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The Effect of a Weekly Social Presence in Online Classes

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The Effect of a Weekly Social Presence in Online Classes

A Project Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of

Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

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Abstract

This study involved looking at the effect that providing a visual presence in online classes had on the students' success on tests, overall achievement in the class, and retention. The instructor provided a weekly visual video to review weekly outcomes, summarize weekly expectations, and provide clarification on content and assignments. The literature on the importance of including engagement by the instructor and adding a human component to online classes for the most part supports the positive effects it can have on students completing online courses successfully. This research included comparing the results of two exams given in a Methods and Curriculum in Early Childhood course, the students' overall grades in the course, and retention. The first year there was no visual presence in the course and the second year the visual presence was added. It was determined that it would be more accurate if a survey was conducted to see who actually watched the videos. A survey was conducted with college students at a community college. Students were asked how many videos they watched and if the videos were helpful. The results from the survey were compared to the students' overall grades. In analyzing the data, it was shown that the test scores were not higher when the visual presence was added. There was no significant difference in the overall course grade. There were, however, more students who completed the Methods and Curriculum course with the addition of the instructor video. Moreover, when comparing the students who viewed the majority of the videos, and their success in the class, there was a strong connection between those who received higher grades and those who watched the videos.

Chapter One

The success rate of college students taking online classes is a growing concern, as more and more students are participating in the online method of delivery. Rebecca A. Glazier (2016) states that of the students currently enrolled in college classes, one third of them take at least one online class. This study looked at the effectiveness of adding a visual presence and involving more engagement by the instructor in the success and retention of students taking an early childhood course at a community and technical college. The study included identification of the problem, the selection of the students and the setting where they are enrolled, a review of literature on the topic, the research action plan, study results, and the plan to share the information found.

General Problem/Issue

The instructor's concern regarding the success rate in online classes was present in an Early Childhood Education Program at a community and technical college in west central Minnesota. There are approximately 25 students that begin the two-year program each year. The students typically reside within a seven county area surrounding Hutchinson, MN.

The six early childhood classes that are offered in the first year of the program are all offered in a blended hybrid model. The students are expected to attend classes on campus one day a week and the remainder of the instruction is online using the Desire 2 Learn Brightspace (D2L) online management system. D2L provides a variety of tools that help keep students interested and engaged in the course. The students are given weekly assignments that need to be submitted electronically in D2L. During the second year of the program, the classes are offered in an all online format, with the exception of four credits of externships.

All of the early childhood classes in the Early Childhood Education AS (Associate of Science) degree program are eight weeks in length, with the exception of three: Language Arts, Activity Ideas, and Internship. The students take three early childhood specific courses each semester for four semesters. This gives them a total of six to nine credits of early childhood classes, which will prepare them to work with young children in early childhood environments. Some of the courses included in their program are: Child Development, Language Arts, Child, Family, and Community, and Health, Safety, and Nutrition. Most of the students then complete their schedules with general education requirements. Additionally, the majority of students attend full-time, enrolling in 12 to 18 credits per semester.

In the last couple of years of structuring the program in this way, it has been found that there have been more students who have been unsuccessful during the second year of the program, when the courses are all online. However, based on experiences, the online courses are well organized and the course expectations are written clearly. The belief is that the students are familiar with the teaching style and with the D2L online management system, which is used for all of the classes. To try and identify the issue, the classes have gone through the Quality Matters process, with one of the classes being certified. Different learning styles have also been accommodated by using narrated Power Points to deliver the course content. A variety of assessments are used, such as group discussions, projects, group learning activities, short-answer tests, videos, among many others. The discussions that are required for each of the classes requires the students to post an initial three to four paragraph reaction to several questions posed. It then involves them reading their peers' comments and reacting to a minimum of two of the students' initial posts, which provides them with peer to peer interaction.

There has been an opportunity to talk face-to-face with many of the students who have been unsuccessful with the all online mode of delivery. Many of the students commented that they miss the interaction and engagement that they had during the first year of the program. They noted that even though they had weekly expectations and deadlines that without the interaction from the instructor, they felt removed and lacked the accountability needed to complete the requirements in a timely manner. One student commented, "I just didn't feel connected with you and the rest of the class, like when we saw each other every week." Another student responded, "I just don't feel as comfortable asking questions, when I don't see you." They also indicated that although the requirements are clearly stated in the syllabus and weekly in the content area, they felt that a weekly summary of those expectations would be helpful.

Therefore, this research addressed the affect that regular interaction from the instructor had on a student's success in taking online classes. In addition, the study compared the delivery of information using a written format compared to the delivery using a visual/auditory method. The hope is that by posting a weekly summary of content and expectations using Media Space, or some other type of visual recording platform, that the students felt more engaged. Ultimately, the expectation would be that through this engagement, students were more accountable and completed their assignments successfully and in a timely manner.

It has been found that the students in the Early Childhood Education program miss the interaction and engagement that a face-to-face class provides. This research addressed the effectiveness of providing that interaction through the use of a weekly visual recording in hopes that this would deliver the connections that the students were missing. These connections would then lead to more successful completion of the courses. This study built on the work done by Annand (2011), Kontos (2015) and Dolan, Kain, Reilly, and Bansal (2017). These professors

from Athabasca University, the University of Kentucky, Clark University and the University of

Wisconsin researched the importance of building community in online courses. They also

looked at strategies that could be used to encourage a sense of convergence within a college-

level online class.

Subjects and Settings

This study took place in a rural technical and community college located in west central

Minnesota. The subjects of the study were members of an Early Childhood Methods and

Curriculum class. Participants in the classes held in the fall of 2017 and 2018 were used.

Description of subjects. The participants of this study were students enrolled in the

Early Childhood Methods and Curriculum classes in the fall of 2017 and the fall of 2018 at a

technical and community college located in west central Minnesota. The classes ran for eight

weeks both of these years. This college's total population is approximately 5000 students. The

students in the fall 2017 class were all females and there were two males in the fall 2018 class. It

is common to only have the female gender represented in these classes. The early childhood field

tends to be dominated by women. Occasionally, however, there are one or two males in the

classes.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

	Number of Students	White	Asian	Pacific Islander	Male	Female	Students Under 25	Students Over 25
Fall, 2017	23	20	2	1	0	23	21	2

| Fall, | 16 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 14 | 2 |
| 2018 | | | | | | | | |

The 2018 course had 16 students enrolled. The total participant sample is 39. This class began the first half of fall semester and ran for eight consecutive weeks.

Selection criteria. This class was chosen because of a concern that became evident at the end of fall semester 2017. 14% of the students failed the course due to a lack of assignment completion. They became absent in the course, not participating in class discussions and not responding to emails from the instructor. This is a course that is offered the second year of the students' two-year program, so these were students who had been successful their first year in face-to-face classes. The question was if their failure in the course was due to the lack of interaction with their instructor and their classmates.

Description of setting. This study took place at a technical and community college located in west central Minnesota. The college includes two campuses, which are located sixty miles apart.

Table 2

Ridgewater College's Student Population Based on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Annual Report

Have a Barrier to Completion	Attend College Part-time	Are Eligible for Pell Grants	Tested into at Least One Developmental Course	American Indian or Students of Color	Female	Under the Age of 25
70%	68%	34%	59%	14%	54%	64%

Informed consent. Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University and from the college to conduct this study. The college's IRB procedure was followed to obtain permission to conduct research. This involved receiving permission from the Dean of Institutional Research as well as other necessary administrators.

Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and any procedures required by the participant, including disclosure of risks or benefits. Confidentiality was protected through the use of pseudonyms without identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined both verbally and in writing. All of the students in the study were adults, so parent permission was not necessary.

Review of Literature

There are more and more college students who are preferring to take online classes. According to recent statistics, about 46% of college students in the United States have taken at least one online course (Song, Kim, & Luo, 2015). "Building Rapport to Improve Retention and Success in Online Classes," author Rebecca A. Glazier (2016) states that of the students currently enrolled in college classes, one third of them take at least one online class. The reasons the students may be choosing online classes can be out of necessity, a personal preference, or the belief that online classes are easier. By taking online classes, students may be missing the social interaction by both the instructor and their peers.

Definition of terms. For purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Social Presence: the intensity of social relationships and emotional bonds within a class or learning community including identifying with the learning community, developing

interpersonal connections, and communicating honestly in a trusting environment (Rubin & Fernandes, 2013).

Teaching Presence: the ways in which the instructor creates learning experiences, manages and drives student work and guides interaction to support intentional learning (Rubin & Fernandes, 2013).

Teaching Effectiveness: how an instructor can best guide, facilitate, and reinforce students toward certain academic ends, such as achievement and fulfillment (Gorsky & Blau, 2009).

Affective Connectedness: a feeling of psychological and social connectedness, to which students feel caring and warmth (Kim, 2011).

Sense of Community: students' feeling to perceive the value of community support and gratification of shared effort and cooperation (Kim, 2011).

Retention: maintain attendance and complete the course successfully with a grade of C- or higher.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect that a weekly visual presence by the instructor in an ECED 1640, Methods and Curriculum online class, has on the students' test scores and retention. Specifically, the instructor will provide a weekly visual video to review weekly outcomes, summarize weekly expectations, and provide clarification on content and assignments.

Student Participation in Online Classes

The intrigue and appeal of taking online classes is increasing every year (Lohr and Haley, 2017). There are many current college students who may have family and work obligations that necessitate online classes. The students may also be taking online classes to avoid the social interaction that a face-to-face class requires, or they may feel that they can get more out-of-class support from family and friends by taking an online course. Lohr and Haley (2017) state that distance learning programs offer the flexibility students are looking for in the areas of time and location, which conforms to an adult's balancing of work, family, and school. All of these reasons also can contribute to the questionability that the students will be successful in the classes.

Platt, Raile and Yu (2014) states that students' satisfaction in face-to-face courses over online courses was attributed to higher levels of interaction with their instructors. Glazier (2016) gives two other reasons why students may not be successful in online classes. One of the reasons is the characteristics of the students and the second is the course and instructor features.

The more students are involved in an online class, the more successful they tend to be. There should be a human side of instruction in online classes (Ghemawat, 2017). If students are required to participate in discussions and respond to an instructor's inquiry, they are more likely to be engaged in all aspects of the class. Of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "classic seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education, five relate directly to interaction among students and faculty (contact between students and faculty, reciprocity and cooperation among students, prompt feedback, emphasis on time on task, communication of high expectations)" (p. 440). "Students may become frustrated if the instructor is not actively involved to help clear up any misconceptions to help bring learning to higher levels and provide tutorials for new skills and development" (Stover & Ziswiler, 2017, p. 464). This may suggest that if students are not

successful in their online classes, it could be due in part, to the lack of connection from their peers and instructors.

In addition, George Kontos in his article, "Practical Teaching Aids for Online Classes," reinforced the importance of using Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles of good practice in teaching undergraduate education. Kontos (2015) states that the challenge with implementing those principles may be the lack of personal visual contact with the instructor. The students may feel that the instructor is not present in these situations and he/she may be viewed as undemocratic, instead of approachable. This feeling of solitude can lead to the student being dissatisfied with the class and unsuccessful as a result. However, if even the first two principles of interactions between instructor and students and the students interacting with each other are implemented in the learning process, it can improve the success of the students.

Student Satisfaction as it Relates to Participation

Moreover, student satisfaction and mastery of content have been studied in relation to online class participation. Draus, Curran and Trempus (2014) in their article, "The Influence of Instructor-Generated Video Content on Student Satisfaction with and Engagement in Asynchronous Online Classes," states that there is a correlation between the satisfaction that students have with their online class and the students' perceptions of the involvement of the instructor. This satisfaction by the students also led to better understanding of the content and more overall success in the classes. Social presence is a critical antecedent to sustaining and supporting a community of learners (Annand, 2011). It can increase communication and learning and encourage an active learning community (Lohr & Haley, 2017). Social presence can also establish a warm and shared class that encourages participation and interaction (Zhao & Kirk, 2014).

By the same token, teacher presence is crucial and indicates the extent to which students stay engaged and actively participate with the subject matter and learning activities (Saadatmand, Uhlin, Hedberg, Abjornsson & Kvarnstrom, 2017). Teacher presence is a specific way that can lead to more engagement and involvement to support intentional learning (Rubin & Fernandes, 2013). Gorsky and Blau (2009) state that social and teacher presence can lead to teacher effectiveness in online classes. Therefore, one of the ways that instructors can be more involved with their students is through instructor-generated video content. (Jayaratne & Moore, 2017). Thomas, West and Borup (2017) states that students have reported that they are better able to understand their instructor's social presence through videos as compared to text alone. This method can increase the instructor's presence in the class and help to build connections among the students. Emerging video technologies may be able to improve interactions and support the development of learning communities (Borup, West & Graham, 2012).

Instructor-generated video content was the subject of a study completed by Draus et al. (2014) to look at its effects on the success of students in online classes. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in scores from those students who participated in courses that included video content presented by the instructor and those who didn't. This increase was noted in the amount of time the students spent in the course and the evaluations that were completed at the end of the courses. The findings relative to the video content indicated that students spent time watching the content, there was improved course satisfaction, the students spent more time in class discussions, and students found it worthwhile observing the instructor-generated content.

In a study conducted by Martin, Wang and Sadaf (2018), however, four facilitation strategies were tested, and of those four, interactive visual-based instruction along with

instructors' use of synchronous instruction were rated the lowest of the four. Draus et al.(2014) also states, "Multimedia did not produce significant differences and that administrators should be cautious regarding the cost-benefit analysis of multimedia in asynchronous online courses" (p. 241). They do include, however, that one way that video content can influence students is to establish instructor social presence (Draus et al., 2014).

Cessation Rates in Online Classes

Furthermore, as the popularity of online classes increases, it is imperative to look at retention rates. Current studies indicate that drop-out rates are higher for online classes compared to face-to-face courses. These statistics indicate a need to look at student attrition (Marshall, Greenberg & Machun, 2012). Social and teacher presence have shown to have positive results in having students feel connected, and engaged and therefore be more successful in the class (Armellini & De Stafani, 2016). Wisneski, Ozogul and Bichelmeyer (2015) asserts, "There are three findings that improve retention in online classes. First, instructors who emphasized the tailoring of teaching practices from the classroom achieved greater levels of teaching presence online than in the classroom. Second, instructors spent more effort tailoring teaching practices for use online than in integrating practices used in the classroom. Finally, providing words of encouragement, affirmation, or validation of student contributions had a positive impact on teaching presence (p. 24). An online learning environment that includes teacher interaction, learning that engages the students, social presence, learning interaction, and visual presence by the instructor can lead to higher retention and better success (Barbera, Gomez-Rey & Fernandez-Navarro, 2016).

With the popularity of online instruction, it is important to look at the ways to present the information to students to increase the likelihood of their success. These reviews stress the

importance of the instructor being present in those classes through discussions, emails, and

instructor-generated video content. The presence of the instructor in these situations helps to

build rapport among the instructor and students and the students and their peers. This rapport

has been shown to increase the students' satisfaction in the courses and their overall success in

those classes.

Theme one. Social interaction and attachment are important for persons of all ages and

can affect performance and overall success in college online classes.

Hypothesis Statement

It is hypothesized that online students participating in ECED 1640, Methods and

Curriculum in Early Childhood, attain better test scores and improved retention when the

instructor provides a weekly visual presence to students.

Chapter Two

There were three leading research questions to this study, which assisted in developing a plan for collecting qualitative and quantitative data. The questions were used as a guide in facilitating the methods of data collection, as well as the determination of the subjects and setting included in the study.

Research Questions

As a college instructor, I have been asked to teach many online courses. I feel strongly about the attachment and social interaction that we all need to fulfill the sense of belonging. I was intrigued to learn whether or not the addition of a social presence in online classes affects the success of the students enrolled in these classes. As a result, I created these research questions:

1. Do students enrolled in online classes receive a higher overall grade, if the instructor provides a weekly visual social presence?

2. Are the students enrolled in online classes who receive weekly visual interactions by the instructor more likely to finish the course?

3. Will the students who are enrolled in the first eight-week course offered fall semester, also enroll in and complete the second eight-week course offered fall semester?

Answering the above questions will give a better understanding why it is important to include a visual social presence in online classes to give students the social interaction to assist with the students' overall success and completion.

Research Plan

The plan below includes the methods of data collection and data analysis, as well as the schedule for conducting the study. In addition, a review of the ethical issues and anticipated responses are also discussed.

Methods and rationale. The intervention that was used for this study was to provide a visual weekly video clip to the students in the class by the instructor. The instructor gave the students information on the weekly objectives, course expectations and review of anticipated questions that may arise. The instructor encouraged the students to use the discussion area to communicate with other students in the class and to communicate any questions or concerns to the instructor.

There are two tests that are given in the Early Childhood Methods and Curriculum class. The tests were created based on the outcomes of the course. Although the standard error of measurement is not given, content validity is good and the assessments clearly identify what the students know. The tests are provided in a Bloom's Taxonomy format.

Table 3

Bloom's Taxonomy Test Format

Bloom's Hierarchy Level	Number of Questions	Point Value
Knowledge	Ten	Five
Comprehension	Five	Five
Application	Five	Ten
Analysis	Three	15
Synthesis	Three	20
Evaluation	three	20

The students were instructed to complete a minimum of 100 points of questions. They needed to complete at least one question from each level of Bloom's. If they completed more

than 100 points of questions, they got credit for the questions where they received the highest

points. If they did not answer a question from one of the levels, they lost the points for that

particular area.

Table 4

Test Grades

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
100-98%	97-95%	94-93%	92-88%	87-86%	85-83%	82-78%	77-75%	74-73%	72-68%	67-65%	64% or less

The retention rates were based on completion of the course. If the students did not

actively participate in the course through participation in discussions and/or submission of

assignments and tests for three consecutive weeks, the students were dropped from the course.

Successful completion of the course was defined as a final grade of C- or better.

Schedule. The Early Childhood Methods and Curriculum class began on Aug. 27, 2018.

The instructor had a seven minute video clip introducing the students to the class and explaining

the layout of the class on Desire to Learn Brightspace (D2L.) There was specific information

about due dates, discussion posts, clarification of assignments, tests, and the importance of

communication in online classes. There was also information regarding the research study and

their participation in the research.

For the remaining seven weeks of the course, the instructor provided a video clip by 8:00

am on the Monday of each week. Each video clip included a review of the weekly objectives,

content, and assignments. The instructor also reminded the students of the importance of asking

questions for clarification and checking email regularly. There was a priority to keep the video clips under seven minutes to encourage students' participation.

At the completion of the course, a review of the students' scores on their tests was collected. The students overall grades were also calculated. In addition, there was data collected on the percentage of students who completed the course. These results were compared to the equivalent data from the students who took the course in 2017.

Ethical issues. There are students every year who feel a sense of obligation to the instructor to do well in the classes. There may be an extra feeling of responsibility to do well when knowing they are part of a research study. There may be barriers in their lives that are preventing them from doing well in the class and/or completing the class. They may feel an extra indebtedness to the class which could cause additional anxiety.

Anticipated response. If any of the above ethical issues arise, where a student may have an unforeseen and/or unpreventable barrier which prevents them from doing well and/or completing the course, the situations will be handled on an individual basis. The instructor will reach out to the student and reassure him/her that his/her situation is the priority over the research study.

Chapter Three

This research looked at the effectiveness of adding a visual presence and involved more engagement by the instructor in the success and retention of students taking an early childhood course at a community and technical college in central Minnesota. The visual presence included the addition of a four to six minute video clip by the instructor, which included information about the content that week, the assignments and their due dates, and the encouragement of asking questions, if needed.

Description of Data

Assessments. The students were given two tests throughout the semester. Each test was worth 100 points. One test was given at the mid-point of the class, and the other test was given at the end of the class. The second test was not cumulative. The same tests were given in the Fall of 2017 and the Fall of 2018. The tests that were given were open book and open notes. The tests were based on Bloom's Taxonomy which included questions at each of the six levels of the taxonomy, including knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Each level of questioning was worth more points, as the students progressed through the hierarchy. The students were required to complete at least one question from each of the six levels, and a minimum of 100 points worth of questions. The students were given more questions than were required, with choices of which questions they wanted to answer. If more questions were answered than were required, the questions that were scored were those which received the higher points. The students were given the tests at the beginning of the semester and had as much time to complete them as needed, provided they were completed by the date due. If the tests were not submitted on time, the students lost five points per week for each week they were late.

Figures 1 and 2 indicate the grades received by the students who took the test. The results of the first test indicate that 96% of the students successfully passed the test with a C- or better in the Fall of 2017. 94% of the students successfully passed the first test with a C- or better in the Fall of 2018.

In comparison, the data indicates that 100% of the students in the Fall of 2017 passed the second test with a C- or better and 81% of the students in the Fall of 2018 passed the second test with a C-or better. It should be noted that the three students who failed the second test in 2018 did not attempt the test.

Final Course Grades. The final grades for the Methods and Curriculum Course were determined using the categories of grades found in Table 4. In addition to the two tests which were each worth 100 points, there were 160 points worth of assignments including preparing a weekly schedule, summarizing different types of curricula in a power point, demonstrating higher order levels of questioning, creating a visual schedule, creating a budget and dramatic play kit, and giving examples of using print and math in learning centers. Each of those assignments was worth 20 points each. Included in the final grade were also four discussions worth 12 points each and five video reflections each worth 10 points. The total point value for this course was 458 points. To receive a grade of C- or better, the students needed to get a minimum of 342 points.

Figure 3 indicates that in the fall of 2017 83% of the students completed the course with a C- or better. In 2018, however, 88% of the students completed the course with a C- or better. It should also be noted that 44% of the students in 2017 received As or A-s, and in 2018 69% of the students received As or A-s.

Retention. The retention rates were based on completion of the course. If the students did not actively participate in the course through participation in discussions and/or submission of assignments and tests for three consecutive weeks, the students were dropped from the course. The retention rates were calculated based on the students who started the course compared to the number of students who completed the course without having a three week or more lapse in participation.

The data in Figures 4 and 5 indicate that in the fall of 2017, 83% of the students completed the course. In the fall of 2018, 94% of the students completed the course. There were 31% more students who were enrolled in the class in 2017 compared to 2018.

Enrollment in Second Course. The Early Childhood Program requires that the students take two eight-week courses back-to-back in the same semester. The first eight-week course was the Methods and Curriculum in Early Childhood course and the second eight-week course was the Special Education course. The study included researching the number of students who enrolled in the first course and successfully completed it, compared to the number of students who enrolled in the second course and successfully completed that course. The addition of the visual presence through the use of a weekly video was added to both of the fall, 2018 courses.

Table 5 shows that in the fall, 2017 course, 91% of the students enrolled in the first class also took the second class. In the fall of 2018, 100% of the students were enrolled in both classes. Of the students enrolled in the second class in 2017, 48% of them completed the course with a C- or better. The data for the 2018 class was unavailable at the time of this submission.

Survey. A review of the number of times the video clips were viewed led to the question of whether the inclusion of the video clips meant that the students were actually watching them.

Figure 6 indicates the number of times each of the eight videos was watched based on numbers

indicated on the Media Space web site, which was used for the taping of the video clips.

It was determined that examining the students who actually watched the video clips and

the success of those students based on their overall grades, would be a better indication of the

video clips' effectiveness. A survey was given to the students who took the class in the fall of

2018. The survey asked the students how many video clips they watched, and if they found the

video clips helpful. There was also room on the survey for comments. The survey was given at

the completion of the class through an email.

Table 6 shows that 75% of the students returned the survey. Of those students returning

the survey, 83% watched five to eight of the video clips. 100% of the students who returned the

surveys found the video clips helpful. When comparing those students who watched the video

clips to their final grades, 70% of students who watched four to eight of the video clips received

an overall grade of A in the course.

Methods

Inclusion of a visual presence. The students in the Methods and Curriculum Course in

the fall of 2017 indicated that they missed the face-to-face contact that they had received the year

before in the Early Childhood courses which were offered on campus. The statistics of the

number of students who successfully completed the course, led the instructor to speculate

whether or not the lack of completion, poorer test scores, and poorer overall grades were in part

due to the absence of visual contact by the instructor and the students' peers in the online

courses.

The comments by the students and the poorer completion rate, led to the theory that the

students' success in classes could be related to the lack of interaction by the instructor. This

study indicated that the students' poorer test scores and retention rates could be in part related to the lack of teacher and peer involvement.

The research involved adding a visual presence in the Methods and Curriculum Early Childhood class. The visual presence involved a weekly four to six minute video clip that included a summary of the content covered for the week, the expectations for the week, the dates the assignments were due and the encouragement that the students reach out and ask for clarification, if needed. The video clips were posted on the D2L online management system by eight am every Monday, for each of the eight weeks that were part of the course.

Research Questions

Do students enrolled in online classes receive a higher overall grade if the instructor provides a weekly visual social presence?

Grades on Tests. The students were given two tests during the course. The tests were open book and open notes. They were available to the students at the start of the semester and were untimed. There were dates when the tests were due, however. The tests were based on Bloom's Taxonomy where each level of questioning was given a point value. These point values are indicated in Table 3. The students were required to complete at least one question from each of the levels and were also instructed to complete a minimum of 100 points worth of questions.

Figure 1
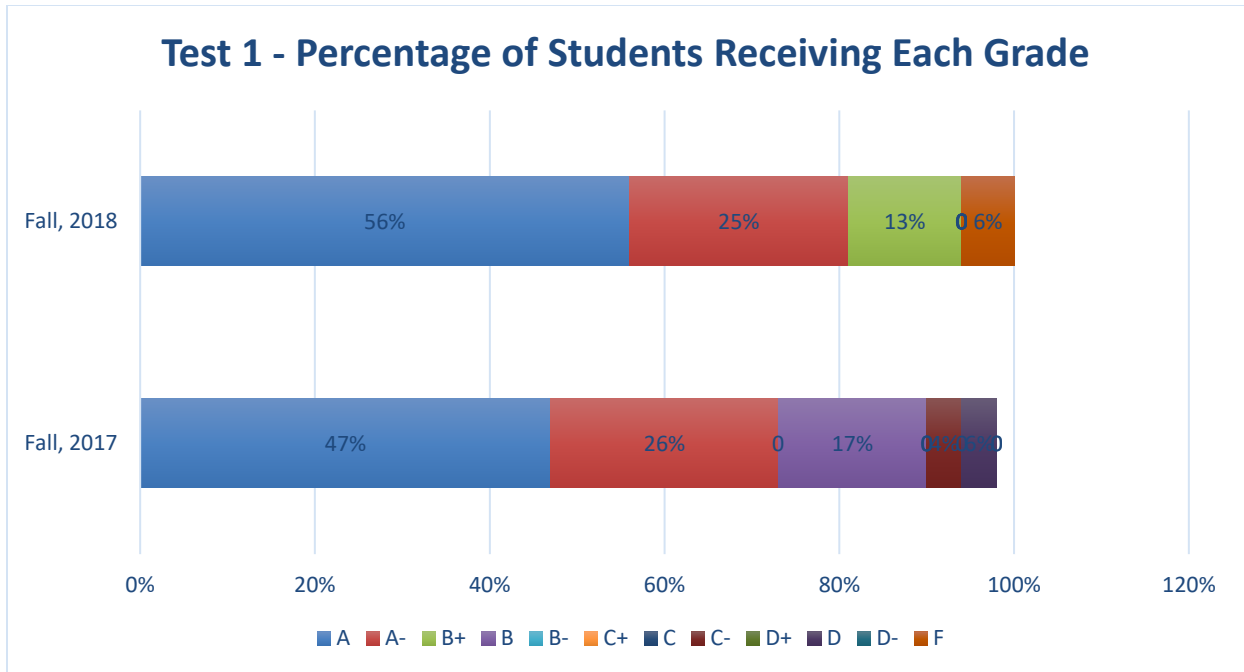
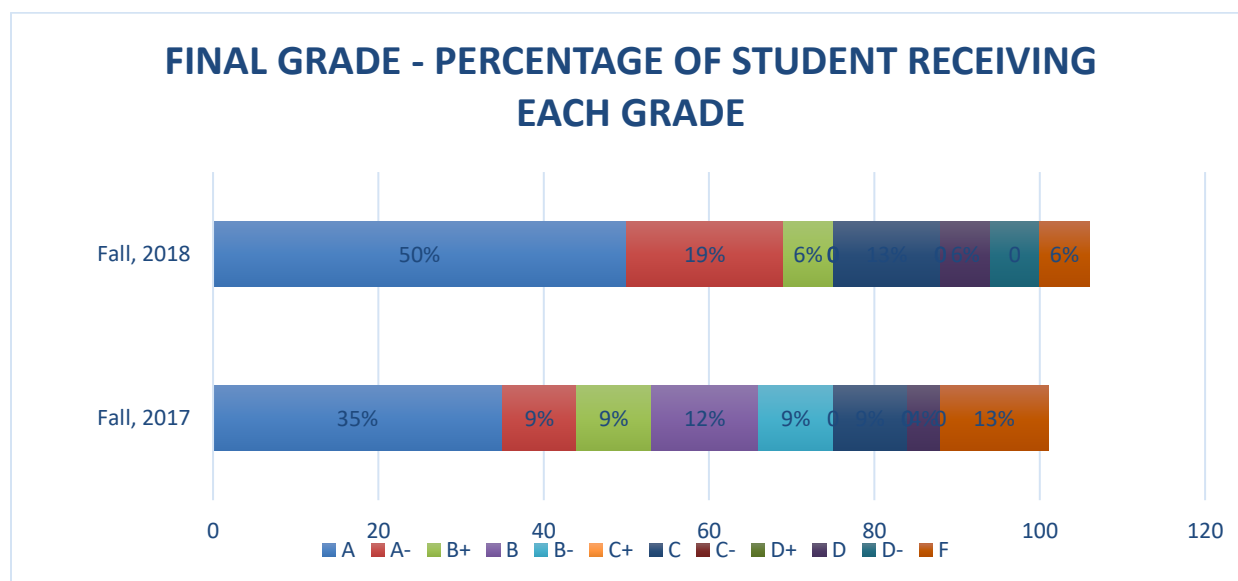*Test 1 - Percentage of Students Receiving Each Grade*

Figure 2
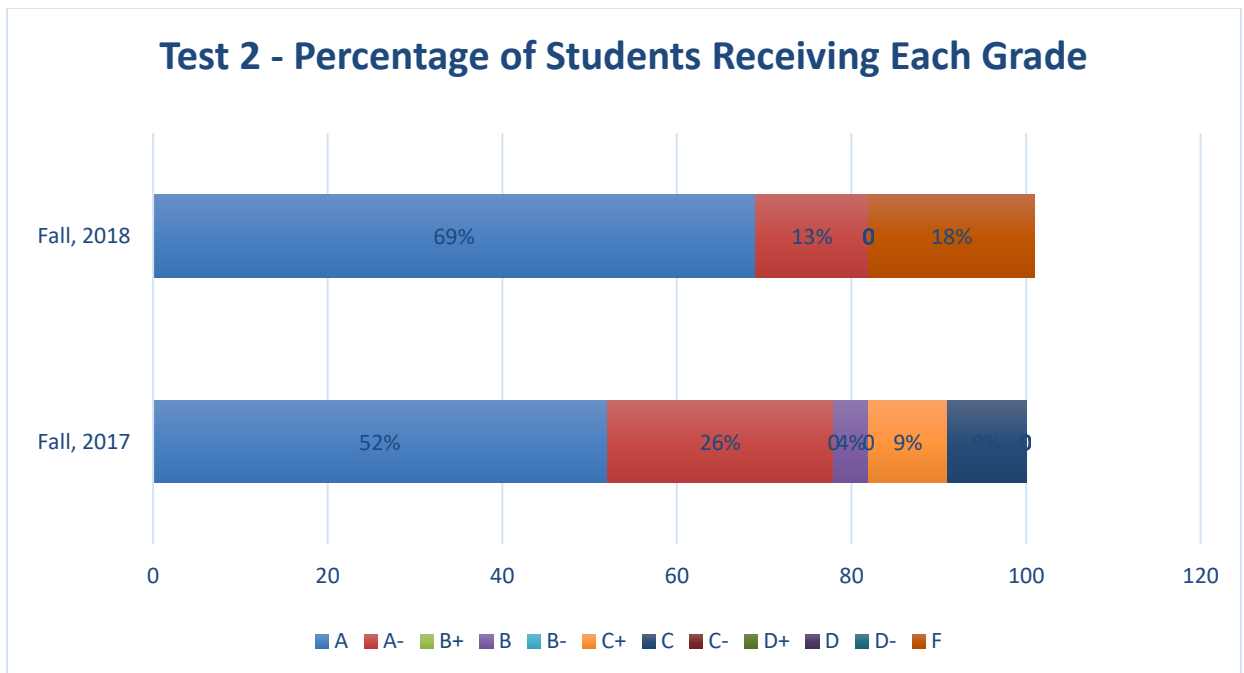
Test 2 – Percentage of Students Receiving Each Grade

Overall Course Grades. The students' overall course grades were determined by the two tests that were administered, as well as additional assignments such as papers, discussions, video reflections, and projects. The final grade was determined by using a percentage of total possible points compared to points received. The summary of grades is found in Table 4. Although tests and other assignments were given different point values, each submission was valued equally. There was a total of 458 points that the students could have received, with the tests making up 200 of those points.
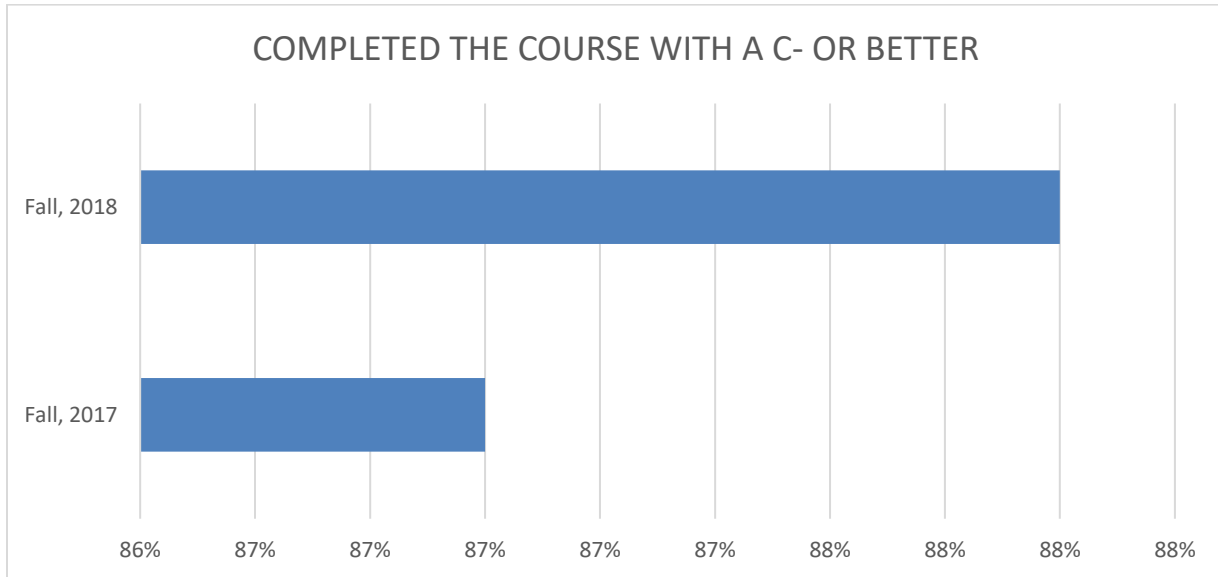
Figure 3

Percentage of students receiving each grade

Are the students enrolled in online classes who receive weekly visual interactions by the instructor more likely to finish the course?

Retention. This question addressed those students who completed the course, as well as those students who completed the course with a C- or better. It was determined that the student had completed the course if he/she had logged into the course within three weeks of the end of the course. The letter grades were determined based on the summary provided in Table 4.
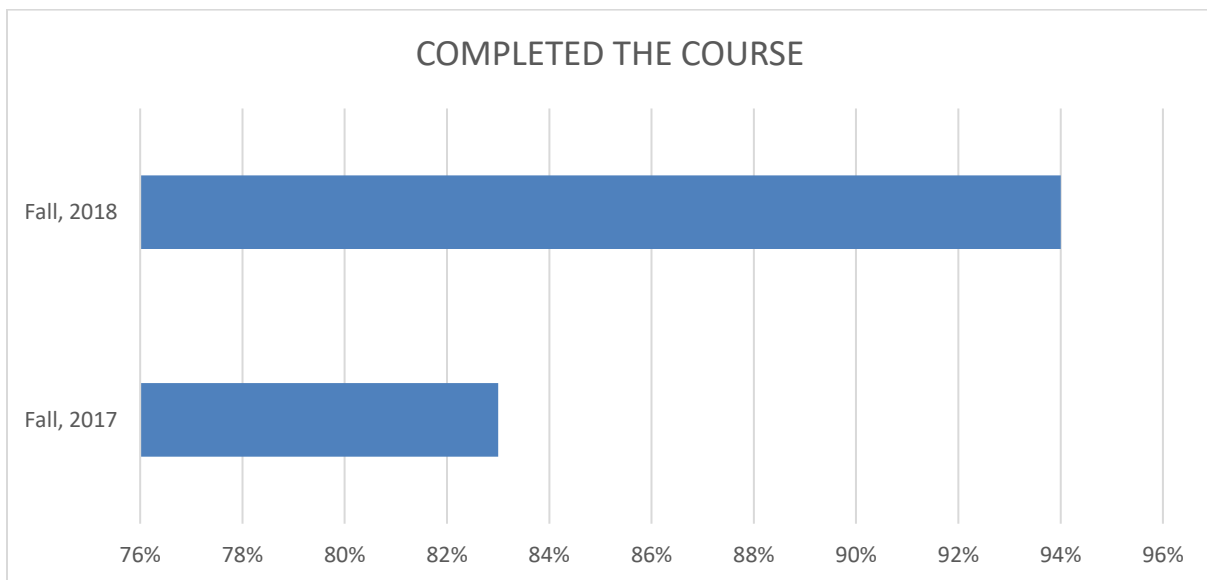
Figure 4

Students Completing the Course with a C- or Better

Figure 5

Students Completing the Course

Will the students who are enrolled in the first eight-week course offered fall semester, also enroll in and complete the second eight-week course offered fall semester?

Participation in the Next Course. The students in this study are required to take two courses in the Early Childhood Program back-to-back within the same semester. The study reviewed the number of students who were enrolled in the first class, who also enrolled in the second class and were successful in completing it with a C- or better. Table 5 indicates the number of students during 2017 who were enrolled in both courses and those who successfully completed it. It also shows the number of students in 2018 who were enrolled in both classes. The data for the number of students who successfully completed the second course in 2018 was not available at the time of the submission of this study.

Table 5

Enrollment in Second Course

|	Fall, 2017	Fall, 2018
Total Number of Students Participating in the ECED 1640, Methods and Curriculum Course	23	16
Total Number of Students who Participated in the ECED 1640 course that also Enrolled in the ECED 1115 – Special Education Course	21	16
Total Number of Students who Successfully Completed the ECED 1115 – Special Education Course	10	**

**This data will not be available prior to the submission of this study.

Students Who Used the Video Clips. After reviewing the data, whether or not all of the students viewed the video clips became relevant to the results. Media Space was the source that was used to record the video clips. This source allows the recorder to review how many times

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the videos were viewed. Checking how many times each video clip was viewed, presented the

following outcomes:

Figure 6

NUMBER OF TIMES VIDEO CLIPS WERE VIEWED
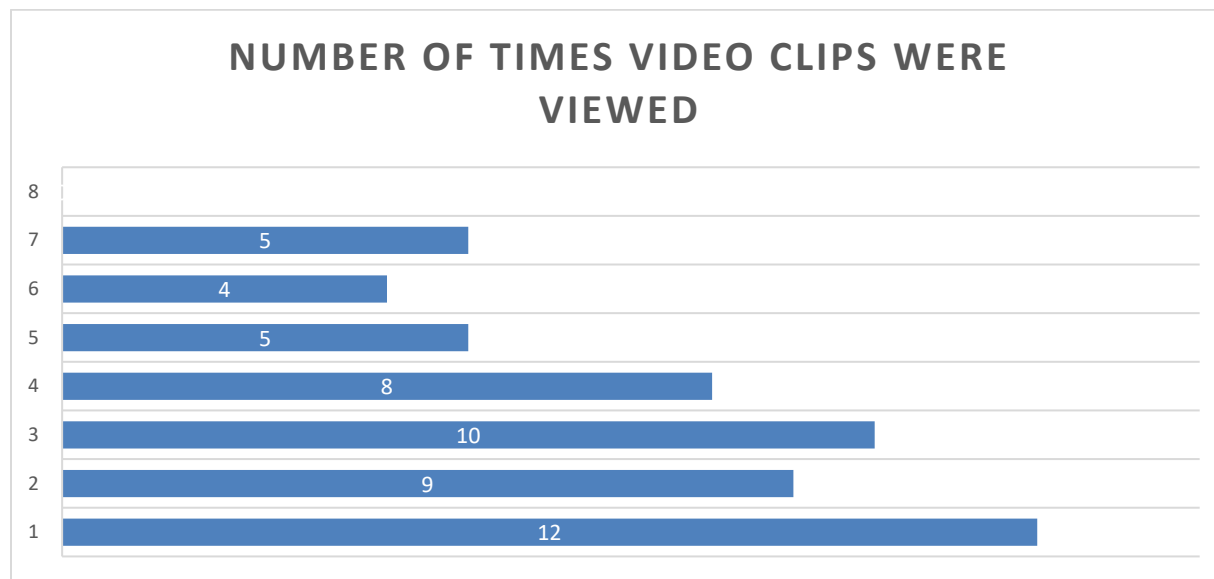
Number of Times the Video Clips Were Viewed

It was also felt that it would be helpful information to determine if the students who did

view the videos were the students who did better in the class. A survey was sent to the students

in the class to ask how many of the eight video clips they watched and if they found them

helpful. It was then determined if the students who watched the videos were the students who

scored higher overall grades in the class.

Table 6

Number of Video Clips Watched Compared to Final Grade

Student	Number of Video Clips Watched	Did You Find the Video Clips Helpful	Final Grade in the ECED 1640 Course
1	7	yes	A-
2	4	yes	A

3	7	yes	A
4	4	yes	A
5	7	yes	A
6			F
7	7	yes	A
8	2	yes	C
9	2	yes	A
10	6	yes	D
11			C
12	7	yes	A
13	4	yes	A
14			B+
15			A-
16	6	yes	A-

Conclusions

The results of this study indicate that there is not a direct relationship between better test scores and overall grades with the addition of a weekly visual presence by the instructor. The results indicated that there were more As when the video clips were added, but there were also more Fs. The comparison between the final grades indicated 25% more As and Bs with the visual presence added, whereas the number of Fs stayed the same. It should be noted that there were fewer students in the 2018 class than the 2017 class. There was also a student in the 2018 class who didn't complete any assignments, although she would regularly check into the class.

When comparing the data of the number of students who completed the course and those that received a C- or better, it was determined that more students completed the course when the weekly video clip was added and the number of students who completed the course stayed relatively the same. These numbers again could be skewed due to the difference in the number of students participating.

These conclusions led the researcher to look deeper into who was actually watching the videos. It was decided that just because the video clips were available to the students on a weekly basis, didn't mean they were actually watching them. A review of the number of times the videos were viewed resulted in a further investigation of who the students were that were watching the videos and the overall grades that those students received in the class. It was found at the beginning of the class, the majority of the students watched the clips. As the course progressed, however, fewer and fewer students watched them.

To determine the relationship between the students' success in the course, as determined by their overall grade, and the number of times they viewed the videos, a survey was given to the 16 students in the class. 75% of the students returned the survey. Of those that returned the survey, 83% of the students had watched at least half of the video clips. Of those 83%, 70% received an A in the course. In addition, 100% of the students who returned the survey said that they found the video clips helpful. Some of the comments about the clips included, "I really enjoyed the video clips as they clear up any questions," and "Having a video makes it easier to know what is expected for that week and to receive a little deeper explanation of the assignments."

Chapter Four

Action Plan

The data that was most useful to the researcher were the results found in the survey that was given to those students who participated in the 2018 class. The outcomes showed that the students who watched at least half of the video clips got an overall grade of an A in the class. This indicates that many of the students found the videos valuable. The comments made by those students who returned the survey included, "It was nice to focus on everything that was due for the week," and "Having a video makes it easier to know what is expected for that week and to receive a little bit deeper of an explanation of assignments."

These results and the comments provided will lead this instructor to include video clips in all of her online classes. She will use this opportunity to reconnect with the students by providing further explanations of the content, assignments, and expectations. The clips will be available to all students and the students can make the choice of whether or not they see value in watching them. It is also a way for the instructor to encourage students to feel comfortable asking questions and make her more approachable.

The use of a visual presence may accommodate different learning styles of the students participating in the course. It is a strategy that won't prohibit a student who learns through different means to excel, but it may make it easier for some students to focus on their assignments and receive clarification, if needed. The visual presence is a tool that may make some students' learning easier and more valuable.

Chapter Five

Plan for Sharing

The results of this study were shared within the department and with other colleagues working at the community and technical college where the research was conducted. The data comparing the students who used the video clips compared to their overall grades was the most pertinent information. The comments of the students who participated in the survey were also shared with faculty members within the department and other colleagues throughout the college.

In addition, this information was shared with our online curriculum specialist and Desire to Learn trainer. The data and overall performance of the students comparing the two sections of courses was presented to her and she commented that the information would be helpful as she coached instructors in planning their online classes.

The data was also shared with the college's administration, specifically the Dean of Technical Instruction. The researcher found the results of the data favorable to include the visual presence in all of her online classes. The inclusion of weekly video clips in all of her online courses was a personal goal shared with her administrator. This goal will be reviewed at the end of next year.

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Appendix A

Participants' Consent

The ECED 1640, Methods and Curriculum Course, is part of a study conducted by your instructor looking at the impact that a visual presence through a weekly video has on students' test results and retention in the course. Participation in the study is optional. The instructor will gather the results on the two tests given in the class, as well as the number of students who completed the course. This will all be done anonymously and no identifying information will be used in the data collection.

If you chose not to participate, please inform me in writing, prior to the end of the course.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Appendix B

Survey

I am taking a class this semester and doing a research project on how to improve my online classes. One thing I am trying this year is to include a weekly 4-6 minute video clip that summarizes the information we're covering that week, the expectations, due dates, and encouraging you to reach out with questions. The first class I'm evaluating is the ECED 1640 – Methods and Curriculum class. I would like to ask you a few questions about how effective you felt the video clips were. If you could return the survey to me by **Friday, Nov. 9,** I would really appreciate it. You can just email it to me. Your responses will be kept anonymous and will in no way reflect your grade and/or offend me. I just ask that you are honest.

1. How many online classes have you taken? _____

2. How many classes are you currently taking with me? _____

3. How many total classes have you taken with me? _____

4. How many of the video clips did you watch? _____

5. Did you find the video clips that you watched helpful? _____

6. Other Comments:

Thank you so much.

Cindy