school.

Vision-setting and communicating that vision to the stakeholders is at the center of this standard. In addition, the leader ensures appropriate goals are set, profiles of the school are maintained, the vision guides the teaching and learning, and the vision is reviewed as needed.

Within the virtual school the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- How does a virtual community efficiently and effectively establish the vision and purpose of the school? Are there required or optional 'faculty' meetings, parent meetings, and student meetings (virtual, asynchronous) for all participants in the school? How do you motivate participation in the vision setting process when participants are scattered throughout large areas and operating in differing time zones?
- How do you communicate the vision and subsequent goals? How is the school community defined? Who should receive this information and how? Will the Internet be the only form of communication?
- How will faculty be guided in establishing a process for reviewing goals to establish connections to their own teaching and to those of the students?
- How will the leader ensure faculty and students participate in such 'collaborative' activities when they have little personal knowledge of or rapport with others in the school?

Governance and Leadership

Standard 2: The school provides governance and leadership that promote student performance and school effectiveness.

The governing board and the school leadership both play an important role in achieving Standard 2. The governing board establishes practices and procedures, preserves the prerogatives of the leader,

and ensures compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. The school leader is charged with using a system for critical reviews of student performance and school effectiveness, fostering a learning community where all have opportunities to lead, providing meaningful roles to stakeholders, and controlling activities sponsored by the school. Finally, the leader ensures responses to stakeholders to gain satisfaction and implements an evaluation system for the professional growth of all personnel.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- In virtual schools, who is the governing board? Is it an elected set of clients or educators? Do expectations for meeting parts of this standard totally rest with the 'owner', or is it the leader (principal or director) of the school? Will responsibilities be differentiated, and are there clear policies and procedures to follow?
- How are the powers of the leader negotiated and/or protected?
- Are there laws or regulations that are inconsistent or in conflict given possible multi-state, multi-national boundaries?
- What do leadership opportunities look like in a virtual school? Are there student councils, parent organizations, teacher leadership teams?
- What kinds of activities can the school reasonably provide and supervise? What does supervision look like in a virtual environment where you might not be even be certain who is participating?
- Does the teacher evaluation system reflect the unique skills, knowledge, and dispositions required for a virtual environment?
- Will teachers be held accountable for the student growth in just the courses they teach? Can you hold all teachers accountable given their varying work conditions and tools they have available in their location?
- Will stakeholders be able to place undue pressure on leaders for inappropriate decisions with their ability to withdraw funds or remove students when there is dissatisfaction?

Teaching and Learning

Standard 3: The school provides research-based curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate achievement for all students.

The third standard addresses implementation of the curriculum based on clearly defined student expectations, and it requires students to be actively involved in challenging learning. Data-driven decisions regarding curriculum, research based strategies, articulation and alignment among and between all levels of the school, interventions to help all students meet expectations, school-climate monitoring, and comprehensive information and media systems are to be provided.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- How will leaders monitor the implementation of curriculum? Will they enter the classroom via the Internet? Will they require lesson plans in the same format as the traditional schools?

- How will leaders ascertain suitability of instructional materials? Will leaders know enough about the range of materials suited to an online environment?
- How are the data to be stored and accessed from all locations?
- How will teachers identify and share interventions appropriate to all students when these interventions must be tailored for the online environment?
- What are the 'levels' in the school, if any, and how are feeder schools and schools where students will transition going to provide input to the process of teaching and learning for this school? Can feeder and transition schools be identified, and will their data be in a useful form for a virtual school?
- Has the research base kept pace with the needs for virtual school environments? Are there strategies that have been proven to work in this environment?
- How would a leader determine the nature of the school climate? Does a school climate exist, or should it be the teacher's 'classroom climate' that is considered?

Documenting and Using Results

Standard 4: The school enacts a comprehensive assessment system that monitors and documents performance and uses these results to improve student performance and school effectiveness.

To fulfill this standard, there must be a comprehensive, secure, and accurate assessment system that measures student learning yielding reliable, valid, and bias-free information. In addition to using assessment data to improve teaching and learning, a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness is expected. All of the assessment results are to be communicated to stakeholders, and trend data should show growth in student performance.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- Is 'school' effectiveness an issue if there are students entering and leaving without a program of study with required numbers of courses or concepts?
- Should effectiveness be documented for content areas only, for equivalent grade levels only, or for diploma or program completers only? How are comparable groups established to show trend data?
- What would more formative or qualitative forms of assessment look like in a virtual environment? How often do you assess if students are all on individual plans or schedules? How is the assessment monitored to ensure the student is the person performing the task?

Resources and Support Systems

Standard 5: The school has the resources and services necessary to support its vision and purpose and to ensure achievement for all students.

Achievement of this standard rests on the leader being able to acquire and retain sufficient numbers of qualified staff, assign responsibilities appropriately, and ensure their continuous professional development. In addition to staffing, the leader must budget for sufficient resources, monitor financial activities, maintain all facilities and related equipment, and ensure a safe, orderly environment. Finally, the standard requires written security and crisis management

plans, adequate services for all the needs of students, including those with special needs.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- Do the financial concerns differ in a virtual world? How will funds be allocated when the maintenance of a building is not as big an issue, but where there may be needs to support personnel with a strong infrastructure that rests on linking multiple environments?
- Do services for faculty include their own equipment? Who and how will all equipment in the homes of students and faculty be maintained? How much software can be required for students and faculty use?
- How is safety ensured in the Internet environment? How are data protected from hackers? How are student issues kept confidential in cyberspace? What types of policies and procedures are in place for professional communication where font size, abbreviations, use of humor, and other rhetorical devices could be misinterpreted?
- Who has access to all forms of communication among teachers, students, parents, administrators, and the community?

Stakeholder Communications and Relationships

Standard 6: The school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

Standard 6 is met when schools foster collaboration with community stakeholders to solicit their knowledge and skills and has formal channels to communicate with them.

Meaningful and useful communication with stakeholders should include expectations for student learning and growth and goals to achieve those expectations.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- How are collaborative environments established via the Internet? Would face-to-face meetings ever be necessary or desirable? Would virtual or asynchronous meetings work best?
- How does the leader make information useful without burdening the client with detailed written explanations?
- Will leaders need more expertise in the creation of electronic forms of newsletters, behavior reports, and explanations of student and school effectiveness?
- Will the goals for the students' learning and the school's effectiveness look different from a traditional school? Is the use of technology given a higher emphasis, given the context?

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Standard 7: The school establishes, implements, and monitors a continuous process of improvement that focuses on student performance.

The fulfillment of Standard 7 requires a continuous process of improvement that engages stakeholders and aligns with the vision and purpose of the school. To assist with improvement, professional development is to be provided, and results of improvement efforts are to be shared with stakeholders. Finally, the entire continuous process of improvement is to be evaluated and documented for effectiveness.

Within the virtual school, the leader is going to be challenged by the following issues:

- How does the leader maintain a continuous improvement process in a school that may not have tenured teachers (or the expectation of continuing contracts)?
- Are there unforeseen challenges in maintaining an interested base of stakeholders when student/client membership is fluid?
- How will teachers in the school have a sense of the vision and purpose if they are not actively engaged in the entire school process? How do you simulate activities that engage a mix of teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community members so that they can visualize the totality of the school?

Conclusion: Implications for Policies and Practice

As school leaders, organizations that employ leaders, and institutions that prepare leaders consider virtual schools through the lens of school accreditation, any number of issues have and will continue to be raised. Each of the standards generates issues specific to the fulfillment of that particular standard. These issues are not necessarily absent in traditional schools, but they do take on additional or differing challenges in virtual schools because of the major changes in the setting or context of the school.

Reflection and discussion surrounding the challenges of leaders of virtual schools must continue. Some form of organized deliberations will be required to identify the needs of leaders for these special contexts. In the process of determining needs, some policies may need to be changed, clarified, or created to suit this environment of the future. Finally, changes in the needs and policies affecting the leadership of virtual schools must be considered so that institutions of higher education can provide programs consistent with those changing needs.

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Using Videoconferencing to Establish and Maintain a Social Presence in Online Learning Environments

**Robert A. Moody
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Introduction

For 30 years, the educational administration program faculty at Fort Hays State University (FHSU) followed a traditional face-to-face (F2F) on campus approach to course delivery. During the spring of 2002, the program faculty began to include the FHSU Virtual College's full motion Interactive Television (ITV) to extend the program beyond campus boundaries. Faculty transmitted the newly integrated instructional format to six broadcasting sites scattered throughout western Kansas, including a site on campus where course content originated. During the summer months, faculty continued to teach classes F2F on the FHSU campus.

Beginning in 2004, faculty began an extensive review of the educational administration program and the 12 courses it contained (Dale et al. 2007). A key element of the process was our commitment as faculty to reflect upon our own individual technology needs. After reviewing current literature, faculty focused on connecting theory and action to transform the program by identifying and integrating technology that would lead to improving learning and instruction. Through research and dialogue, faculty discovered that the following concerns needed to be part of the revised educational administration program:

- Essential technology content woven throughout the program;

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- Flexible scheduling and individualized instruction for students;
- All courses infused with real-world problem solving;
- Program decisions based on current research;
- Faculty-student communication through alternative delivery modes;
- State and national leadership standards integrated into every course (Dale et al. 2007).

Dale et al., further reported, "A faculty development plan was designed that included a heavy emphasis in technology awareness, implementation, and integration. Program faculty decided to thread technology throughout each core course of the program so that the technology related to specific course content and application would be taught and applied within the appropriate course" (p. 45). In August, 2006 faculty instituted a blended approach to course delivery incorporating ITV and Blackboard (Bb) a sophisticated, yet easy-to-use, online course platform that provides asynchronous communication opportunities through a variety of tools, including announcements, discussion board, virtual classroom, and e-mail.

Throughout the program review process, faculty continuously reviewed other online tools that could further enhance our instruction. The faculty investigated the use of podcasting, Articulate Presenter, DyKnow, and social websites such as Classroom 2.0 and Wikispaces. Even though these technology tools were useful for on-line instruction, faculty realized the socialization and personal F2F exchanges that were such a vital component of our F2F instruction were quickly becoming non-existent. As a result, faculty-student relationships were being held together asynchronously by emails, telephone calls, instant messaging, and the occasional workshop.

Within the research, faculty discovered John Naisbitt's 1982 concept of 'high tech, high touch' was very true. Naisbitt said that even in a world of technology, people still long for personal, human contact. In fact Spitzer (2001) mimicked his sentiments as he pointed out that the 'high touch' is often de-emphasized in favor of the 'high tech' in online distance learning, and argues that "until those enamored of the hardware and software acknowledge the importance of human intervention, the full promise [of web-based distance learning] will not be realized" (p. 55).

Still searching for technology that could help build and maintain relationships; the authors began to investigate desktop videoconferencing (DVC) as possible means to personalize instruction. DVC programs such as GoToMeeting, Marratech, FlashMeeting and Elluminate were reviewed. Marratech was originally selected, but was discontinued when the pricing structure changed after its purchase by Google, and it became less cost effective for program use. FM and Elluminate are free programs. The main difference between the two is that with Elluminate only one person is visible at a time, but with FM as many 25 participants can see and hear one another. The authors stated using FM on a trial basis during the 2007 spring semester to broadcast instruction to students. By that time, all but two program courses had made the complete transformation from F2F to the 100% online format. In June 2007, all courses officially moved from F2F to online, making the entire educational administration program available globally.

History of Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing evolved through the years as people tried various forms of technology in an attempt to connect with one another. In 1927, Bell Telephone Laboratories designed the first two-way television as an adjunct to the telephone (Ives, 1930) Bell Labs transmitted live television images of Herbert Hoover, future U.S. president, over telephone lines from Washington D.C. to Manhattan, NY (Badger, et al 2001). In 1964, at the World's Fair in New York City, videoconferencing was introduced for the first time as the future replacement of the standard telephone ("An industry retrospective: Videoconferencing history" n.d.).

Videoconferencing hit the commercial market in 1982, but it was too expensive to make widespread adoption possible until the 1990s. At that time technical advances in Internet Protocol (IP) allowed more resources to choose from and were less expensive (Badger, et al. 2001; Evans, n.d.; "An industry retrospective: Video conferencing history," n.d.). In 1991, IBM created the first PC-based videoconferencing system, PicTel (Wilkerson 2004). Cornell University's development team released CU-SeeMe v1.0 in 1998 with color video that could function on both PC and Macintosh computer operating systems. However, its peer-to-peer connection methodology limited applications to classrooms, and training facilities required all users to be on the same network ("An industry retrospective: Video conferencing history," n.d.).

In 2001, videoconferencing (VC) was getting attention from vertical industries that saw its potential. The first transatlantic 'telesurgery,' videoconference took place as a U.S. surgeon controlled a robot overseas to perform gall bladder surgery. To date it was the most compelling, non-business use of video conferencing and brought VC to the attention of medical practitioners and the public throughout the world (Wilkerson 2004).

By 2003, high-speed broadband Internet access became generally accessible at a very practical cost and was available in nearly every region of the country. Concurrently, the expense of video-capture and display devices diminished. Technology as a whole was more affordable, and with the availability of user-friendly free software from leading instant messages service providers, videoconferencing became more appealing to the consumer for both business and personal use.

Although not complete, the history of videoconferencing exemplifies just how far the technology has come since its debut. Breaking through nearly every obstacle, videoconferencing will likely continue to develop until it becomes a fundamental part of organizational and personal life. As the technology endures additional adaptations, it will indubitably become more inexpensive and ultimately a foundational resource tool of distance education programs.

Significance of Videoconferencing to Higher Education

Higher education began to appreciate the benefits of videoconferencing in 2003 ("An industry retrospective: Video conferencing history" n.d.; Wilkerson 2004). Universities and colleges globally began to incorporate videoconferencing into their distance learning programs to enhance classes with more interactive F2F simulated environments. In 2004, videoconferencing companies continued refining their applications and fine-tuned them for more reliable performance and usability. During the same year, WiredRed Software became the first company to enable ten or more participants to conduct videoconference sessions simultaneously (WiredRed's one-click web & video conferencing via Microsoft Office 2005). During the 2006-

07 academic year, 61% of U.S. higher education institutions offered online courses and of those institutions, and 75% utilized some form of synchronous computer-based media, including videoconferencing to facilitate live online instruction at a distance (Parsad & Lewis, 2008).

Videoconferencing Strategies Used in Educational Administration Courses

In order to have successful videoconferences, it is vital to inform students as to their function and responsibilities. Video conferencing requires planning, coordination, training, and testing for the technology and instruction to integrate well, in order to minimize instructor and student stress levels. The authors accomplished this by including information in course syllabi, Bb announcements, e-mails, and dialogue with students during the first two or three videoconferences.

One of the authors conducted videoconferences every week, presenting lectures, facilitating discussions filled with inquiry and discourse while supplementing the lectures with Blackboard discussion boards and e-mails. A second method is a variation of the first, where videoconferences take place occasionally, rather than weekly, while conducting the remaining classes through Blackboard, thus combining synchronous and asynchronous learning. This was the method selected by the other instructor.

The authors employed a third method, known as an ad-hoc videoconference, which involved guest speakers for one or two classes in a semester. Guest speakers would speak on a particular topic and then entertain questions from the students. The guest speaker could easily sit next to one of the instructors or be granted access to the videoconference from a location of their choosing.

In order to engage all students in discussion, build a social presence, and avoid the 'passivity' of some, the authors used a variety of strategies and interactive activities such as:

- Calling on individual students by name, with questions in order to ensure participation by all;
- Discouraging individual students from monopolizing class discussion;
- During the first videoconference, establishing rules, guidelines, and standards for videoconferencing conduct;
- Reviewing class session playbacks to identify students who were experiencing technology difficulties or were not actively participating;
- Following up videoconference meetings with one-on-one phone discussions, videoconference calls via programs such as Skype and ooVoo, and e-mails to support and encourage student involvement.

The Importance of 'Social Presence' in the Online Learning Environment

Developing a social presence has become an important component of the authors' instruction in the FHSU educational administration program. Traditional learning communities thrive on relationships formed through F2F interactions, as students usually come from a particular geographic region or locale. However, geographic boundaries have become secondary in importance as communication technology makes it easier to share information and maintain relationships across physical distance (Kimery, 2006). Concerns surrounding the lack of physical presence in the online learning environment have led researchers to investigate the concept of

'presence' when learning online (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Early work focused on social presence and the idea of participation and belonging (Garrison, 2006). Social presence is a factor that contributes to building a community of learners and must be one of the first components established to initiate learning online (Aragon, 2003).

Many have defined social presence differently when applying social presence theory to Internet-based interactions. Gunawardena (1995) states social presence as "...the degree to which a person is perceived as a 'real person' in mediated communication" (p. 151). Tu and Mclsaac (2002) defined social presence as "...a measure of the feeling of community that a learner experiences in an online environment" (p. 131). Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) defined social presence "...as the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as 'real people'" (p. 89).

In a series of studies on the effects of different media and activities on trust, Zheng et al. (2002) demonstrated that social presence, even if carried out online, significantly increases people's trust in each other. Bos et al. (2002) demonstrated that richer media—such as face-to-face, video/audio-mediated communication—leads to higher trust levels than media with lower bandwidth such as text chat. When more than one participant is involved in an educational interaction, there is the potential to produce this social presence: the sense of being together with others and having a sense of engagement with them (Biocca, Harms, & Gregg 2001). Videoconferencing involves 'social presence,' which is "the degree to which individuals perceive intimacy, immediacy, and their particular role in a relationship" (Belderrain 2006, p. 149).

Conclusions

Successful operation of videoconferencing technology for interactive learning demands preparation and scheduling. Well-organized strategies for interaction assist faculty in meeting individual student needs and developing the 'social presence' necessary to facilitate quality online learning. Organizations can be proactive by offering this innovative technology as a way to build relationships (Badger, et al., 2001).

The transition of the FHSU educational administration program to a fully online program has been a valuable learning experience for faculty and students. The 'evolution' of the program has been from traditional on campus F2F instruction, to ITV, to Bb, social networks such as Classroom 2.0, to videoconferencing programs, which provide instant one on one or small group chat and/or video communication. Data collection on student satisfaction is ongoing and the authors are growing in their willingness to take risks with new technologies that enhance teaching and learning. The use of videoconferencing to make the learning environment as transparent as possible can be a valuable 'social presence' tool as educators seek to build and maintain quality relationships with students.

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Virtual Counseling for Students Enrolled in Online Educational Programs

Nikki S. Currie

Virtual schools are increasing in popularity as a method of providing formal education for a growing number of students in the United States (Appana, 2008; Clark, 2001; Bazin & Burke, 2009; Hipsky & Adams, 2006). The economy, coupled with technological advances and parental demand for a more personalized, innovative, individually tailored, and high quality education alternative for their children has led to the increase in enrollment of K-12 children in virtual schools (Chaney, 2001; Bazin & Burke, 2009). Realistically, this proliferation of distance education programs—or virtual schools—is here to stay (Appana, 2008; Clark, 2001; Hipsky & Adams, 2006).

The term 'virtual school' is defined as education delivered through various technological methods to learners who are typically separated from their instructors (Clark, 2001). Benefits of an online delivery method include, but are not limited to, the following: regularly updated course material; student anonymity which in some cases increases student participation; availability of rich resources for learning; reduced cost factors and budget constraints; reduction in student social distractions; flexibility; acceptance for special needs students; individualized education; modifications and adaptations for special needs students; absence of boundary limitations; students being able to take courses for credit recovery; and the broad range of courses offered (Appana, 2008; Bazin & Burke, 2009; Groves, 2006; Hipsky & Adams, 2006).

Virtual schools, however, are not without limitations: for example, funding; time limiting factors; student readiness, enjoyment, and motivation to study effectively online; organization and administration of the program; facilitator ability to replace non-verbal cues with textual techniques; technological training and support; and providing comprehensive student services such as counseling. The aforementioned factors affect the success of virtual school educational programs (Appana, 2008; Dennis, 2003; Liu, 2005). A study conducted by the Distance Learning Resource Network (Clark, 2001) provided insight into some of the trends of K-12 virtual schools in the United States. Findings addressed context factors of virtual schools such as funding, curriculum, teaching, assessment, policy and administration, marketing and public relations. In addition, the study focused on the critical need to find a means of providing student services such as

counseling. Student services for virtual learners should be equal to services traditional face-to-face learners receive; however, the delivery of these student services creates challenges and in some case ethical dilemmas for administration and guidance personnel. A comprehensive framework for providing counseling services beyond the typical use of technology by school counselors needs to be developed to meet the personal/social, academic, and career needs of students enrolled in on-line educational programs.

Current Use of Technology by Counselors

Currently, school counselors typically use computer technology in a variety of ways. School counselors provide direct channels of communication with students and parents through e-mail and posting electronic counseling newsletters that provide information to the larger audience in an expedient, cost-free manner. Counselors use technology to develop on-line guidance calendars with additional links and Web pages that provide information for parents and the community about guidance department activities and opportunities, as well as to assist in defining the role of the school counselor. Finally, technology is used by counselors to manage data on assessments which drive whether or not standards are being met (VanHorn & Myrick, 2001; Wall, 2004). The role of school counselors in virtual schools is presently vague in counseling literature, and examples of guidance programs are limited.

Virtual School Counseling as a Reality

This paradigm shift to support distance learning as a reality will change the role of school counseling and school counselor training for counselors who work in schools utilizing an online delivery system. A framework for providing counseling services for students enrolled in online educational programs presently varies considerably with some virtual schools providing online counseling and others arranging face-to-face services; however, a program model needs to be developed with clear guidelines for confidentiality, security of technology, resources, programming, and specialized training for those who deliver the guidance program (Clark, 2001). The traditional face-to-face meeting of counselor and student to discuss personal/social, career, or academic concerns during counseling sessions will need to be replaced with technology alternatives. Virtual school administrators and guidance personnel can gain information from practice and protocol utilized in online mental health counseling to design and provide student services such as virtual school counseling.

Online Mental Health Counseling

Discussing the history, benefits, and limitations of online mental health counseling is one of the first steps in assisting virtual school guidance personnel and administrators in designing counseling services for students enrolled in online educational programs. Using counseling methods devoid of face-to-face contact is not new to the profession. Counseling by indirect methods dates back to psychotherapists who communicated with clients through letter writing. The first mental health service utilizing the Internet was established in 1995 by Sommers, while online self-help support groups were the precursor to online therapy (Skinner & Zack, 2004).

Cyber or online counseling is defined as counseling where a licensed practitioner uses technology to deliver mental and behavioral health services to a client who is in a separate location (Mallen & Vogel, 2005; Maples & Han, 2008; Rochlen, Zack, & Speyer, 2004). The use of technology to address clients' needs through online

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counseling include telephone contact, video-link, interactive audio and video, chat rooms, asynchronous e-mail, synchronous chat, on-line support groups, and therapeutic software aligned with various theoretical approaches (Mallen & Vogel, 2005; Mallen et al., 2005; Maples, & Han, 2008; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Asynchronous e-mail is characterized by communication which occurs when the client and counselor choose to respond while synchronous e-mail is 'real time' e-mail correspondence (Rochlen et al., 2004).

The prevalent use of the Internet to provide direct client service provides assistance to clients who are unable or unwilling to access services due to cost, distance, scheduling, inability to meet in person due to illness, physical limitations, issues with transportation, family obligations, or lack of available resources (Barak & Doley-Cohen, 2006; Barnett, 2005; Layne & Hohenshil, 2005; Mallen & Vogel, 2005; Mallen et al. 2005; Maples & Han, 2008; Robinson & Serfaty, 2003; Rochlen et al., 2004; Rochlen et al., 2004; Sampson, Kolodinsky, & Greeno, 1997; Sampson & Lumsden, 2000). Some clients gravitate toward utilizing online counseling services when they choose to remain anonymous (Robinson & Serfaty, 2003). According to Mallen et al. (2005), a reduction in clients' issues can be addressed effectively through online counseling. With the current trend towards online counseling, professional associations such as the American Counseling Association (1999), American Mental Health Counselors Association (2000), and National Board for Certified Counselors (2001) have now issued ethical guidelines for practitioners to follow regarding online counseling; however, challenges still arise for practitioners which merit careful consideration.

One of the concerns with online counseling is in regard to confidentiality and protection of a client's privacy (Koocher, 2007; Maples & Han, 2008; Sampson & Lumsden, 2000). Counselors can implement measures to secure their computer files; however, control over the client's computer security and control over websites which hold messages is difficult to monitor (Frame, 1998; Robinson & Serfaty, 2003). Verifying the age, identity, and location of clients also presents challenges regarding confidentiality and liability for practitioners facilitating online counseling (Rochlen et al., 2004). Visual cues or body language that are integral to traditional therapy gleaned through face-to-face counselor/client contact is not present in most computer-aided counseling (Alemi, Haack, Harge, Dill, & Benson, 2005; Alleman, 2002; Bloom, 1998; Frame, 1998; Haberstroh, Parr, Bradley, Morgan-Fleming, & Gee, 2008; Mallen et al., 2005; Rochlen et al., 2004; Shaw & Shaw, 2006; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006). Issues of counselor competence, informed consent, crisis or emergency procedures, licensure issues in regard to crossing jurisdictional lines, and lack of empirical research addressing both the efficacy and limitations of online counseling need to be researched in a comprehensive manner (Barnett, 2005; Bloom, 1998; Mallen et al., 2005; Shaw & Shaw, 2006). Finally, some therapeutic interventions do not lend themselves well to an online delivery; for example, play therapy techniques with children. (Koocher, 2007). According to Koocher (2007) practitioners need to focus on contracting regarding the nature of services, practitioner competence, confidentiality, and control in relation to licensure jurisdictions across state lines.

As we transition into the era of technology and information, it is important for practitioners to be prepared for the facilitation of counseling services and the effect on clients (Norcross, Hedges, & Prochaska, 2002).

Counseling Services in Virtual Schools

What implications does the current practice of online mental health counseling have for virtual school counseling? Limited information is available on how virtual schools address the counseling needs of students. Students who do not experience success in regular school due to behavior concerns, lack of motivation, bullying from peers, involvement with risky behaviors, poor social skills, and low academic skills, in addition to the previously mentioned reasons for virtual school enrollment, often look to online programs as an alternative. With this plethora of social and emotional needs, it is essential that virtual schools provide counseling services to address the domains of counseling, personal/social, career, and academic services; however, it has yet to be determined what the best framework is for providing these services.

Counselor Training

Another critical question to consider is how an online delivery system of student counseling services impacts counselor training and future research. Models of effective guidance programs for virtual schools are limited; however, administrators and counselors can adopt some components used in mental health online counseling to develop a comprehensive program for counseling students in virtual schools that address counselor training, technology, confidentiality, and methods. Licensed counselors in virtual schools need additional training or emphasis in online counseling, including how to communicate through text-based modes of delivery and how to mirror verbal encouragers in text-based communication. To improve communication in counseling sessions with students, counselors can describe their nonverbal reactions to the student (Mallen et al., 2005). Counselors can use capitalization and punctuation to communicate affect and empathy (Mallen et al., 2005). Finally, ongoing staff training and professional development needs to be provided for counselors in online educational programs.

Technology Considerations

A secure computer network, with encryption, and user verification software to protect the student's privacy should be used. The counselor, depending on his or her technological expertise, may need additional training, professional development, and the availability of tech support to address any problems with the technology itself.

Confidentiality and Student Privacy

To address confidentiality and student privacy, a signed informed consent should be administered, outlining the limits of confidentiality, counseling services provided, procedures for counseling including when or how often the counselor will respond, the risks and benefits of online counseling, emergency back-up procedures, and counselor credentials which helps the counselor be prepared for potential difficulties (Koocher, 2007; Roy & Gillett, 2008; Shaw & Shaw, 2006). If possible, an initial face-to-face meeting or telephone conversation with the student should occur prior to engaging in online counseling where the counselor gathers demographic information about the student, administers informed consent, discusses the limitation about online counseling such as absence of verbal cues, slower transmission of conversation, technical difficulties, and informs the student about confidentiality and privacy issues (Roy & Gillett, 2008). A plan to address crisis management should be explained and given to the student and parent in written form (Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006).

The counselor should be knowledgeable about local crisis resources and how to access them to make emergency referrals for students.

Components of Online School Counseling

Various types of online counseling can be used in virtual schools to address personal/social, career, and academic needs of all students.

Videoconferencing allows conveyance of both audio and video communication and can be used with students in counseling sessions. Two-way audio or video between the counselor and student is comparable to face-to-face counseling (Day & Schneider, 2002).

E-mail counseling, either asynchronous or synchronous where students can e-mail the virtual school counselor about concerns and issues and the counselor responds via e-mail can be used with students (Maples & Han, 2008).

One-on-one chat room counseling, where students can have an in-depth conversation with the counselor can be organized.

Group chat can also be used which involves conversation between two or more students and the counselor; however, issues of confidentiality should be addressed prior to engaging in group chat (Maples & Han, 2008).

Therapeutic software can be used to address student concerns.

Career software, videos, and virtual job shadowing can be used for career exploration and development. In addition, writing can enhance self-reflection for students if integrated into online counseling (Rochlen et al., 2004; Wilczenski & Coomey, 2006).

In order to work with parents, interactive conferences addressing the three counseling domains (personal/social, career, academic) between the counselor and students and their parents can be arranged on a scheduled basis.

Finally, continuous evaluation of the guidance program is essential to determine which components need to continue, be revised, and eliminated along with adherence to professional ethical codes which provide guidelines for online counseling. The American Counseling Association (1999) lists ethical codes for counselors who provide online counseling services that address benefits and limitations of online counseling, whether or not the delivery method is appropriate for the client, access of technology, observance of state laws and statutes, boundary jurisdiction, and informed consent and client privacy. Counselors in online educational programs should have a clear understanding and adherence to these ethical codes.

Counselor Training

In addition to programming and ethical issues, matters of counselor training and research are important considerations for counselors, and the counseling profession needs to address how technology fits into counselor education and training programs. According to Alleman (2002), providing online counseling services requires distinct competencies. Graduate programs should incorporate information regarding online counseling into programs of study (Alleman, 2002). Whether working with individuals or groups, counseling supervisors need to learn how technology can be utilized to accentuate both coursework and experiential counseling (Haberstroh et al., 2006). Supervisors who provide online supervision also need to be astute in the ethical and legal issues of online counseling (Layne & Hohenshil, 2005).

Students who plan to deliver counseling services online need additional training beyond regular counselor education programs. Advanced technological knowledge of computers and interactive potential, along with expertise in maintaining security of communication,

are essential components for counselor training. Advanced training in online communications and in textual—as opposed to verbal—communication needs to be a component of counselor education training for those counselors (public school or private) who are planning on facilitating online counseling (Alleman, 2002). Specific issues such as confidentiality, protection of client privacy, legal jurisdiction regarding licensure, and informed consent need to be included in counselor training.

Research Considerations

Research provides sparse direction for counselor educators who design and facilitate counselor training. There is little empirical information regarding the effectiveness of online counseling and the effects of relaying mental health information to consumers (Alleman, 2002; Chang, 2005; Rochlen et al., 2004). Comparing face-to-face counseling and online counseling is difficult and presents challenges for researchers (Barnett, 2005).

Continued research studies are needed to provide evidence of the appropriate type of client who can benefit from online counseling, to help establish professional standards for online counseling, to present information about online counseling, to enhance training for programs, and to advocate for funding issues and licensure of online counselors (Barnett, 2005). It would also be beneficial to conduct research studies with various cultural groups to determine if online counseling is beneficial for diverse clients. There is a lack of consistent evidence in this area (Sanchez-Page, 2005). Research should be conducted on the various forms of online counseling separately (Sanchez-Page, 2005). Research also needs to be conducted to provide evidence of the safety, legality, and efficacy of online counseling (Alleman, 2002). A final recommendation would be for university counseling departments to add to the existing body of research regarding online counseling by developing research protocols, providing online counseling, and evaluating the efficacy of online modes of treatment (Mallen & Vogel, 2005).

Discussion

As the trend toward online virtual educational programs continues to grow, attention to services such as student counseling merits careful consideration. Research studies and results can assist practitioners in developing comprehensive counseling programs for students in online educational programs in order to address program components, technology, counselor training, ethics, confidentiality and student privacy, and the most effective forms of online counseling in addition to benefits, limitations, and risks. Administrators and counselors in virtual schools can learn from research and programming in the area of online mental health counseling to help them develop successful counseling programs that meet the needs of all students enrolled.

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