

Needs Assessment: Creating Classroom Community in a Virtual Setting

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September 6th, 2020

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Discussion of Instructional Problem

When teaching virtually, teachers are struggling with how to create a classroom community. They are aware that creating a successful community takes many steps and involves multiple stakeholders. They know their classroom community is not as developed as previous in person communities but lack the training on how to create it in a virtual setting.

Contributing Factors to the Instructional Problem

Due to COVID 19 and school districts delayed decisions, teachers were given limited time to prepare for the 2020-2021 school year. Once schools made the decision to go completely virtual, school districts have made the focus of their professional development on learning the management systems and video conferencing method. This had led to limited discussions, training and even time to think about how to begin building classroom communities in a digital setting. The second limiting factor is technology. Both students and teachers are struggling with connectivity issues which is contributing to the lack of opportunity to build a classroom community.

Comparison of Conditions

The participating teachers from my data collection instruments know what a successful classroom community looks like when teaching in person. They are very aware that their classroom community is not up to the level they want it to be at. They have not been trained on how to provide that same level of community in the virtual setting.

Current Conditions. Teachers are struggling to create classroom communities in their virtual classroom that are comparable to their previous in person classroom communities from prior years.

Desired Condition. Teachers will have the tools necessary to build a more developed classroom community in the virtual setting. All of the stakeholders (teachers, students and parents) will feel invested in the community.

Data Collection Process

Discussion of Data Collection Instruments Used

For this Needs assessment I wanted to determine if teachers felt there was a noticeable difference in their classroom community from teaching virtually this year and what might be some of the factors effecting it. The first instrument I used to collect data was a teacher survey. I used a Microsoft form and collected data from 78 teachers. Based on the initial data collected from the survey, I used interviews to collect more detailed information. I had 17 of teachers complete the interview. A copy of the survey and interview can be found in the appendix.

Discussion of Sources of Data

My first source of data was a teacher survey. I posted the survey in a Virtual Teaching Facebook group and asked members to complete the survey if they had started virtually teaching for the 2020-2021 school year. 78 teachers completed the survey and ranged from teachers of 1st grade through 12th grade.

My second source of data was a teacher interview because I would be able to ask to follow up and clarifying questions based on the themes I identified in the initial survey. I reached out to teachers from the initial survey who had indicated they were willing to answer follow up questions. 17 teachers completed the interview.

Data Gathered Through Other Sources

I did not use any additional data sources.

Process of Data Analysis

Data Analysis Techniques Used

For the teacher survey, I started by reading through the responses to all of the questions. 94% of the teachers surveyed identified that teaching virtually has affected their classroom community. From there I focused on the three questions that best help clarify the issues affecting classroom community. I identified the common themes and patterns that appeared in the teachers' responses.

After the teacher survey, I completed teacher interviews. I interviewed 17 teachers from the initial survey group. 100% of the teachers interviewed identified that their virtual classroom community is not as well developed as their in-person classroom from the previous year. From there I focused on the five questions that discussed the barriers affecting classroom community.

Results of Analysis

Table 1 presents the quantitative data from the teacher survey. This data identifies the types of respondents and the structure of their virtual classroom. It also determines the number of teachers who identified that their classroom community has changed due to the virtual setting.

Table 2 presents the qualitative data from the teacher survey to begin identifying potential causes of the change in classroom community due to the virtual setting. Sample responses were selected from the responses due to the large number of responses. This survey identified that 94% of the teachers believed the virtual setting was affecting their classroom community. From their responses I was able to begin identifying the three main themes affecting classroom community. The themes were barriers to teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions and teacher-parent interactions. The survey identified many factors that could be grouped within in one or more of these themes. Additionally, the survey identified two contributing factors to the

problem as mentioned previously. Three qualitative questions from the survey have been excluded from the data table. The first question asks about what strategies they have tried in building their virtual communities. This question will be useful for creating a training, as it gives insight into what has been attempted already. The second question asks about how have teachers included parent in their classroom community in previous years. This question is useful for helping identify the baseline of parent involvement previously. This topic was also address in the survey question about parent engagement this year because most teachers responded by comparing engagement during virtual learning to prior school years. The third and final question excluded was a request to reach out if I have follow up questions. The purpose of this question was to gather contact information for those willing to participate further in this research.

Table 3 presents the quantitative data from the interviews. This data identifies the types of respondents and the structure of their virtual classroom. These questions were asked to gain greater insight into the teacher factors that can influence classroom community and to have a direct quantitative comparison of the virtual classroom community as compared to the teachers' in person classroom communities the prior year. The data showed that the sample group was varied in years of experience, grade taught and class size. This was helpfully for showing that the same themes can appear across these demographics. Three quantitative questions were excluded from the data table. The first question identified what subject they taught and was excluded because the information gathered was redundant due to other questions. The second question excluded asked what percentage of students were willing to turn on their cameras. This question was excluded because some of the teachers expressed that they had not yet asked their students to turn on their cameras or students were required to keep them on by their school district. The third question excluded ask how many days a week teachers had live sessions. This question was

excluded because some teachers interpreted this question to be how many days they are required to teach virtually, and other teachers interpreted it to mean how many days they saw each student.

Table 4 presents the qualitative data from the teacher interviews to further clarify the themes the causes of the themes that were identified in the in the initial teacher survey. Summaries of the responses where identified from the responses to show which theme was the most common among those interviewed. The interviews identified that within the theme of teacher-student interactions that students no longer had an incentive to participate and there is a lack of 1-1 social times for teachers and students to build relationships. Within the theme of student-student interactions the interviews identified that students lack the opportunities to build relationships with each other. Lastly within the theme of teacher-parent interactions the interviews identified that communication has become limited to email and/or phone calls and that parents lack the time to keep up with the information, technology expectations and their own job requirements. Five additional qualitative questions from the survey have been excluded from the data table. These questions asked teachers to identify how the virtual setting has improved the interactions between the various stakeholders. These questions will be usefully in developing a plan to breaking down the barriers to building a classroom community because they give me insight into what is working in the virtual setting.

Table 1

Virtual Classroom Community Assessment: Teacher Survey Quantitative Questions

Variable	Respondents n=78
<u>Grade level</u>	
Elementary (1 st – 5 th)	13
Middle (6 th – 8 th)	32
High (9 th – 12 th)	34
<u>Subject</u>	
Two or more subjects (math, science, social studies, and/or science)	16
Math	11
English	20
Science	11
Social Studies	2
Related Arts	5
Technical Education	4
Foreign Language	3
Special Education	4
PE/Health	2
<u>Live sessions</u>	
Students are required to attend	61
Students are not required to attend	18
<u>Amount of face-to-face time with students</u>	
Feel they have less	59
Do not feel they have less	19
<u>Feels that teaching virtually has changed their classroom community</u>	
Yes	73
No	5

Table 2

Virtual Classroom Community Assessment: Teacher Survey Qualitative Questions

Questions	Themes	Sample Responses
How would you compare your virtual classroom community to your in-person classroom community?	Lack of student engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Really hard to engage. It's more code, less personal since they are often muted and have a camera off. My students are either uninterested or tense/on edge because of the work load & stress of the virtual format.
	Lack of student interactions with other students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students feel a little isolated from other class members. Not as many relationships between students.
	Inability to get to know individual students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most are just names or voices on a screen. I wouldn't even recognize a child who is in my class if I were to run into them in a store.
What are some of the limitations you have faced when creating a virtual classroom community?	Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just the lack of time to learn and have access to the LMS prior to the start. Accordingly, it's been a hit the ground running situation. I could create a better community if I could just focus on that. I wish admin would realize that it takes a lot of time and energy to do that and I can't do it all at once.
	Technology issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can see kids are not staying focused on the speaker. I have 34 kids and with audio and video issues, delays in just getting kids to answer, it takes a really long time for everyone to even introduce themselves." Poor wifi for students, getting all students to attend all classes, some miss classes because of either wrong zoom invites used or internet going on and off.
How would you describe your parent engagement this year?	Increased engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents are more engaged because they are watching or listening to the online lesson. They sit in and do the kids work. Our platform allows them to be as engaged as they want.
	Increased contact through email and phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am in constant communication with many of my parents so far this year dealing with assignment problems, lack of work, falling asleep in class, etc. I have been able to get to know parents via phone calls and having the time to help their children. They really appreciate it.
	Parents are struggling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pretty good, not great. Parents are stressed and confused because they have too much on their plates. Little to none and when you reach out to them to include them, they are defensive. Worse. Parents just do not have the time or energy to reach out.

Table 3

Virtual Classroom Community Assessment: Teacher Interview Quantitative Questions

Variable	Respondents n=17
<u>Number of years teaching</u>	
1-10	7
11-20	4
21-30	6
<u>Grade level</u>	
Elementary (1 st – 5 th)	2
Middle (6 th – 8 th)	8
High (9 th – 12 th)	7
<u>Average class size</u>	
1-10	1
11-20	5
21-30	9
31-40	2
<u>Live sessions</u>	
Students are required to attend	16
Students are not required to attend	1
<u>Percentage of students who attend live sessions</u>	
0-25	1
26-50	5
51-75	2
76-100	11
<u>Length of live sessions (in minutes)</u>	
15-30	3
31-45	6
46-60	6
180-240	2
<u>Teacher ranking of virtual classroom community 0 (no community) – 10 (awesome community)</u>	
3-4	3
5-6	11
7-8	3
<u>Teacher ranking of last year's in person classroom community 0 (no community) – 10 (awesome community)</u>	
8	5
9	5
10	7

Table 4

Virtual Classroom Community Assessment: Teacher Interview Qualitative Questions

Questions	Themes	Summary of Responses
What barriers are there to student engagement in the virtual setting?	No incentive to participate	76% of those interviewed discussed that students lack incentives and motivation to participate
What barriers are there to building relationships with teacher-student relationships in the virtual setting?	Lack of 1-1 social time	71% of those interviewed discussed how virtual learning does not provide the time or the space for the casual conversations that help build a repour between students and teachers.
What barriers are there for student-student interactions in the virtual setting?	Lack of social interactions	76% of those interviewed discussed how the virtual setting makes it difficult for students to begin speaking socially with each other.
What barriers are there for teacher-parent communications in the virtual setting?	Communication is limited to email and/or phone calls	41% of teachers discussed how they are struggling to connect with parents outside of email and/or phone calls.
What barriers are there for parent engagement in the virtual setting?	Lack of time	53% of teachers discussed how the parents do not have time to keep up with the information being sent home, troubleshooting the technology, and continuing to work their jobs.

Needs Analysis Evaluation and Need for Instruction

The survey helped identified the three themes affecting classroom community. I was able to break down the main areas that need to be addressed to begin solving the problem. The interview gave greater clarification to the themes so that instruction can be targeted to solving the biggest issues first. Between the 78 surveys and 17 interviews enough relevant data was collected to identify that there is a need. Moving forward it would be beneficial to gather additional data from the other stakeholders, students and parents. It would also prove useful to return to these teachers at the end of the first quarter or at the semester mark and see how their responses might have changed.

The data points to a clear need for training on building classroom community in a virtual setting. As mentioned previously 94% of the teachers surveyed agreed that their classroom community has been affected by the virtual environment and 100% of the teachers interviewed ranked their virtual classroom community as less developed than in their in-person classroom community from the prior year.

Instructional Goal Statement

Teachers will be able to build a more developed classroom community for the virtual setting. They will be provided with the tools, strategies and resources they need to strengthen their teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-parent interactions.

Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What grade do you teach?
2. What subject(s) do you teach?
3. Are your students required to attend live sessions?
4. Compared to your last school year, do you feel that you have less face-to-face time with students?
5. Do you feel teaching virtually has changed your classroom community?
6. How would you compare your virtual classroom community to your in-person classroom?
7. What new strategies have you tried when creating your virtual classroom community?
8. What are some of the limitations you have faced when creating a virtual classroom community?
9. In previous years, how have you included parents in your classroom community?
10. How would you describe your parent engagement this year?
11. Can I reach out to you if I have follow up questions?

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been teaching for?
2. What grade do you teach?
3. What subject(s) do you teach?
4. What is the average number of students scheduled for your classes?
5. What percentage of your class attends the live sessions?
6. Are your students required to attend live sessions?
7. What percentage of your class is willing to turn on their cameras during a live session?
8. How long are your live sessions?
9. How many days a week do you have live sessions?
10. On a scale from 0 (no community) to 10 (awesome community) would you rate your classroom community?
11. Think back to your in-person classroom last year at this time. On a scale from 0 (no community) to 10 (awesome community) would you rate your classroom community?
12. What barriers are there to student engagement in the virtual setting?
13. What ways has the virtual setting improved student engagement?
14. What barriers are there to building relationships with teacher-students relationships in the virtual setting?
15. What ways has the virtual setting improved teacher-student relationships?
16. What barriers are there for student-student interactions in the virtual setting?
17. What ways has the virtual setting improved student-student relationships?
18. What barriers are there for teacher-parent communication in the virtual setting?
19. What ways has the virtual setting improved teacher-parent communication?
20. What barriers are there for parent engagement in the virtual setting?
21. What ways has the virtual setting improved parent engagement? If you have a specific example(s) please include.