TEACHING A SYNCHRONOUS DISTANCE EDUCATION
COURSE FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS:
ONE PROFESSOR'S PERCEPTIONS

By
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This single-subject case study used qualitative techniques to examine the perceptions of a novice professor who taught a synchronous graduate distance learning course for elementary educators. The host site students were taught in the presence of the professor, and the remote site students interacted with the professor and host site students by way of two-way audio and video technology.

Two research questions and protocols guided data collection. Questions were 1. What are the professor’s perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class? and 2. What are the needs of distance learning faculty?

The researcher attended nine of the 14 classes during the fall semester of 2000 as a silent observer. Field notes were recorded by the researcher during class meetings. Data collection was descriptive and included detailed perceptions, attitudes, demeanor, and observation of the teaching style of the professor who simultaneously taught the two groups of students.
The professor maintained a journal in which perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of the distance learning class/program were documented. The presentation of findings include an analysis of field notes taken by the researcher and
journal entries recorded by the professor for each protocol. Yin (1994) noted that results are strengthened when multiple sources of evidence are used to draw conclusions.

The results of this study indicated that those who teach distance learning classes for the first time might benefit from professional development training before the academic period begins and a mentor during the academic period. Although some of the same skills are utilized when teaching in a traditional setting and when teaching via distance, there is a difference in preparing for class as well as managing the learning environment. Humor, motivation, detecting nonverbal cues, open communication, and high but realistic expectations were some of the professional dispositions that the novice possessed that ensured progress in this synchronous graduate distance learning class.

Although there are problems associated with teaching using a distance learning format, many of the difficulties can be overcome by integrating feedback from both students and teachers. This input can be obtained through qualitative and quantitative research studies. After the data has been collected and analyzed, as in this study, recommendations can be offered to administrators and faculty to improve the quality of teaching students receive.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my mama, Annie Mae Stephens Ward; my husband, Vernon; my daddy, John; and my daughter, Aleah Anjae as an expression of my love and gratitude for your endless support. On different levels, each of you gave me encouragement and made tremendous sacrifices during my quest for this terminal degree.

Mama, tears come to my eyes as I write this. You willingly accepted the responsibility of caring for a 10-month old when I began the doctoral program. You potty trained, nursed, taught, and provided a myriad of learning and enrichment experiences for Aleah. In essence, you put your life on hold for her and for me.

Vernon, your love and support during the past five years is evidence of your commitment to me and to our family. Thank you for being my personal technical consultant. Your expertise with computer operations, maintenance, and problem solving is phenomenal.

Daddy, thanks for being not only a father but also a "daddy." You always kept my "eyes on the prize."

My sweet Aleah, I will always remember the encouragement you gave me when you were but two years old. You would say, "Mama, you getting ya lessen." Thank you for not crying when I would leave you on Sunday afternoon to go back to MSU. Duke, you are truly my angel.
Finally, I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my maternal grandfather,

Reverend Ezell F. Stephens.
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I want to breathe a sigh of relief now that this phase of my life has come to an end. As I reflect on the countless hours of commuting to campus, completing home assignments, and conducting research, I can honestly say that it was worth the effort. I am thankful that I had the determination to persevere. I realize that the support of family, friends, and colleagues kept me motivated. I am indebted to each of you who telephoned to say hello, gave me encouragement, sent an email, or said a prayer.

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I would like to thank Dr. Sam Givhan for keeping me focused, reassured, and calm. He also edited every step of the way. I enjoyed our email chats and was always intrigued by his unique command of the English language.
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My sincere thanks goes to Dr. Margaret Pope for serving as my dissertation co-chair. It was interesting that in 1999 we were peers in a course that was in the doctoral program of study and in 2003 she was one of my committee members. Her editing was thorough and consistent. Her feedback helped me communicate the written word clearly and with power. I wish her the best as she develops into a remarkable professor.

I want to thank my husband, my daughter, and my parents for their patience, understanding, and support. I wish I could share my title with each of them.

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Lastly, I thank God for giving me the determination, strength, and ability to endure to the end. I finished my course. I kept the faith. He has given me my academic reward.
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CHAPIER I
INTRODUCTION

In times past, the need for distance learning course offerings was not as great as it is today. Students were traditional in that they made a daily commute or lived in on-campus housing while pursing their quest for knowledge. Consequently, colleges and universities conformed to the “traditional” way of educating the masses. The instructor met students in a designated place at a designated time to facilitate learning.

Today, there is a greater need for distance education because the non-traditional student population has significantly increased. Cisco Systems Incorporated (1992-2002) reported that in 2002, 2.2 million students were expected to enroll in distance learning courses, up from 1.6 million in 1998; approximately 84% of four-year colleges were expected to offer distance learning courses, a change from 79% in 1998; and approximately 85% of two-year colleges were expected to offer distance learning courses, a change from 72% in 1998.

As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics 2002 Special Analysis Report, characteristics of non-traditional students include, but are not limited to, those who are financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid, are single parents, are employed full-time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled, are enrolled part-time during an academic year, have dependents other than a spouse, have delayed enrollment after completing high school, or are those who do not have a
high school diploma. Students are time and place bound due to situations that include family obligations, travel restrictions, health issues, and work responsibilities. Therefore, their educational needs extend beyond the confines of the classroom on college and university campuses. Institutions of higher learning are offering distance education courses via audio, video, and other computer technology as one response to this situation. Collins and Dewees (2001) reported that the range of distance education technologies is wide and include television broadcasts, digital satellite, mailed videotapes, two-way interactive video, telephone, fiber-optic cable and wireless transmission. Kayworth and Koch (1997) asserted that distance learning is one of the “boom” areas in education, and it is expanding so rapidly that it will eventually become the normal mode of instruction.

Given the rate of increase in the number of courses taught in a distance learning format, faculty concerns, attitudes, and perceptions should be considered and addressed. Published research across disciplines that documents the perceptions of the professor in a distance learning platform has been limited. Langford et al. (2000) indicated that there is a lack of research regarding the attitudes and perceptions of business faculty about distance learning. Schifter (1999) maintained that the component of distance education that has received the least attention is the perceptions of faculty teaching the courses. Therefore, a case study that will share the perceptions of the professor teaching a distance learning course is significant because it will add to the current body of knowledge and will partially fill the void in the existing research.

In a comprehensive review of the literature covering the role of faculty of all disciplines in distance learning, Langford et al. (2000) reported that little of the literature
addresses college and university faculty. Two years later, Dillon and Walsh (1992) made the same observation. Langford et al. (2000) in a meta-analysis of distance education journals published by Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) revealed that 24 articles focus on faculty and 13 of the 24 specifically examined faculty attitudes regarding distance learning. Only one of the 13 studies surveyed faculty not already engaged in distance education, and no surveys by discipline were reported.

Without insight from the individuals who facilitate distance learning courses, future success cannot be fully realized. Thus far, student feedback given during course evaluation has been the predominante method of analyzing program/course strengths and weaknesses. For a more thorough evaluation of distance learning programs, it is imperative that faculty perceptions be considered. This study seeks to describe the perceptions of the professor that pertain to the problems, progress, and potential of teaching a synchronous distance learning course for students enrolled in a master’s degree program in elementary education.

**Background**

Administrators at a regional community college (Leaville Community College, pseudonym) contemplated partnering with a major university (Manjae State University, pseudonym) to launch a distance learning program for approximately four years before the first class was taught. The Dean of Community Services listened to concerns from potential education and business students regarding their desire to enroll in distance learning degree programs if they were offered by the college. He submitted a joint
proposal for a graduate elementary education program and business administration program to the president of LCC in early 1999. The president assigned a task force to discuss the proposal and explore the options (telephone conversation with dean, October 23, 2000).

To assess the need of a distance learning program, the dean contacted local school counselors to obtain their input regarding the program. The counselors distributed surveys to teachers and teaching assistants to determine if there was enough interest in a distance learning program to justify further investigation. Counselors served as the liaison between Dean Ezell (pseudonym) and teachers and teaching assistants (telephone conversation with dean, October 23, 2000).

Leaville personnel conducted a survey in the spring of 2000 at area Wal-Mart stores to determine the community’s interest in a joint elementary education master’s program. They also put articles in newspapers in the consortium to make the possibility of the program known to prospective students. According to Ezell, “My phone rang off the hook.” The needs assessment produced positive results with over 60+ inquiries about a graduate elementary education program. Dean Ezell commented that his ultimate goal was to meet the needs of the people in his community. He modestly asserted, “I have been in this business for 40 years.” He noted that people knew him and they just kept inquiring about a distance learning program through Leaville (telephone conversation with dean, October 23, 2000).

After the need was validated, Dean Ezell contacted two institutions of higher learning, one of which was Manjae State University (pseudonym) (MSU), to discuss the
implications. A proposal was requested of both institutions. Of the two institutions contacted, MSU was the only institution to submit a proposal. Dean Ward commented that the proposal from MSU proposal was acceptable, and Leaville was eager to lay the groundwork to begin offering courses the fall semester (August 2000). He added that personnel at MSU were extremely cooperative and very willing to work to get the program started (E. Ward, personal communication, October 23, 2000). Twenty of the 60 students who had expressed interest enrolled in the pilot program for the fall 2000 semester (telephone conversation with dean, October 23, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

A review of the literature indicated that distance learning researchers have neglected to explore the wealth of information that can be gleaned from faculty. The delivery of distance education has great potential that cannot be realized until the needs and concerns of the faculty who will develop the courses are met (Wilson, 1998). Beaudoin (1990) contended that the importance of faculty input is critical to the success of distance learning. According to Dillon and Walsh (1992), the dominant theme of distance learning research has been the learner; research has primarily focused on learning outcomes, learner characteristics, and learner attitudes. Despite the fact that student feedback has immeasurable value, an investigation of perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of distance learning programs from the perspective of the professor would be a valuable contribution to future development.
In *Twelve Important Questions to Answer Before You Offer a Web Based Curriculum*, McAlister (2001) outlined twelve key questions those who are responsible for developing and offering web-based education at academic institutions need to address. These twelve key questions may be useful in determining the capability of a university to offer distance learning classes, but they do not provide opportunities for input by the professors. The lack of documented perceptions of distance learning faculty makes it difficult to define distance learning faculty needs, determine a strategy by which needs can be met, and assess the effectiveness of the implementation. The problem surrounding the omission of faculty perceptions in the literature will remain until adequate research has been conducted, analyzed, and reported. This dissertation will add to the limited body of existing knowledge and should compel others to undertake parallel research efforts.

**Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation investigated the perceptions of problems, progress, and potential held by a professor teaching a synchronous graduate distance learning class for elementary teachers. Insight gained will help to close the gap in the existing body of knowledge that has largely ignored evaluative feedback from professors of distance learning courses. Information obtained from the professor will provide a reference for other distance learning professors. The secondary purposes for the study were to analyze the steps taken to prepare the professor to teach via distance learning and to determine if adequate support was given during the semester in which the class was taught.
Since this pilot distance learning project was launched in the fall of 2000, it is now important that all program components be thoroughly evaluated to determine its effectiveness. The primary purpose for this study was to describe the perceptions held by the professor in teaching a synchronous distance learning course.

**Limitations of the Study**

This single-subject case study was limited to one primary participant, a female professor. A history bias may have limited the study in that data were gathered in the fall semester of 2000 and the analysis was completed in the fall semester of 2003. Results therefore can only be generalized to other professors at other universities with caution and consideration of individual and setting differences.

**Significance of the Study**

The conclusions of this study produced additional information that will add to the limited research in distance learning. Administrators, faculty, and other professionals in higher education concerned with the perceptions by instructors of the problems, progress, and potential of distance learning programs may use the conclusions in this study. Those who consider offering courses via distance for the first time may use the results of this study to determine if the technology available is sophisticated enough to send and retrieve the spoken and written word and if the budget will permit the employment of technicians and assistants. The conclusions also communicated the necessity for faculty training and continued support through release time, mentoring, and conference attendance whereby faculty can interact with others who teach via this medium.
Definition of Terms

Following are specific terms that will be utilized throughout this study:

- **Delivery media.** The medium that connects the instructor to the students and the students to each other.

- **Distance learning/education.** A teaching/learning environment in which the instructor is not required to be in the same location as the students during instructional time. Separation in time and space are defining characteristics of the distance learning setting. Distance learning and distance education will be used interchangeably.

- **Facilitator.** A guest lecturer.

- **Faculty.** Person/s who teach synchronous distance learning classes.

- **Journal.** A record of experiences, ideas, or reflections.

- **Host site students.** Students who were in the classroom on the main campus.

- **Instructional technology.** A field that is both theoretical and applied which seeks to develop and promote effective procedures for design, delivery and evaluation of instruction utilizing traditional methods, media and other technology in a systematic process sensitive to the unique characteristics of the targeted learner(s).

- **Master teacher.** A teacher who has been identified as exhibiting superior performance and expertise.
**Mentor.** A trusted counselor or guide.

**Perception.** The process of using the senses to acquire information about the surrounding environment or situation. Intuitive cognition.

**Professor.** The primary participant. The person who taught the synchronous distance learning class in this case study.

**Remote site students.** Students who were in a classroom away from the main campus.

**Participant.** The person who taught the synchronous distance learning class.

**Synchronous.** Students at the host site and remote site are taught simultaneously (real time) with the use of a two-way interactive system.

**Two-way interactive communication.** A distance learning system which allows the host site and remote site participants (instructor and students) to simultaneously interact visually and audibly. The use of monitors and desktop microphones promote the visual and auditory exchange.

**Withit.** A skill that enables a teacher to know what is happening in the classroom at all times even if he/she appears not to be watching.

**Summary**

The need for distance learning course/program offerings is increasing. Students who desire to continue the learning process are often time and place bound due to the demands of work, family obligations, remoteness of living conditions, or other
constraints. Distance learning has made educational attainment and advancement feasible.

Colleges and universities are steadily encouraging faculty to tread the distance learning waters. Unfortunately, their perspectives have been underresearched and under published in the literature. Without research, faculty feelings, ideas, and opinions about this teaching/learning platform will not be communicated. Chapter One confirms the need for distance learning faculty research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Facilitating learning while separated from the learner by time and/or distance is a mountainous task. Extensive preparation is imperative if faculty are to move from a “sage on the stage” to a “guide on the side.”

Oftentimes, willing faculty teach distance learning classes to tap into waters unknown. They are eager for a new challenge in their careers and feel distance teaching provides the medium by which they can satisfy a professional yearning. Others teach to provide educational and degree attainment to those who could not reach their goal by traditional means.

Professional development is critical to the success of the distance educator and ultimately to the success of the distance education program. In the absence of training, the educator is left in the position of “sink or swim” and thereby will resort to a “fight or flight” attitude. Many educators may seek advice from experienced distance learning colleagues but nothing takes the place of comprehensive training program. The program should begin with a theoretical overview of distance education and include opportunities for the novice to observe other instructors and practice under the guidance of a mentor.
Overall, a faculty development program is needed to enable inexperienced distance instructors an opportunity to gain critical knowledge and skills that will ensure success.

The History/Development of Distance Education

The medium by which distance education courses are administered has evolved. Taylor (1995) identified four generations of instruction that have been used to educate students who were/are not physically in the presence of the instructor/peers (See Appendix A). The first generation, the correspondence model, required the college or university to send printed material to the student. According to Matthews (1999), the inventor of shorthand, Sir Isaac Pitman laid the foundation for distance education. As reported by Phillips (2000) Pitman implemented the idea of having rural learners acquire secretarial skills by translating the Bible into shorthand in 1840. Translations were mailed back to him for grading via the penny postage system. The penny postage system is the first systematic method of charging the sender a flat rate to mail letters. Regardless of the distance, the weight of the letter determined the mailing cost.¹

Taylor (1995) referred to the second generation as the multimedia model. As reported by Romiszowski (1993), the second generation was characterized by the addition of open broadcast by either radio or television. Correspondence instruction and print materials supported deliverance of coursework.

Hinger (2003) referred to the second generation as the teleconferencing generation. He described it as utilizing audio, video, and telephone technologies to

¹ Bath Postal Museum, n.d.
facilitate learning. While audiocassettes, videocassettes, and telephone technologies were beneficial to students, these mediums did not allow for intimate interaction. For example, Hinger noted the difficulty an instructor would have trying to explain a problem via telephone without using written words and numbers.

Taylor (1995) referred to the third generation as the telelearning model. The telelearning medium added electronic mail, computer conferencing, and audiographic teleconferencing which allowed for interaction between students (host and remote sites) separated by distance, as well as the instructor and students separated by distance. described this as the generation that sought to eliminate communication barriers that were prevalent during the first and second generations. According to , audiographic teleconferencing combined computers, teleconference microphones or speaker-telephones and touch sensitive white boards with writer control pads to deliver valuable voice and data communications system. Text and images can be shown simultaneously at many locations, enabling students to interactively discuss and edit the displayed information.

Steinberg (1992) asserted that the fourth phase of development of distance education is based on the integrated use of new developments in telecommunications and computing and is characterized by the integrated use of remote study materials that are supported by computer-based multimedia teleconferencing. Romiszowski (1993) also concluded that integrated multimedia computer technology will provide the platform that will most resemble real-time, interactive instruction.
What is Distance Education?

“Distance education is beset with a remarkable paradox - it has asserted its existence, but it cannot define itself” (Shale, 1988, p. 25). There is no single definition for distance education. As a defining principle, it is physical separation between the teacher-the sender, and the student-the receiver. Shale asserted that the crux of distance education is the “dialectical relationship between teacher and student (Shale, 1988, p. 25). To Shale, “distance,” and the technology which accompanies it, is an incidental consideration and not a “defining criteria” for education.

The Instructional Technology Council (2002) defined distance education as the process of extending learning, or delivering instructional resource-sharing opportunities to locations away from a traditional classroom, building or site, to another classroom, building or site by the use of video, audio, computer, multimedia communications, or some combination of these with other traditional delivery methods. In the book, Foundations of Distance Education, Keegan (1996) listed five criteria as a descriptive definition for distance education:

1. The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process
2. The influence of an educational organization both in planning and preparation of learning material and in the provision of student support services
3. The use of technical media, print, audio, video or computer, to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course
4. The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from or even initiate dialog

5. The quasi-permanent separation of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibilities of occasional meetings of an academic and social nature (page 50)

In Foundations of Distance Education (1996), Keegan refers to his 1980 work by further defining distance education in terms of the following key elements:

- Separation of the teacher and learner (during at least a majority of the instructional process).

- The influence of an educational organization (including the provision of student evaluation).

- The use of educational media to unite teacher and learner (and carry course content).

- The provision of two-way communication (between teacher, tutor, or educational agency and learner) page 44.

Although Keegan (1996) has given the criteria for and key elements of distance education, Grimes (1993) felt the need for a more succinct definition. Grimes defined distance education as taking instruction to the student through technology rather than the student to the instruction.
How is Distance Education Delivered?

As reported by Willis (1993), a wide range of technological options are available to the distance educator. There are three major categories of these options:

1. Instructional audio tools include the interactive technologies of telephone, audioconferencing, and short-wave radio. Passive (i.e., one-way) audio tools include tapes and radio.

2. Instructional video tools include still images such as slides, pre-produced moving images (e.g., film, videotape), and real-time moving images combined with audioconferencing (one-way or two-way video with two-way audio).

3. Computers send and receive information electronically. For this reason, the term "data" is used to describe this broad category of instructional tools.

Computer applications for distance education are varied and include:

- Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) - uses the computer as a self-contained teaching machine to present individual lessons.

- Computer-managed instruction (CMI) - uses the computer to organize instruction and track student records and progress. The instruction itself need not be delivered via a computer, although CAI is often combined with CMI.

- Computer-mediated education (CME) - describes computer applications that facilitate the delivery of instruction. Examples include: electronic mail, fax, real-time computer conferencing, and World-Wide Web applications.

- Print is a foundational element of distance education programs and the basis from which all other delivery systems have evolved. Various print formats
Defining Distance Learning Faculty

Who are they? Whom do they teach?

In higher education, distance learning faculty are male and female full and part-time faculty who teach associate, undergraduate, and graduate courses to students who are physically separated by time and or distance. One research study noted that distance learning faculty are those who have content expertise and either the appropriate skills for teaching at a distance or a strong desire to acquire them (Boaz, Elliott, Foshee, Hardy, Jarmon, and Olcott, 1999). They caution that master teachers in a traditional classroom are not inherently prepared to teach effectively in the absence of face-to-face instruction. Boaz et al. (1999) adds that distance faculty also serve as mentor, coach, facilitator, tutor, resource supplier, and/or referral liaison.

Distance learning faculty who participated in a study conducted by Schifter (1999) were full and part-time faculty. The full-time faculty consisted of assistant and associate professors, and department chairs who were tenured or on a tenure track.

What are their qualifications?

The qualifications for distance learning faculty are determined by the institution providing the service. Two institutions of higher learning in the state of Alabama (University of North Alabama and Troy State University) that offer distance education
publish faculty criteria on the Internet. A visit to the webpage of each institution yielded the qualifications for distance education instructors.

According to the Distance Learning Program Procedures and Policy Manual (2001, Section 4.2) published by University of North Alabama, faculty approved to teach in distance learning programs are selected based on interest, qualifications, and adaptability of course content for distance learning delivery methods. These faculties meet the same criteria as faculty for campus-based courses in the areas of academic credentials, workloads, and accessibility to students.

At Troy State University (on-line no date Retrieved on March 9, 2003), qualifications for undergraduate distance learning faculty are only published on-line and include:

1. Possession of an appropriate master’s degree or earned doctorate from a regionally accredited graduate institution; and
2. Demonstrated excellence and experience in teaching at the undergraduate level, evaluations of teaching, peer/colleague evaluations, student evaluations and/or letters of support regarding the faculty member’s teaching abilities (from chairs, deans, and colleagues). (page 2 of 3)

At Troy State University qualifications for graduate distance learning faculty are only published on-line and include:

1. Possession of an appropriate earned doctorate in the teaching discipline from a regionally accredited graduate institution; and
2. Demonstrated excellence in teaching at the graduate level and/or senior undergraduate level evaluations of teaching, peer/colleague evaluations, student evaluations and/or letters of support regarding the faculty member’s teaching abilities (from chairs, deans, and colleagues); and

3. Evidence of professional involvement and/or service through active participation in state, regional, national, or international professional meetings, membership on professional committees, or by holding office in professional organizations; and

4. Evidence of developed scholarship in the subject-matter field, or continued, noteworthy performance in the creative arts including publication and/or presentation in recognized disciplinary scholarly meetings or comparable activities in the creative arts. (pages 1-2 of 3)

Why do they teach?

Faculty who teach in the absence of face-to-face student contact are no different from those who have face-to-face contact. However, their reasons for teaching distance education courses are varied. Some teach because a significant percentage of the student population cannot commute to campus. Many have taught in a traditional setting and feel the need for a new challenge or renaissance. Others teach because of the insistence and encouragement of administrators.

Like traditional methods of facilitating learning, challenges present themselves in distance teaching. These challenges include insufficient training, lack of administrative
and staff support, and adapting prepared lesson plans to distance classrooms. There is also the challenge of working out the logistics of sending course related materials to remote students, receiving course related materials from remote students, and administering exams. Willis (1993) contended that instructors are able to encourage interpersonal communication between students who are diverse in social, cultural, economic, and experiential backgrounds; to reach a larger population of students; to provide learning experiences for students who are unable to attend on-campus classes; and involve guest speakers who would otherwise be unable to accept an invitation to participate.

The decision for teaching distance education courses can be categorized in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. According to Wolcott and Betts (1999), the top five motivating factors as rated by the faculty participants whom Betts surveyed can all be described as intrinsic. They include: (a) the ability to reach new audiences for those who cannot attend classes on campus, (b) the opportunity to develop new ideas, (c) a personal motivation to use technology, (d) an intellectual challenge, and (e) overall job satisfaction. Betts’ interviews revealed that many faculty members saw distance education as an opportunity for personal and professional growth.

A mid-career faculty member explained this motivation by saying:

“I was personally looking for a new challenge. I was, I don’t want to say, bored with the type of teaching I was doing, but I was ready for something new.” Later she added, “I think maybe a sense of
adventure—that’s probably what led me into [distance teaching] and, you know, I kind of wondered if I could do that.” (pp. 36-37)

Wolcott and Betts (1999) found that faculty members who were willing to embark upon the challenge of teaching at a distance characterized themselves as “early adopters,” “early innovators,” “risk takers,” or adventurous.” Many faculty are intrigued by instructional technology and delivery media, and thereby capitalize on the opportunity to utilize these advances to facilitate learning in synchronous and asynchronous platforms.

Wolcott and Betts (1999) identified monetary compensation, credit toward tenure and promotion, and release time as extrinsic motivators to teaching distance learning classes. These authors cited other incentives which included a reduced teaching load, release time for course development, travel accounts, new computer equipment, graduate assistants, or graders, and a “roving parking sticker.”

Faculty Perceptions of Teaching a Synchronous Class

In the spring of 1994, Emporia State University began offering distance education courses via interactive compressed video. The experiences of three faculty members and the evaluations of one undergraduate and two graduate classes who experienced distance education for the first time were examined.

One undergraduate class (13 students) and graduate classes in education (26 students), and in library and information management (25 students) were taught from the Emporia campus and transmitted to a remote site 100 miles distant. One class was taught from the Emporia campus and transmitted to two sites, one fifty
miles from campus, and the other 100 miles distant. (Clay & Grover, 1995, page 622.)

The study conducted at Emporia State University is significant in that it mirrors the case study conducted for this dissertation. First, the participant in this research study taught a distance course for the first time just as the participants in the report by Clay and Grover (1995) had taught their first distance education course. Second, the number of education students in this study as well as in the reported study was almost equivalent. Lastly, both studies utilized interactive video technology.

**Perception of Problem**

Clay and Grover (1995) attested to the anxiety that novice distance education instructors feel and attributed some of it to the lack of necessary prerequisite instructor preparation. They noted technological problems that included, but were not limited to echoing audio feedback. In the absence of high tech computer equipment, printed course materials must be delivered to the remote site. They added that a feeling of isolation and frustration was likely due to the many visual and auditory cues that could not be captured by the technology. Wait time was significantly longer in distance education courses when compared to wait time in traditional classes. Instead of waiting 3-5 seconds, the instructor on TV must wait 5-10 seconds or longer. Consequently, it took longer to cover course content in distance education classrooms. As perceived by some instructors, distance teaching has some disadvantages. Instructor complaints included the vast amount of advance preparation required, poor audio transmission quality from the remote
classroom, lack of training, and the perception of being inadequately compensated (Barrett et al. 1995, p.17).

Joan Whitworth (1999) conducted a case study to chronicle the experiences of an instructor and her students as they embarked upon teaching and learning in a synchronous distance education course for the first time. The host institution, Morehead State University, services the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky. The instructor, Dr. Friend (pseudonym), was an assistance professor who had taught a graduate level science education course at the university for two years. According to Dr. Friend's journal, which documented her impressions of the distance learning course, the following areas of concern were expressed (Whitworth, 1999):

- A sense of removal from the remote site students existed
- The technological equipment created a physical barrier
- At the beginning of the semester there was some difficulty operating the technology
- Traveling to the site was time consuming and expensive
- Visiting the remote site diminished the rapport between the teacher and the students at the host site
- There had to be a conscience effort made to give additional wait time for students to respond to questions
- More time was required to complete tasks
- When scheduled class time concluded, transmission ceased
- Special provisions had to be made to send materials to the remote site
Promise and Potential

Although distance education presents problems, its promise and potential are unlimited. To help eliminate problems, Clay and Grover (1995) were not remiss in including valuable suggestions to help the distance learning educator prepare for class sessions and facilitate more effective televised interactive instruction. Clay and Grover’s suggestions are as follows:

- Begin preparing the semester preceding the offering of the televised course.
- Participate in a workshop to experience teleteaching from both the instructor’s and student’s perspective.
- Prepare handouts to accompany transparencies so that students can better concentrate on the lesson instead of frantically taking notes. They add that presentation software packages provide for the production of reduced size handouts which duplicate the visuals students see on the televised screen.
- Limit televised visuals to no more than five lines of print with no more than five or six words per line. Recommended presentation software packages were PowerPoint, WordPerfect Presentation, Harvard Graphics, and Lotus Freelance. (page 623)

Summers (2003) the first Ph.D. faculty at Ball State to teach a distance education course, emphasized that communication with distance learning students is one of the most important facets of creating a successful class experience. She specifically addresses the importance of timely feedback on course assignments. Rekkedal (1983)
cautions the instructor to consider his or her own schedule in assigning dates for course assignments so that grading can be completed quickly and papers returned to students within a week. According to Summers, E-mail, phone-in office hours, the Internet, and the FAX machine can all assist the instructor in communicating with off-campus students. All relevant phone numbers and addresses should be included on the course syllabus. She recommended allowing some time at the end of each class session in order to allow for greater instructor-student communication with the off-campus students. Summers also contended that support from the technical staff is priceless. When all share the mountainous task of providing a quality education for students, success is inevitable.

Summers (2003) recognized the importance of breaking the monotony of lecturing during instructional time. Consequently, she punctuated a lecture by engaging the students in a situation to analyze via overhead transparency notes. Unfortunately, on one occasion, she included too much narrative on a slide that was projected via the television screen. Through trial and error she discovered that the same experience could be successful at the remote site if the teaching aids were prepackaged and delivered to the students. This adaptation could allow for follow up discussions to check student understanding for both campus and remote groups. Furthermore, Summers’ experience taught her to require that self-addressed stamped envelopes be sent in with course requirements that had to be returned, to consider take-home or other alternatives for administering a final exam, and to explore ways to be more flexible about time scheduling.
Professional Development and Support for Faculty
(Before, During, and After Distance Teaching)

Training Opportunities for Faculty

The National Center for Educational Statistics (1997) surveyed institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995 to determine whether training opportunities for faculty teaching distance education courses were available and whether they were required. The conclusions revealed training opportunities were generally available, but not required of faculty teaching distance education courses at about 60 percent of the institutions (see Appendix B).

Stages of Faculty Development

According to Cyrs (1997), academic administrators are overjoyed when distance courses are offered. They make sure the physical facilities are equipped with state-of-the-art technology, but fail to provide and require the training that faculty need to be successful in the classroom. Cyrs added that it is incumbent on postsecondary administrators to provide necessary support and training for instructors who will teach through any delivery technology.

As reported by Willis (1992), the tenure of faculty development programs can vary but all should provide the instructor with a procedure and framework for planning, developing, and adapting instruction based on identifiable learner needs and content requirements. Independently, Clay (1999) and Willis (1992) have developed four-stage training models for novice distance education faculty. Both models are sequential
processes that seek to transform a beginner to an effective, experienced distance learning educator. Clay’s model is described in Table 1 and Willis’ model is described in Table 2.

Table 1  Stages of Distance Faculty Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Stage</th>
<th>Faculty Concerns</th>
<th>Faculty Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>• how distance courses are offered</td>
<td>• general information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• why distance courses are offered</td>
<td>• opportunity to separate fact from fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how distance program relates to university mission</td>
<td>• opportunity to ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consideration</td>
<td>• quality of distance instruction</td>
<td>• consultation with experienced distance faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• drawbacks and benefits of distance teaching</td>
<td>• published research and articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• availability of assistance</td>
<td>• opportunity for hands-on practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>• time</td>
<td>• coaching from other faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• course design</td>
<td>• one-on-one intensive training and course development support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• student interaction</td>
<td>• incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• quality standards</td>
<td>• job-imbedded opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>• improvement</td>
<td>• opportunities to assist and mentor others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• contribution</td>
<td>• recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• recognition</td>
<td>• ongoing training and follow-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Illustrates the four stages of faculty development for distance educators and the corresponding concerns and needs. From “Development of Training and Support Programs for Distance Education Instructors,” by Clay, M., Fall 1999, Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 2(3).
Table 2  Distance Learning Faculty Development Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Stage</th>
<th>Faculty Concerns</th>
<th>Faculty Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>• define problem or need</td>
<td>• general information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• understand audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• identify goals and objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>• content outline</td>
<td>• understand Conceptual framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• audience analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• instructional goals and objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• course content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• relevant examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• instructional materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>• formative and summative data collection</td>
<td>• feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• quantitative and qualitative data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision</td>
<td>• improvement</td>
<td>• training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• collaboration</td>
<td>• feedback from evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• constructive criticism from stakeholders</td>
<td>• constructive criticism from stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first stage of both models, faculty become familiar with the concept of teaching courses in the absence of the learner. This familiarity can be a result of peer collaboration as well as through direct contact with the potential students. As this can be considered the information gathering phase, Clay (1999) reported that faculty gain general information through workshops, printed material, or by dialoguing with practicing distance education faculty. These venues provide clear, concise background information about distance learning.
During Clay’s (1999) second stage, instructors typically decide if they are suited to teach through distance learning. Willis’ (1992) second stage moves the instructor on to tailoring process and content to the course objective and to the distant learners. During Clay’s third stage, specific instructions as to how to administer tests, how to develop emergency plans in case of technological difficulty, and how much assistance they can receive are given. In essence, training in this stage helps teachers feel more comfortable teaching distance courses. Willis’ third stage utilizes formative and summative evaluations to assess students’ perceptions of course goals and objectives. Quantitative and qualitative methods are used to collect data.

In general, in the fourth stage of each model, instructors have gained competence and confidence in teaching distance courses but will still require some ongoing training. According to Clay (1999), many instructors will go on to mentor the novice, assist in training other faculty, or conduct research.

Clay (1999) and Willis’ (1992) distance learning faculty development models are phenomenal. Both are practical guidelines for preparing faculty to meet the needs of learners who are physically separated in time and/or distance. These models will be instrumental in determining if the participant in this case study was reasonably prepared to teach a distance learning course. They will also provide a basis for assessing follow-up professional development in terms of utilizing course evaluations as means to reflectively think for progress and make curricular revisions for subsequent courses that will be taught.
Types of Effective Training for Distance Instructors

Whether in a group or individualized self-paced setting, teacher training is the foundation for successful distance learning course delivery. Willis and Touchstone (1996) indicated that to be successful in distance education, faculty should have training before their initial teaching experience. As reported by Clay (1999) an ideal training program will include opportunities for at least four of the following types of training: (a) group sessions; (b) one-on-one lab sessions; (c) web-based tutorials; (d) printed materials; (e) listservs; (f) mentorships; (g) monthly discussion sessions among peers; and (h) observation of other distance courses.

Clay (1999) added that of all the aforementioned methods, one-on-one training is probably the most effective for most instructors in that it enables them to progress at their own pace while giving them a feeling of dedicated support. However, institutions would probably restrict it to those instructors who have a strong desire to teach via distance due to the cost that would be incurred.
Competence and Support Needed to Facilitate Distance Learning Courses

John Donne (1572-1631), “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main...” (Norton Anthology of English Literature, 1962, p.1107). Many who teach distance learning courses need emotional and physical support from administrators, other faculty, and staff. Recognition, collaboration with consultants, coaching from experienced colleagues, and staff support is often needed to facilitate a distance learning course.

As reported by Cyrs (1997) there are a number of competencies that relate to teaching at a distance, especially on interactive TV, both live and taped. Thach and Murphy (1995) surveyed approximately 100 distance education experts to identify roles and competencies of distance education professionals within the United States and Canada. Those surveyed agreed that the necessary competencies include, but are not limited to questioning skills, presentation skills, feedback skills, interpersonal communication, instructional design, and facilitation and group process skills. The research results produced a competency model for the development of training and certification programs for distance education faculty.

Rockwell, Shauer, Fritz, and Marx (2000) conducted a study in two colleges in one mid-west, land-grant university that expressed interest in exploring distance learning to identify faculty perceptions of the type of education, assistance, and support needed to deliver education via distance. In addition, the study identified differences in the way education, assistance, and support are viewed by:
(a) teaching faculty and administrators; (b) teaching faculty who have taught or are teaching via distance, expecting to teach via distance in the next three to five years, and never expecting to teach via distance; (c) faculty who have taught 10 years or less, 11 to 20 years, and more than 20 years; (d) tenured and non-tenured faculty; and (e) faculty teaching only undergraduate classes and those teaching only graduate classes.

To these researchers, there is a direct relationship between successful distance educators and higher education institutions who take into account the wants, needs, interests, and aspirations of the faculty so they can help them develop distance learning educational models and techniques.

Upon data analysis, Rockwell et al (2000) found that overall, faculty felt it was very important to obtain further education about, assistance with, or support for (a) developing interaction, (b) developing instructional materials, and (c) applying selected technologies. They also felt it was very important to have assistance with ‘marketing a course’. Personal incentives, such as increase in pay, were comparatively not as important as support issues.

Regardless of the degree, support can be a motivator for faculty considering distance teaching. Clay (1999) asserted that depending on the resources available and the size of the distance staff, support services may include a student assistant, uploading of course materials, creation of online quizzes, development of graphics, test proctoring, and much more. Clay (1999) contended that although these services are critical to a beginning distance instructor, most institutions do not have the resources available to
provide an endless array of support services for an infinite amount of time. The adage, "experience is the best teacher," can be a rationale for institutions that terminate support given to novice distance learning instructors after a designated period of time. Although support (directly or indirectly) should be endless for a distance teacher, limiting a time frame in which assistance is given compels the beginner to become more efficient and effective in his/her facilitation of distance courses.

**Summary**

Distance learning, the process of providing an education for students who chose to undertake learning in the absence of faculty, is no longer the wave of the future, but is the trend of the present. The medium by which courses are facilitated has evolved. Initially, faculty who taught distance courses were required to send printed material to the student by way of the postal service. As technology advanced, audio and video components were added to include cassette tapes, videotapes, and telephone conferencing. In more recent years, computer applications have been instrumental in delivering instruction. The World Wide Web, email, real-time computer conferencing, and two-way interactive communication have made the distance learning curriculum much like a traditional setting.

Issues in distance teaching include, but are not limited to, the lack of training distance educators have prior to offering a distance education course, the support given during the term in which a course is taught, follow-up training and support after the term in which a course is taught, distribution and collection of course assignments, delayed
response time, and separation anxiety between host and remote students and remote students and the instructor. Although there are issues of concern in distance teaching and learning, the benefits have enough merit to warrant continued course and program offerings.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Research Questions and Protocol

Qualitative research methods for this single-subject case study were used. The study communicated the perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential that surround teaching a synchronous graduate distance learning class for elementary school teachers as perceived by the professor (see Table 3).

Table 3 Research Questions and Protocols

**Question One:** What are the professor’s perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class?

**Protocol**

- Beginning class
- Communication between host and remote site students
- Communication between instructor and students at the host and remote sites
- Detecting and interpreting nonverbal cues
- Ending class
- Initial feelings
- Humor
- Feedback/Notations
- Technology
- Demeanor
- Questioning and responding to questions
- Physical environment
- Keeping students on task and motivated
Table 3 cont. Research Questions and Protocols

**Question Two**: What are the needs of distance learning faculty?

**Protocol**

- Administrative support
- Logistics of teaching and distributing materials
- Secretarial support
- Technological support
- Training

**Design of the Study**

According to Yin (1994), the single-case study is appropriate because it represents a unique case. This qualitative study utilized intensive study of a single case, the professor, who taught one of the first two distance learning courses offered in the school of education. This case is unique in that the participant, the professor, was also the department head of curriculum and instruction. The study is also unique in that it was the only opportunity the department had to document initial faculty perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of a distance learning course the first time it was taught. Knowledge gained from the professor about the first course is vital to the future success of the program.

**Participants**

The primary participant, Dr. Nancy Johnson (pseudonym), is the Department Head and Professor of Education at Manjae State University. Dr. Johnson is a native Alabamian. She was educated in the Macon school system. She always knew she
wanted to teach children. At age 17, she read *Christy*, by Catherine Marshall. After reading the literary piece, her career choice was confirmed.

Secondary participants were graduate level education majors who were enrolled in a required Seminar in Elementary Education during the fall semester of 2000 on Tuesday evening from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Two groups of students concurrently took the course: one group attended class at the host site; the other group was a cohort who attended class at the remote site. There were 12 host site students and 16 remote site students. The remote students took 10 predetermined courses to fulfill the requirements for a master’s degree. The diversity of the students included but was not limited to age, race, religion, gender, and marital status.

**Instrumentation**

Copious notes were taken as the researcher, the instrument, observed the participant, the professor, during class meetings. According to Patton (1990), the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry and the qualitative report must include information about the researcher. The instrument in this study was a female doctoral candidate who has teaching experience on the elementary level and in higher education. The researcher taught third grade in a public school system and currently is an assistant professor at a university. Qualitative research and research design were courses that the researcher had taken prior to this study. These courses provided the knowledge base that the researcher needed to conduct qualitative research. The researcher sat in the back of
the classroom during class sessions and used all senses to make observational notes while the participant facilitated class sessions.

According to Ratcliff (2003) those reading the report need to know about the instrument, so the researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, biases, assumptions, expectations, and relevant history. The researcher in this study had no prior experience with distance education. Therefore, few biases, expectations, or preconceived ideas of teaching protocol existed.

Dr. Johnson maintained a journal during the semester in which the class was taught. She logged entries that reflected her feelings about teaching via distance learning after each class meeting. She also made notations about the progress, problems, and potential of teaching a synchronous distance learning class as they came to mind on any given day at any given time. No parameters for journal entries were defined, as this case study sought to examine the professor’s perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class.

**Materials**

Fenderson Hall (pseudonym), Room 244, the meeting place for the host site, was equipped with 32 stations, 12 tabletop microphones, 1 ELMO, 4 TV monitors, 2 cameras, and an AMX screen. Stephens Hall (pseudonym), Room 154, the meeting place for the remote site, was equipped with 24 stations, 10 tabletop microphones, 1 ELMO, 4 TV monitors, 2 cameras, and an AMX screen.
The researcher used an ink pen and a composition book to make observational notes during class meetings. Videotapes of class meetings were viewed as necessary to confirm or clarify observational notes. A tape recorder was used to record three interviews with Dr. Johnson.

Data Collection

Primary data collection took place seven times in the scheduled classroom and one time at an area restaurant during the fall 2000 semester as Seminar in Elementary Education was taught. During this period, the researcher observed the professor and took field notes during nine class meetings. After class was dismissed the researcher and participant had informal conversations in the classroom and/or via telephone. The participant initiated a call after class to the researcher via cellular telephone during the 45-minute drive to her home seven times during the semester. This conversation provided another opportunity for the researcher to take additional notes about the participant’s perceptions of teaching a course via distance.

The participant maintained a journal during the duration of the semester in which the class is taught. Her perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of the distance learning class/program were documented.

According to Patton (1990), triangulation is the process by which a researcher looks at a problem or hypothesis through more than one set of lenses. Multiple methods of data collection (triangulation) included structured interviews, unstructured interviews, narrative analysis, document analysis, direct observation, viewing of archival videotapes
of class meetings, and the participant’s journal. The various methods of data collection strengthened the conclusions and helped to establish construct validity.

Yin (1994) asserted that the most important advantage of using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines. Converging lines are the paths from each data source that lead to the phenomenon to be studied. Yin added that research conclusions will be strengthened and results will be more convincing when multiple sources of evidence are used.

**Procedures**

During the fall semester of 2000, Seminar in Elementary Education was taught simultaneously to students at Manjae State University, the host site, in a traditional classroom and to students at Leaville Community College, the remote site, via distance learning. The course was required for both groups of students' program of study for a master's degree in elementary education.

The researcher observed the professor in the host site classroom nine class sessions during the fall 2000 semester. Observational notes detailed what Dr. Johnson said and did as each class session was facilitated. Documentation included the (a) teacher-student interaction, (b) teacher’s attentiveness to host site vs. remote site students, (c) teacher’s enthusiasm, (d) teachers’ commitment to the program to ensure that it is successful, (e) teacher’s ability to hold students’ interest during class time, (f) teacher’s ability to encourage and motivate, (g) teacher’s willingness to adjust the course format
(materials, assignments, due dates, etc.) as necessary, and (h) teacher’s intuition (ability to recognize nonverbal cues of understanding, confusion, frustration, etc.).

After the class was dismissed, the participant and the researcher remained in the classroom to discuss the perceived strengths and weaknesses of that night’s class meeting. As necessary, the two had an additional telephone conversation as the participant drove home.

**Data Analysis**

Observational notes, face-to-face and telephone conversations with the instructor, the professor’s journal entries, interviews with the professor, the course syllabus, and videotaped class meetings were used to analyze this case study, all of which strengthened triangulation. The researcher read all pieces of data sources to “see” the full picture of this case study. A matrix was developed on butcher paper to determine themes that emerge. When information became redundant from the data sources, the researcher made conclusions about the professor’s perceptions of the problems, progress and potential of teaching a distance learning class, and the program as a whole. Specific suggestions for improvement will be given to the School of Education at Manjae State University and suggestions for institutions who desire to offer courses via distance learning will be noted in Chapter 5.

**Summary**

This qualitative case study explored issues that are important to consider before, during, and after a novice teaches a synchronous distance learning course. Although the
perceptions are based solely on one person’s opinion, knowledge gained will add to the limited body of published works that convey the professor’s insight of teaching a distance learning course.

Actions that will be employed to collect and analyze the data are outlined in this chapter. The description of the procedures, data collection, and data analysis components of Chapter Three will serve as a guide for further research.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Summary

I conducted a descriptive case study to investigate the perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential that surround teaching a synchronous graduate distance learning class for elementary school teachers in a southern state as perceived by Dr. Johnson. I observed Dr. Johnson during nine of the 14 scheduled classes during the fall 2000 semester. The host class met in Room 244 of Fenderson Hall on the campus of Manjae State University. The remote group met in Room 154 of Stephens Hall on the campus of Leaville Community College. I took notes during each class Dr. Johnson facilitated. I used all senses to document only what was observed as the synchronous class was taught. Observational notes included, but were not limited to the following: (a) professor-student interaction, (b) professor’s attentiveness to host site vs. remote site students, (c) professor’s enthusiasm, (d) professor’s commitment to the program to ensure that it is successful, (e) professor’s ability to hold students’ interest during class time, (f) professor’s ability to encourage and motivate, (g) professor’s willingness to adjust the course format (materials, assignments, due dates, etc.) as necessary, and (h) professor’s intuition (ability to recognize nonverbal cues of understanding, confusion, frustration, etc.).
After the class was dismissed, Dr. Johnson and I remained in the classroom to discuss the perceived strengths and weaknesses of that night’s class meeting. We also had an additional telephone conversation as Dr. Johnson drove the 45-minutes to her home.

Distance learning had not been offered in the department prior to fall 2000. As this was a pilot program, there was a need for an analysis for this distance learning course. This dissertation is one of a three-strand study whereby two other doctoral students are documenting the perceptions of students at the host and remote sites and I am studying the professor (Carter, D., host site, dissertation in progress; Reed, J., remote site, 2003). Analysis serves to inform the department of the perceived problems, progress, and potential made in one of the first two distance courses offered fall 2000 from the viewpoint of the professor. As this course was the catalyst for all other distance learning course offerings in this department, it may be instrumental in guiding faculty who will teach a course by distance in the future.

The study related to published literature on distance learning in that it extends present knowledge. Documented studies have neglected to research and report the perceptions of faculty who encounter the day-to-day successes and failures as they teach two groups of students who are separated by distance. Therefore, the practicality of this case study research is evident. The potential contribution to basic research and practice abounds. It may serve as a frame of reference for not only Manjae State University but for any institution of higher learning whose goal is to make learning attainable for students who are unable to commute to the host site.
This chapter provides an abbreviated biography of Dr. Johnson. The conclusions reflect data recorded in a matrix that parallels the research questions and protocols. Observational notes, which I reported, were taken during class meetings in the distance learning classroom at MSU, at LCC, and at Ward’s restaurant.

The problems that surround teaching a distance learning class will be outlined and possible solutions will be offered in light of the perceptions of the professor being studied. Dr. Johnson’s journal and interviews will serve as a data sources to confirm what I documented in field notes. Thereby, triangulation will be strengthened.

Nancy Johnson, the participant, taught school for 10 years: junior high, band/music, and kindergarten. She completed her doctorate in 1986 at Manjae State University and joined the Department of Curriculum & Instruction that year as Director of the Early Childhood Education Center/Grant-In-Aid Project on the MSU campus. In 1988, Dr. Johnson was hired as Assistant Professor in the Department of C&I and taught early childhood and elementary school courses to elementary majors in the College of Education. She was appointed Associate Professor in 1992 and Professor in 1996. After teaching in the department for eleven years, she was hired as the Department Head for C&I and is currently in that position. In addition to her service to Manjae State University, Dr. Johnson has also served as President of the Early Childhood Association in the state, as consultant to the Southern Early Childhood Association, and as consultant to the Department of Education in the state.
Questions to Explore

Question One

What are the professor’s perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class?

Beginning Class

Researcher’s Comments

Dr. Johnson began each class session on a positive or humorous note. On November 3, 2000, Dr. Johnson told the class that she had kept her grandchildren over the weekend. She shared that she was so tired Monday she could not come to work.

Throughout the semester, Dr. Johnson designated different students to play the role of “teacher assistant” at the remote site. Another pair of eyes and ears helped to keep the class on-task.

Participant’s Perceptions

Dr. Johnson believed that each class should begin on a friendly note. She felt that giving students an opportunity to share what had happened in their personal and professional lives since the last class meeting helped to create a trusting, relaxed atmosphere in which learning could take place. However, off-task chatter diminished instructional time. She indicated that icebreaker sharing was “both good and bad.” Dr. Johnson asked other questions such as, “how is everyone and did you think about the topics of discussion from the last class as you went about your work”? She experienced
some discontent because the students did not always respond as she desired. She remarked, “Some nights they talk, and some nights they just look at me.”

Dr. Johnson believed that answering questions about the course objectives and assignments at the beginning of class were appropriate. However, she felt that some questions were valid but there were times that she perceived questions from students as just “worry talk.” Valid or not, all questions were answered.

Dr. Johnson realized that at the beginning of class or at any time during class she needed to call each student by his/her name to encourage participation. She sensed that the remote group was more hesitant to share how their feelings and thoughts. They were more reserved than the host group when students were at liberty to “jump out there and answer a question.” Dr. Johnson believed the remote group felt their answers would be deficient. Therefore, she struggled to make the remote group feel as secure as the on campus bunch.

Discussion

The first few moments of class are important because they generally set the tone for the class period. Dr. Johnson used the first few minutes of each class period to communicate her expectations as well as make students feel valued. She realized that the success of the class rested on her shoulders and ultimately, the success of the program was in part dependent on the success of this class, one of the first two offered in the pilot project.
Communication Between Host and Remote Site Students

Researcher’s Comments

Communication between host and remote site students gradually increased as the semester progressed. There was more dialogue between the two groups with each class meeting. The discussions of their likes and dislikes about the class seemed to connect them more than anything. Dr. Johnson primarily encouraged interaction by having students share in whole-class discussions after a peer discussion at the individual site. There were technicians at both sites but they mainly operated the technological equipment.

Dr. Johnson honored a student’s request that the two groups have class together. Once during the semester, the two groups of students met at a restaurant in Lamar County (pseudonym) for class. The Leaville students were already seated when the MSU students arrived. Dr. Johnson asked host and remote site students to sit alternately (one MSU student and one Leaville student, one MSU student and one Leaville student, etc.) so they could get to know each other. The students made positive comments about the joint meeting and suggested that in the future, the host and remote site students meet earlier in the semester and more often.

Students at both sites indicated that they were overwhelmed with the course requirements. They were particularly frustrated with the reading assignment. Dr. Johnson allowed the two groups to vent together. A student at the host site commented to the students at the remote site that she was just as confused as they were.
Dr. Johnson encouraged communication between the host and remote site students during class meetings. When host and remote students were separated, she insisted on dialogue via technology. Dr. Johnson videotaped the class meeting.

**Participants Perception**

Dr. Johnson realized that she would have to make a concerted effort to “pull everyone (students from both campuses) into the conversation.” She worried that the remote site students were not connecting with her and the host site students. She perceived that the remote site students believed that they were not as equipped as the host site students and that the host site including her would have to help them overcome those feelings.

Both groups of students were allowed to share their insecurities about the program and the assignments. Dr. Johnson commented that they “started to open up and be one.” She felt that by allowing them time to vent as a whole class they would be encouraged to unify themselves.

During the fourth class meeting, Dr. Johnson’s class agenda included having students introduce themselves. As a part of the introduction, each student was required to share what they taught, their worries that revolved around their respective classroom and school, and what kept them going. She attempted to build the community by having the host and remote site students interact. She thought that this would help the remote students realize that they were more like the host students than they were different.
Dr. Johnson was always excited when there was interaction between the two campuses. She believed that this interaction was because the groups were becoming more comfortable with each other, the technology, and with the concept of being educated in a synchronous distance learning setting.

Dr. Johnson was excited about the two groups of students meeting at Ward’s restaurant (pseudonym) in Lamar County (pseudonym). She felt that the students enjoyed visiting with each other. She noted that the students seemed timid at first. To relieve the tension, she said, “I made them move so that every Manjae State (host site) student was sitting beside someone from Leaville (remote site).” She then grouped the students and assigned questions for each group to discuss. She felt as though this would “force” the groups to interact. She had a strong perception that both groups of students loved the interaction and their repeated comment, “We wish we had done a face to face meeting earlier in the semester,” confirmed her feelings.

Discussion

Willis (1993) realized the advantages of interpersonal communication between students who are diverse in social, cultural, economic, and experiential backgrounds. Distance learning provides the avenue for such interaction. Dr. Johnson was concerned about the interaction between the diverse host and remote site students during the entire semester. The MSU students included some experienced teachers, some beginning teachers, and some students right out of college. The Leaville students were all teaching in the public school system. She made many attempts to foster a sense of community and
to encourage interaction between the two groups even at the expense of end of course faculty/course evaluations.

Keegan (1996) echoed the same sentiments about interpersonal communication as Willis (1993) but minimizes its importance to include occasional meetings of an academic and social nature. Of all class activities, the face-to-face meeting at the restaurant in Lamar seemed most beneficial. Not only did the students enjoy the interaction, but the professor enjoyed the camaraderie as well.

**Communication Between Instructor and Students at the Host and Remote Sites**

*Researcher’s Comments*

Although the two classes were supposed to be one class there was sometimes a sense of “us and them” in the minds of the students. Therefore, the instructor had to interact with both groups simultaneously to prevent jealousy. The instructor had to communicate expectations clearly, keep students on-task, and compel them to conduct themselves as professionals. At times when both groups of students independently discussed a question or completed a task that required dialogue, the instructor had to prompt students to begin the discussion and firmly prompt students to end the discussion so that whole-class sharing could commence.

Dr. Johnson asked both groups what caused them to feel overwhelmed. Both groups said they were overwhelmed by course requirements. A Manjae State student told the students at Leaville that she was just as confused as they were. The reading assignment was particularly causing stress. Some commented that they could not find
articles that pertained to class discussions. Students suggested that Dr. Johnson assign two articles and students could read one article of their choice.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson sensed early in the semester that neither group of students was adjusting well to sharing the professor. She felt that when she talked with the remote site students, the host site students felt neglected, and vice versa. She believed that students at both sites felt uninvolved and isolated when someone from their respective group was not speaking or being spoken to. Dr. Johnson said, “Already, after one class, I sense the jealous sibling. Having students at two sites is a lot like having competitive daughters who want all your attention all the time.”

Initially, Dr. Johnson expressed concern that upon posing a question to the remote site, no one would respond. She deliberately began working harder to learn every student’s name so she could shorten time wasted after asking a question. Dr. Johnson believed the technological delay contributed to the problem but felt the students could have responded to her questions in a timelier manner. She added that the students would look at each other waiting to see who would take the plunge to press the button and reply.

Dr. Johnson opened the door for students to express their feelings about the program as well as the class several times during the semester. She desperately wanted the students to have confidence in her ability to work through the technical difficulties and make the class palatable for all. She made certain they understood that they were in graduate school and with that came sacrifice and hard work. She tried to push them hard
enough so they would realize the commitment they had made but not hard enough to make them withdraw from the course or from the program. She expressed that finding a balance between the two was a constant battle.

Dr. Johnson taught class from the remote site once during the semester. She felt it was imperative that she “walked a mile in their shoes.” The visit was proof that she wanted to give the students a demonstration of personal involvement. She wanted them to somehow reach a comfort zone and begin to trust her as the teacher but also as the facilitator of the pilot program.

Dr. Johnson asked the remote site group to remain seated after she dismissed the host site students. She wanted them to convey their feelings about the class, the program, and the next cohort. The group said they felt overwhelmed because of their day jobs. This cohort was required to take a course on Monday night and a course on Tuesday night. Dr. Johnson acknowledged that taking two evening courses was demanding. The students made recommendations for the next cohort and discussed their summer 2001 course load.

**Discussion**

The researcher’s field notes as well as the professor’s journal indicate that the professor made a concerted effort to listen to the remote site students’ concerns. Although she communicated with and was open to discuss the issues that both groups had, she seemed to have been more cognizant of the needs of the remote site students.
She was always concerned about their mindset. She worked hard to make sure they felt comfortable with the class.

The host and remote site students should have felt that they were unified. There should not have been a need to compete for attention from the professor. However, the professor in the case study perceived that the two classes felt disjointed. The conclusions in the case study conducted by Whitworth (1999) coincided with this case study. The professor that Whitworth studied noted in a journal that visiting the remote site diminished the rapport between the teacher and the students at the host site. Dr. Johnson tried all semester to make both groups feel as though they were equally valued. Her journal reflected that although the remote site students at LCC felt as though they were removed and not as capable academically, in actuality they produced higher quality work than their host site peers on the campus of MSU. Dr. Johnson perceived that some of their motivation to produce higher quality work was they felt they had to prove to themselves and to her that they were as capable as students on the MSU campus.

Detecting and Interpreting Nonverbal Cues/Awareness of Needs

Researcher’s Comments

The instructor’s ability to detect and interpret nonverbal cues is imperative when teaching two classes that are separated by distance. In this class, body language that communicated what the spoken word did not included a student who supported her head with her hand, tired looks, frustrated facial expressions, and folded arms. Immediately upon detecting nonverbal cues, Dr. Johnson addressed the issue with the student or
students. For example, a remote site student supported her head with her hands as Dr. Johnson told the students at both sites that she expected each student to read three articles between class meetings so they would be prepared for class. She told them that she wanted the pilot program to work but the requirements would not be “watered down.” She asked students to communicate their feelings. Their responses were elicited in order to help them understand the course requirements, reflect on their professionalism, and to prepare them for similar situations in their own classrooms.

Throughout the semester, students seemed agitated about the workload. The majority of the students had careers in the teaching profession and worked full time. This cohort was required to take a class on Monday night and this class on Tuesday night. They felt they did not have enough time to prepare for both classes. There were times that Dr. Johnson honored requests to reschedule due dates for assignments.

During the last class meeting, Dr. Johnson was still trying to get both groups of students to feel as one. She commented to the remote site students that the host site group looked “like they had had it.” She asked them if they felt the same way. The remote site students concurred.

With many years of teaching experience, Dr. Johnson knew the value of eye contact and dialogue in the teaching/learning environment. She constantly reminded students to use the microphone when they had something to contribute to the class discussion. On one occasion, she specifically asked a host site student who was peer teaching to maintain eye contact with the remote group. Guest presenters were periodically invited to share their expertise on educational topics with the class. One
night Dr. Johnson said, “Leaville, could ya’ll hear her.” The students acknowledged that they missed the comment. Dr. Johnson then said to the guest presenter, “Annie, one more time, and pull the speaker close to you. You have something to share.”

**Participant’s Perceptions**

As guest presenter, Annie (pseudonym), expounded on the topic of the evening, Dr. Johnson noticed that the students were not taking notes and perceived that the looks on their faces indicated that they were not quite following. Dr. Johnson wrote, “I find that I am constantly reading their faces and body signals and watching for nonverbal cues.” I ask myself, “Are they listening? Are they cold? Are they feeling ignored? Tonight it was really clear that the Leaville group was absolutely freezing. That's frustrating for me because I'm in Manjae and have no control of that room at Leaville.” Dr. Johnson offered a quick fix and that was come to class prepared with extra clothing. As a rule of thumb, she said, “We all have to do that anyway.”

Dr. Johnson believed that she needed to find a better way for someone at the remote site to be "in charge." She knew that she needed a person who would watch for indicators like she did, take control, and do something to correct issues as they arose. For example, she felt the student in charge could call maintenance if he/she noticed cold classmates.

**Discussion**

Nonverbal cues from students can be positive or negative in the college classroom. They indicate frustration as well as excitement about the learning process.
Dr. Johnson was able to detect and interpret body language throughout the semester. Upon noticing signs of discontent, she attempted to understand the problems and offer solutions. At times, the solution was not what the students wanted to hear, but Dr. Johnson felt as though she was preparing them for life as well as for the classroom. The nonverbal positive cues helped to make class meetings enjoyable. In her second journal entry, Dr. Johnson wrote, “I can tell the students are proud to be in a distance class.” During an interview, Dr. Johnson clarified that she was confident that students were overjoyed to be in the distance class because they said they were “excited” to be in the first distance learning cohort group at Manjae State University. They felt as though they were in a sense, making history.

**Physical Environment**

*Researcher’s Comments*

Folded arms were an indication that the temperature was too low for some students. Dr. Johnson advised the students to dress in layers or bring additional clothing in during subsequent class meetings.

Dr. Johnson noticed that a Leaville student had a black notebook in an upright position on the table. During a break, Dr. Johnson asked Vernon to go over and check it out.

Dr. Johnson normally sat at the back table but sat at the second table on October 3, 2000. She reminded students to continue to introduce themselves before they began teaching. She told them to share where they taught, how long they had taught, what they
taught, and what kept them teaching. The introductions were just another way to get students acquainted and comfortable with each other.

As one of the host students peer taught, Dr. Johnson was concerned that the remote students could not see the handout. She walked to the back of the room, walked back to the front of the room, and refocused the projector.

Participant’s Perceptions

Dr. Johnson felt he students were cold just by looking at them on the monitor. Unfortunately, she had very little control over the temperature since the class met after regular business hours. She reminded the students to bring extra clothes to class each evening.

Dr. Johnson’s trip to the remote classroom was somewhat disappointing. Knowing that community colleges in the state had made greater progress than the host university in distance learning, she expected more advanced technological equipment at the Leaville campus. To her surprise, the room was somewhat dark, dull, and not nearly as up-to-date as the host university’s classroom. She also learned that the camera did not properly “zoom”, making it difficult for the host site to get a good close up of the students in the classroom. Their reception camera of the host site provided a poor quality picture as well.

Discussion

The physical environment of the college classroom should be conducive for learning. The temperature, lighting, acoustics, color of the walls, and style of desks or
chairs should make attendance pleasurable. Teaching aids and technological equipment should serve to help the professor achieve course goals. When such factors are considered and made available, the physical environment promotes learning.

Dr. Johnson was pleased with the physical environment of the host site but displeased with the physical environment of the remote site. The remote site students persevered in spite of the poorly lit, unappealing classroom that also lacked the modern technological equipment that is desirable in a distance learning classroom.

**Ending Class**

**Researcher’s Comments**

Dr. Johnson ended class most classes by saying, “Ya’ll have a good week.” She reminded them of upcoming assignments that were due, asked if they understood the assignments, commended students who had done an exceptional job in class, empathized with tired students, and at times rescheduled due dates to accommodate students’ requests. At the end of one class session, Dr. Johnson talked with the remote site students independently. She communicated that she had shared their concerns with the School of Education faculty and that solutions to the problems were being investigated. Dr. Johnson gave encouraging and inspirational words at the end of the last class meeting for the semester.
Participant’s Perceptions

Dr. Johnson stated:

I have always not liked the ending of my classes. And this distance class is no different. I always want to try to end on a positive note or something that leaves them really thinking about everything on their way out the door. But I find this very hard. As students begin to get really tired at 8:00 or 8:30, they begin to watch the clock and are find it harder to concentrate. And they begin to close their books and put their materials away. I know I always did that and still do when I'm in a class setting or some similar situation. I'm usually trying to send a message to the teacher/facilitator that it's time to wrap it up. So, what I normally do is make the wrap up short and friendly, like, "OK, you're tired, it's been a good night, have a good week." I want to sound encouraging. I don't know if that has any effect on their psyche nor do I know how anyone else ends class. This works for me.

Discussion

Dr. Johnson ended class each night on a positive note. She wanted the two groups to feel that they were a team who could win the game. Dr. Johnson noted that even if she was tired at the beginning of the class period, by the time she walked through the doors of
the classroom she would have a sudden burst of energy that would allow her to facilitate that night’s meeting.

**Humor**

*Researcher’s Comments*

Vernon, the technician at the remote site, was a young, Caucasian male who many of the females at both the remote and host site perceived as handsome. During the third class meeting, Dr. Johnson chatted with the technician and questioned him about his marital status. He revealed that he was 23 years of age and single. Dr. Johnson pointed out a student at the host site who was interested in him. The students at the remote site commented that the technician was “theirs.” Dr. Johnson replied, “We’re one.”

Dr. Johnson shared that she was on MSU’s first female basketball team. Although the students were surprised, they laughed. Dr. Johnson smiled as she reminisced about her athletic abilities. Dr. Johnson further noted how far women have come in sports.

When the host and remote site students met at a restaurant for class, Dr. Johnson gave accolades to the student who suggested that the two groups meet formally. While dining, Dr. Johnson had the student to stand to be recognized. The students gave a round of applause as the young lady stood.

*Participant’s Perceptions*

Dr. Johnson had to tell the technical assistant at the remote site exactly how she wanted him to operate the camera. She felt as though he was not as serious about his role
in the distance class as he should to have been. She said, “I’ll just have to tell him what to do. Otherwise, it seems that he will be setting the camera and leaving the room. I think more effort is needed.” After being very firm about her expectations, she teased him about having some female admirers in the host group.

Both groups of students indicated that they enjoyed the class meeting that was held at the restaurant. Some liked the time frame in which the joint meeting was held but others wished they had had a face-to-face meeting earlier in the semester. Dr. Johnson accused them of just wanting to have class at the restaurant.

Discussion

It has been said that laughter is good for the soul and that it takes more muscles to frown than to laugh and this seems to be Dr. Johnson’s philosophy of teaching as well as life. Dr. Johnson capitalized on almost every opportunity to bring humor to the class. She smiled constantly during each class meeting and marveled when the students were enjoying the class. It seemed as though she wanted her humor to be contagious. Dr. Johnson was somewhat relieved at the beginning of the November 7th class when the remote students held up signs that read, “We are calm.” This was a great day for Dr. Johnson because she had agonized over how to get the students to calm down and trust her the entire semester. Dr. Johnson figured that they were tired of her telling them to calm down and relax. She didn’t really know if they were trying to convince her or themselves that they were calm but she said it was fun to see them having fun with her.
That night she left the classroom feeling that they were making major progress. She said to herself, “This will work.”

Feedback/Notations

Researcher’s Comments

During the second class meeting, Dr. Johnson entertained questions from students at 8:22 p.m. She told the remote site students that she sensed that they were leaders at their schools.

During the third class meeting, Dr. Johnson informed both groups of students that three students had withdrawn from the class. Dr. Johnson asked, “Is there anything we need to talk about?” She re-explained the course requirements and showed the grading rubric for the semester. She added that she did not want anyone else to drop the course without talking to her.

Peer lessons were taught the sixth class period. Dr. Johnson reminded the students to take notes because the final exam would be comprehensive. A remote site student had faxed a handout to Dr. Johnson so copies could be made for the host site students. Dr. Johnson did not have the copies but assured the “teacher” that she would have the copies made and would distribute them to the host site students before the end of the week. Dr. Johnson explained the article requirement again and reminded the students to write an article that reflected the topic they taught. The article would be submitted for publication.
From the initial class to the final class, Dr. Johnson communicated her expectations, which included being well read. To her, being well read meant being able to regurgitate names of authors and research studies during class discussions and she did advise them to conduct themselves accordingly.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson felt that she did not have enough time to devote to replying to email messages. Although she knew this was an important component of the course, her duties as department chair consumed most of her time. She also expressed that it was difficult to keep up with grading course assignments. Students frequently asked about their performance on their work and sometimes became frustrated when Dr. Johnson did not have any feedback to give. She would apologize and tell them she would do her best to have it the next week. She believed this was one of the "sins" that could haunt some faculty, but felt she could get by with some of her deficiencies at evaluation time.

**Discussion**

Feedback is a must in any educational setting and especially when teaching adults via distance. After sacrificing the time to complete course requirements and submitting the assignments on time, most college students want a grade ‘yesterday.’ They fail to realize that there is more to professorship than class preparation, class attendance, and grading. Rekkedal (1983) warns the professor to consider non-teaching obligations when assigning due dates for course requirements. Rekkedal recommends that assignments be returned to students within one week. Dr. Johnson did not disagree with Rekkedal but
there were just not enough hours in the day to fulfill the responsibilities of every position she held at Manjae State without more direct staff support.

Dr. Johnson answered questions, made suggestions, and initiated correctives during class time as need. She was concerned about students who dropped the course. She reiterated program requirements and informed the students that the program was not going to be any less rigorous because they were participating in a pilot distance learning program. In essence, the quality product that MSU produced would not be sacrificed because distance education is the “wave of the present.”

Technology

_Researcher’s Comments_

A host site student began speaking and did not press the intercom button. Dr. Johnson asked her to press the button so the remote site students could hear her. A remote site student began speaking and did not press the intercom button. Dr. Johnson asked her to press the button so the host site students could hear her. Dr. Johnson frequently reminded both groups of students to press the intercom button before speaking. She would make sure the remote site students could hear what was being said at the host site. She did not ask the host site students if they could hear the remote group because she was in the classroom herself.

During three different class meetings, Dr. Johnson questioned the Leaville students about the reception they were receiving from the host site. She said, “Before we
go on let’s make sure they (LCC) can hear. “Can ya’ll hear Rosie?” Students at Leaville nodded.

During a student presentation evening, Dr. Johnson told a female, MSU peer teacher, to slow down because she was concerned that Leaville was getting some feedback. Leaville said that they were getting it. Dr. Johnson said, “It seems worse.”

On October 17, 2000, Dr. Johnson played a video. The remote site students informed her that they could not hear the tape. Dr. Johnson lowered the volume but that did not remedy the problem. Dr. Johnson said, “If ya’ll can’t hear at all, we don’t want to waste your time.”

Participant’s Perceptions

Dr. Johnson was concerned about the quality of the technology that was available at the remote site. Prior to visiting the classroom, she took for granted that the equipment at both sites was comparable. Her assumption was inaccurate. As a result of the visit, she compared the technology in the two classrooms. She learned that the camera at the Leaville site could not be focused to get close up images, the reception camera of the host site provided a poor quality picture, and that the delay in transmission was much worse than it was at the host site. She had a better understanding of why it was so hard to keep a good rhythm going. She perceived that the host site students’ frustration was justified but also noted that they “kept on going.”
Discussion

Throughout the semester, Dr. Johnson made sure the remote site could receive the spoken or written word from the host site. Without careful analysis, one could perceive the professor’s actions as being partial to the remote site students. However, since the professor was facilitating from the host site, she knew how the reception was from the remote site. Therefore, it is evident that more attention to technological concerns at the remote site was justified.

Before an institution of higher learning offers courses at a distance, administrators should make a thorough assessment of the technology that is in place or determine what technology would be used before the initial class meeting. There should be a commitment to make the remote and host settings as much like a traditional classroom as possible and state-of-the art technology should be used.

In a synchronous setting, the fact that the remote group is removed from the host site makes it somewhat difficult for the professor as well as the students. Every effort to relieve the fears of apprehensive students and professors should be executed.

Technological problems exist in distance learning venues. Clay and Grover (1995) attested to technological problems that included echoing audio feedback. Dr. Johnson admitted that echoing feedback was annoying. Wait time, the time between when a voice communication was sent and received, was as much as double that of the traditional classroom environment. This presented a problem in that the rhythm of engaging class discussions was somewhat fragmented. Dr. Johnson wrote in the journal, “It became even clearer to me tonight why sometimes when we (host site students) ask a
question, why they (remote site students) are slow to answer. There is really a delay in
transmission. This makes it hard to keep a good rhythm going, but we’re catching on.”
Barrett et al. (1995) noted that instructor complaints included poor audio transmission
quality from the remote classroom. In this case study, the participant noted that reception
was definitely better at the host site.

Demeanor

Researcher’s Comments

Dr. Johnson gestured a “rolling in the air” motion to Annie (pseudonym), a guest
facilitator. Annie thought Dr. Johnson wanted her to keep going but she wanted her to
repeat the four things a research study found were important to teachers through research.
Dr. Johnson commented, “Annie, go over those again. I think they are important.”

The reading assignment as already mentioned was a thorn in the side of the
students. Jean (pseudonym), a host site student, wanted to read an article that was not on
the reading list. Jean said, “It’s not on the list, can I do it then.” Dr. Johnson replied,
“No.” Jean remarked, “I don’t know then.” Dr. Johnson said (softly), “Pick one.”

The mere fact that Dr. Johnson accepted the challenge to teach a distance learning
class without formal training was an indication that she did not have many inhibitions.
During one class meeting the host site technician had to leave early. She gave Dr.
Johnson a crash course in operating the technological equipment. Dr. Johnson learned
quickly and performed the dual role of professor/technician that night. She told the
students she was having fun.
Dr. Johnson had a clever way of getting students to think about their professionalism. She asked them what grade they would give themselves for the semester. Most indicated that they would give themselves an A for effort. Dr. Johnson asked a question to make them reflect on their own grading method. She commented, “Do you give your students an A for time and effort?” The students expressed that effort plays a role in the grade but is not the primary determinant.

Dr. Johnson felt that the technician's performance at the remote site was lacking. Vernon (pseudonym), the technician, was not operating the camera as the position required. To date, he had been setting the camera and leaving the room. On September 12, 2000, Dr. Johnson began by communicating directly with him. She felt as though she had to be more direct with him in order to get his assistance with the camera. She said, “I’ll just have to tell him what to do.” Although she informed Vernon of his duties, she teased him about one of the female students at the host site who was interested in meeting him.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson learned that the host site students were upset because she talked with the remote site students while they were out of the room. On December 5, Dr. Johnson explained to the MSU students that she thought she was managing time wisely when she allowed them to have a baby shower they had planned during class time. She told them that during the time they were out having a baby shower she discussed issues with the
Leaville students that she had already addressed with them. She apologized for making them uncomfortable.

Dr. Johnson intervened when guest presenters taught the class. Based on her observation, they lacked the skills necessary to expound, clarify, reiterate, and motivate students to be active learners. At times, she worried if the students were “getting it.” She once thought, “Maybe it is up to the students, as some would say, to get it and if they don’t, they are adults.” This was only a passing thought for Dr. Johnson. She reflected on her philosophy of teaching and reminded herself that she plans to always be in charge and on the scene.

Dr. Johnson loved teaching the distance class. Some nights she was tired before class started but noted that once she got into the classroom she became excited and in the teaching mode. She felt the success of the class depended on how she facilitated. She came to terms with the fact that some people would not be “effective at all in a distance setting.”

After Dr. Johnson chastised the remote site technician about his unprofessional behavior and his poor job performance, she and the class still “cut up a little with him.” She and the students liked him and she knew that the rapport that had already been established was positive. Therefore, she did not want to compromise the good will that each felt toward the other.

The students complained to John (pseudonym), the program administrator, about Dr. Johnson’s teaching and managerial skills. She agreed that some of the complaints were justified, but felt that some of the complaints were made because the students
wanted the class to be easy. Otherwise, Dr. Johnson did not make excuses for her negligence. She admitted that she was remiss in returning assignment, returning phone calls, replying to email messages, sending handouts to the remote site, etc. She believed that she could have done a better job of teaching the class had she had more time to devote to planning and executing tasks. Unfortunately, there was not more time. While teaching the class, Dr. Johnson was also serving as department head of the School of Education. Her comment was, “But, still, I am devoted to pulling this off. This is too good of an idea not to keep plugging on. I keep asking the students if there is anything else I need to know and I keep reassuring those who are still enrolled in the class to relax. I keep stressing that it will work out and we’ll all make it.”

Discussion

Dr. Johnson modeled professionalism in her interactions with the host site students, remote site students, technicians, and guest presenters. She was tactful in giving all necessary constructive criticism and correctives. Dr. Johnson attempted to keep the spirits of all stakeholders high for the duration of the class.

Dr. Johnson felt responsible for the success of the class and the program. To this end, she maintained open communication with the students, made adjustments in course requirements, and did her best to keep every student motivated. In times of adversity, Dr. Johnson never lost site of the course and program goals. She believed in lifelong learning and professional growth. Dr. Johnson knew that the distance learning program would provide an avenue for students who were bound by time and place to attain a master’s
degree in elementary education. The degree would not only benefit students personally but would benefit the state in that elementary students would reap the rewards of a more educated teacher.

As chair of the elementary education department, Dr. Johnson tested the waters of distance teaching at the onset of the pilot program. She felt as though she was leading by example. She knew that the best way to understand the needs of faculty who would teach distance courses after the semester in which she taught was to walk a mile in their shoes before they did.

**Questioning and Responding to Questions**

*Researcher’s Comments*

Dr. Johnson encouraged students at both sites to ask questions regarding assignments or requirements for which they were cloudy. On one occasion, a host site student asked for a due date for the first draft of the article. Dr. Johnson responded with the due date and suggestions of publications for which the article could be submitted.

During the first class meeting, Dr. Johnson asked students to describe their feelings about the synchronous distance learning class. She also asked them to communicate their expectations.

During the second class meeting, Dr. Johnson asked the Leaville students if they thought class was getting better as she did. They agreed and told her they liked Vernon, the Leaville technician. Dr. Johnson always reflected after class meetings and always tried to find something positive that would allude to progress.
On October 10, 2000, a LCC student who peer taught on October 3, told Dr. Johnson that she and the other students who taught the class had emailed their self-evaluations but she had not emailed them their individual grades. Dr. Johnson told them she had forgotten to do so but she would try to email them before the end of the week.

Dr. Johnson asked students if they were receiving professional development training on inclusion. She specifically asked Leaville to raise their hands. Dr. Johnson asked the peer teachers whose topic was inclusion to recap what she had said to make sure everyone understood.

On October 24, Leaville students asked for clarification on the last assignment. Dr. Johnson told four Leaville students that she might have to go to the remote site for the next class meeting. She said, “You know me. I’ll figure this out next week. The next time we’ll have this figured out.” Dr. Johnson never made excuses and tried to pretend she had answers to questions that she didn’t. She was honest and projected to the students that with time, things would improve.

Although Dr. Johnson did not “water down” the requirements, she always tried to allow students to make some decisions about the manner in which the course was facilitated. Knowing that the university football team would be playing a game on the night that class met, the host site students asked if they could have a release day from class on October 31, 2000. Dr. Johnson honored the request.

As the semester was coming to an end, Dr. Johnson asked students if they needed to ask her anything. An MSU student asked about the final. Dr. Johnson told them that the final would be similar to questions on a master’s comprehensive exam. She advised
them to review all that they had read during the semester and to be able to incorporate names of authors and research studies into their answers.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson attributed the myriad of questions to the students being overwhelmed with taking two courses that required a great deal of intensive, thought provoking work. She was not perturbed by the questions because she was confident that the students wanted to produce quality submissions. She felt that she was the captain of the ship and had the faith that the vessel was going to sail to its destination regardless of the raging sea.

**Discussion**

Questioning and responding to questions play a vital role in the learning process. The professor asked divergent and open-ended questions throughout the semester. Although, closed-ended questions have a place in the college classroom, Dr. Johnson sought to make the students use reflection. Oftentimes, they were able to reflect on their own teaching practices while engaging in small and whole group discussions.

Wait time was not an issue given the technical difficulty. After a question was asked at either the remote or host site, the automatic delay provided ample time for students to think about what was being asked and formulate a response. Dr. Johnson did not utilize a systematic way of recognizing students who wanted to respond. She usually solicited volunteers to answer questions or requested that ‘someone’ in either the host site or remote site give a reply. Dr. Johnson never acted at if she knew it all. When students
asked a question for which she did not know the answer, she admitted that she could not respond. She told them that even when teaching elementary school, the teacher does not know everything and advised that they follow her lead rather than trying to impress their students with inaccurate information.

**Keeping Students on Task and Motivated**

**Researcher’s Comments**

Dr. Johnson frequently designated a student at the remote site to assist with the class meeting. Knowing that she was limited in her ability to be “with it” she felt that it was her professional duty to utilize another pair of eyes, ears, and hands at the off-campus site. She hoped that a peer and the remote site technician would help her keep everyone on task.

On September 12, Dr. Johnson told the students to stop worrying. She said, “Ya’ll have got to trust me. We’ll get through this together. Stress levels are rising.” Dr. Johnson never made the students feel as though they were in a sink or swim situation. She wanted them to realize that graduate school was not a piece of cake but at the same time did not want students to withdraw from the course and/or program.

Two remote site students (Leah and Pearlie, (pseudonyms)), commented that the state of MS is the last on the Education totem pole. They surmised that the reason is because all of the most qualified teachers leave the state. Consequently, the problems don’t get solved. They remarked that they had no intentions of leaving Manjae. Dr. Johnson
smiled a lot during their comments and told them not to panic. She commended both and specifically told Leah that she had the qualities of a good leader.

Dr. Johnson had a conversation with Leaville students. She told them that her goals were to work with them, listen to them, and make the program work. She said, “There’s nothing we can’t work out.” She reminded them that the quality of the program could not be compromised. She commended them on keeping up with the reading assignment. She said, “Ya’ll are doing a great job. It is obvious that you are keeping up with your reading.”

After a group at the remote site completed their peer teaching lesson, Dr. Johnson told one of the group members that she did a good job of telling what she did at her school. She also told her that the title of her article was catchy and that she had done a good job.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson was concerned that the remote students were just not connecting with the host site students. She desperately wanted the two groups to bond. She felt as if the joint meeting had occurred earlier in the semester, the unity that she hoped for would have been felt after a few class meetings.

As in a traditional class, Dr. Johnson expected fully engaged, attentive students. The fact that many took notes sparingly, talked to neighbors during instructional time, and gazed at objects or classmates in their classroom when they should have been maintaining eye contact with her disturbed Dr. Johnson. One night a student at the
remote site placed her notebook in an upright position in the space in front of her. Dr. Johnson was not sure what was going on behind the notebook. She wondered if the student was crocheting, sleeping, or engaged in some other activity that was not related to the class. At break time, she asked Vernon what was consuming the student. He told her that the student was eating behind the notebook and didn’t want the host site to see her. After break, Dr. Johnson expressed her expectations with them concerning their attention during class. Off-task behavior was totally unacceptable in her classroom, whether it was host or remote site students. Dr. Johnson asked all students to move to the middle of the room so she could see everyone. She believed that she could prevent eating, talking, or other behavior unbecoming to a college graduate student if all students were in view.

Discussion

From the first night to the last, Dr. Johnson commended students for having enough courage to embark upon taking a course by distance. Not only were the students taking one course in their program of study, they were a cohort taking an entire sequence of courses by distance to fulfill the requirements to earn a master’s degree. Knowing that this course was one of the first two in the pilot program, she anticipated apathy. Consequently, throughout the semester she tried to abort negativity. She addressed complaints and issues with an immediate or postponed solution.

Dr. Johnson was definitely a motivator. She tried to keep every student on-task and encouraged the discouraged. During the semester Dr. Johnson made comments such as, “Trust me. We’ll work it out. My goal is to work with you, listen to you, and make this program work. Ya’ll are doing a great job. Good discussion.”
Three battles that she fought the entire semester were: earning the trust of her students, getting them to calm down, and helping them view themselves as one group, not two. Exactly one month before the term ended, the remote group held up signs at the beginning of class that read, “We are calm.” That night Dr. Johnson felt the victory had been won.

*Question Two*

What are the needs of distance learning faculty?

*Protocol:*

Administrative support

Logistics of teaching and distributing materials

Secretarial support

Technological support

Training

*Researcher’s Comments*

Direct observations of protocols were not documented as these elements of preparing and supporting faculty are handled on an administrative level. However, the National Center for Educational Statistics (1997) conducted a study to determine if distance faculty received professional development to prepare them to teach via distance. Results indicated that while training is generally available, it is not required at more than 50 percent of institutions that offer distance education courses. Cyrs (1997) added that although academic administrators endeavor to add distance courses to the curriculum,
they are remiss in requiring the training needed for faculty to be effective distance educators. Willis (1992) reported that the tenure of faculty development programs could vary but all should provide the instructor with a procedure and framework for planning, developing, and adapting instruction based on identifiable learner needs and content requirements. Furthermore, Willis and Touchstone (1996) added that to be successful in distance education, faculty should have training before their initial teaching experience. Dr. Johnson, the participant in this case study, did not have formal training before, during, or after teaching her first distance education classroom. Although she was experienced in the traditional classroom, she would have benefited from training. She would have been better prepared to send materials to and retrieve materials from the remote site. Additionally, she would have known to plan office hours to include more time for grading, returning phone calls, and email messages. Timely feedback on assignments is a necessary ingredient in distance teaching and this was an area in which the participant needed to improve upon. Clay asserted (1999) that support services might include a student assistant. This assistant would have been helpful in that Dr. Johnson could have delegated some of her non-teaching duties to the assistant and would have had more time to interact not only with remote students but with host students alike.

Secretarial and technological support was available but not in abundance. The secretarial support was not extended beyond the normal scope and technological support was only given during instructional time. Clay (1999) contended that support services that would be of monumental aid in the classroom included but was not limited to an
assistant to upload course materials, create online quizzes, develop graphics, and proctor test.

**Participant’s Perceptions**

Dr. Johnson’s response:

I need more training. I knew this would be a problem.

Yes, the training was provided, but I had to miss it.

This whole issue of teaching by distance is really not understood by the administration. Our administration still hasn't addressed the workload issue, and without a doubt, we need to be adjusting workload for faculty teaching by distance, especially in the beginning when they are learning all about it. The workload is not the issue for me because I'm 12-month faculty, but teaching this class has sure opened my eyes concerning what is involved and how workload needs to be reviewed. Still, in my case, I was so determined to teach the class so that I could experience and be involved first hand, I decided that I would do the best I could and learn on the job. I have to say, I've loved it. I've loved learning the technology and doing my part to get this program going. But, oh, how I know I need to know much more about the technology.
Discussion

Professional development training to prepare faculty for distance education faculty should be mandatory for novice as well as experienced traditional classroom professors. Although the curriculum may be the same, the manner in which the course is delivered is unique. The workload is significantly greater because of the medium by which the course is taught. Consequently, staff support is imperative.

Many administrators are unaware of the planning and preparation necessary to facilitate a synchronous distance learning class. This could possibly be the reason so many institutions of higher learning make a hasty decision to jump on the distance learning bandwagon. Professional development for faculty and technicians should be mandatory. Presently, a number of colleges and universities offer distance teaching training but faculty can opt not to invest the time to become formally trained. Staff support is a component of distance teaching that has largely been overlooked. When teacher education faculty facilitates a class or classes in the traditional venue and by distance, the workload is compounded. During office hours, faculty duties may include advising, student teaching supervision, campus committee tasks, accreditation preparation, grading, class preparation, returning telephone calls, and replying to email messages. Consequently, assistance is needed if all of the duties that surround the professorate are to be executed efficiently and effectively. Departmental secretaries are
responsible for assisting the entire faculty and thereby have limited time available to solely assist the distance faculty. Therefore, support in the form of a student assistant would be ideal.

Without first-hand knowledge of the plethora of issues that surround offering a distance learning class, the potential of the program is jeopardized. Problems can be minimized if not eradicated with the proper research and preparation. When this is done, progress is sure to follow. College and university presidents, deans, and department heads must keep focused on the role they play in the distance platform and take the steps that are necessary to ensure success for the institution, the department, the faculty, the staff, and the students.

**Inference**

Wolcott and Betts’ (1999) description of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for teaching via distance were evident in the participant. Dr. Johnson was aware that the remote site students could have come to campus but travel would have impeded their progress. She was committed to the opportunity to develop the pilot distance education master’s program. Although she had not received formal training on the use of the equipment, she was willing to learn during instructional time and did succeed in learning. The intellectual challenge proved to be stimulating. Oftentimes, exhaustion overtook her as the time to begin class drew near, but she was able to persevere. Dr. Johnson was committed to making the project work because it was valuable for students who wished to earn a master’s degree, for MSU, and for the state. Dr. Johnson realized the potential
of the program and did not become discouraged in times of adversity. She always tried to make “lemonade out of lemons.”
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research was to describe the perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class held by the professor. There has been a limited amount of research conducted that documents the perspective of faculty. This study seeks to help fill the literature void. This single-subject case study was designed to observe the professor in the natural setting, the college classroom. This study addressed two questions: 1. What are the professor’s perceptions of teaching a synchronous distance learning class? and 2. What are the needs of distance learning faculty?

Conclusions reflect the perceptions of the professor and the observations made by me as they relate to the problems, progress, and potential of teaching a synchronous class for the first time. The conclusions are expected to give insight to professors and administrators as to what steps must be taken to ensure a successful synchronous distance learning class and program.

Whitworth (1999) and Clay and Grover (1995) studied first-time distance professors to describe their perceptions of teaching courses via distance. Many of their conclusions were identical to those drawn by Dr. Johnson and myself. For example, technology was not only inadequate but created a feeling of isolation, class preparation was time consuming, sending and retrieving materials was difficult, and wait time
impeded instructional time. As many of the conclusions from this study mirror those from the aforementioned studies, the need for solutions to the problems is justified.

Although teaching a distance learning course is tedious, distance education is in demand. Therefore, institutions of higher learning should prepare faculty because it is the key to a successful experience. Professional development funding to attend conferences and workshops, mentorship programs, and collaboration with experienced distance learning faculty should assist the novice distance learning professor to plan and execute classes efficiently.

A knowledge of the problems associated with teaching a distance learning class may help administrators be proactive. As they will be abreast of technological and facilitation challenges, they will be able to: (a) assess the technology, (b) upgrade the technology as necessary, (c) employ and train additional support staff and (d) schedule training for the professor.

When the challenges are addressed, the likelihood of progress and potential for the course increases. The conclusions drawn will reflect what was documented in chapters one through four of this study. Suggestions for improvement will be noted at the end of this chapter.

Chapter One validated the need for this study. As reported by Schifter (1999), the perceptions of distance learning faculty have received minimal attention by researchers. Lankford, Weeks, and Hobbs (2000), echoed this finding by reporting that researchers have been remiss in studying the attitudes and perceptions of distance learning faculty.
The inception of the program was also described in Chapter One. A partnership between a major research university and a community college was established to launch the distance learning program that initially served graduate elementary education majors. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of teaching a synchronous distance learning class as held by a novice professor. The secondary purpose was to determine the administrative and staff support that distance learning professors need.

Chapter Two provided a review of literature. It included an overview of the history and development of distance education, a theoretical and working definition of distance education, and a detailed description of those who teach distance learning courses. Lastly, the literature review described faculty perceptions of teaching a synchronous class and outlined the support needed before, during, and after a class is taught. Models that were developed by Clay (1999) and Willis (1992) were described in order to outline the stages of faculty development.

Chapter Three focused on the methodology of this study. The study was a single-subject case which utilized two research questions and protocols as a guide. Qualitative data in the form of interviews, observations, and a journal was used for data analysis.

Chapter Four reported the results of the study. The results are my interpretation of observations and interviews, Dr. Johnson’s perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of teaching a synchronous distance learning class, and a discussion of the implications for each protocol. The implications will contribute to the recommendations that will be made to Dr. Johnson and the School of Education at Manjae State University.
Conclusions and Implications

Results of my study indicated that there were problems, progress, and potential associated with teaching a synchronous distance learning class. Consequently, steps should be taken to ensure its success because it is one of the “boom” areas in education that may become the normal mode of instruction (Kayworth and Koch, 1997).

The problems in this case study can be categorized as overall problems, problems at the remote site and problems at the host site. Overall, problems included limited required faculty training, inadequate staff support, lack of time to grade and return course requirements, and the challenge of keeping both groups of students motivated. The remote site problems included fine-tuning the logistics of sending and retrieving materials, technological constraints, and the perception that the students felt as though they were isolated from and not as academically capable as the host site students. There were no significant host site problems.

Progress was made in that the program had been approved and this course was being facilitated. Dr. Johnson accomplished the task of getting students who had been apprehensive about the course in its beginning to relax near the end of the semester. Her insistence on the use of the microphone when comments were being made helped students become comfortable with the technology. The joint class meeting at Ward’s restaurant was the renaissance for both groups of students. The students “blossomed” and not only interacted more but seemed to enjoy the camaraderie. Although the students perceived the workload was overbearing, Dr. Johnson reminded them the entire semester that they were in graduate school. She reiterated that the conceptual framework for the
department was clear in that students were expected to produce quality work and practice professional dispositions desirable of educators.

The potential of future distance learning courses is immeasurable. Administrators must be committed not only to “bringing the students in” but investing the time and money it takes to prepare those who will teach. With adequate training and staff support, teachers can succeed in educating students who are separated by distance.

Although this is a study of the perceptions of the problems, progress, and potential of one professor who taught a distance learning course, knowledge gained can assist other distance learning professors. I can not overemphasize the importance of the professor keeping a journal during the semester that the course is taught. As teaching is a profession that requires reflection on practice, copious notes will allow the professor to mull over the manner in which the course was taught and plan for improvement. An improvement plan may include professional development training. A study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (1997) concluded that at the more than 50 percent of institutions that offer distance education courses, the faculty who teach are not required to take training that is available. I encourage those who teach distance courses to insist on training and when possible seek the assistance of an experienced distance learning colleague.
Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations will inform administrators, faculty, and students of what makes a successful distance learning course/program. Information was gleaned from data analysis and from interviews with the participant in this dissertation.

For Administrators:

1. A student assistant should be budgeted for first time distance learning teachers, regardless of whether they are novice or experienced faculty. Although synchronous distance teachers have a technician, that person primarily operates the technical equipment. The student assistant would help instrumental in helping the teacher will preparation, research, and clerical duties associated with teaching a distance learning course.

2. Institutionally funded professional development for faculty and technicians should be mandatory and ongoing. Conference attendance, workshops, training sessions, and the like would keep faculty abreast of methods of facilitation as well as with advances in technology.

3. A release from one regularly scheduled course should be granted to faculty who teach a course by distance for the first time. A course release would give the novice an opportunity to concentrate his/her efforts on preparing to teach by distance. The novice may also have time to observe experienced distance faculty in action.
4. Experienced distance faculty should mentor novice faculty for a period of two semesters. Regularly scheduled office hours should be reduced so the two can have a weekly meeting to discuss planning, process, progress, successes, and failures.

5. Participating distance faculty should receive funding to attend a national distance learning conference a minimum of once per academic year. The faculty should be expected to submit a proposal to present after two academic years of teaching distance learning courses.

For Faculty:

1. The host and remote site student should have a joint meeting the second or third session. The session will provide an opportunity for the two groups to meet each other, thereby reducing apprehension to share knowledge, experiences, and concerns.

2. The professor should take 15-20 minutes of instructional time every other class meeting to have an open forum with both groups simultaneously to address issues, entertain questions, and solicit suggestions for improvement.

3. A teacher made faculty/course evaluation should be distributed at mid-term. The evaluation will allow faculty to ascertain perceived teaching strengths and weaknesses before the end of the semester.

4. The professor should subscribe to a minimum of one distance learning related publication to keep abreast of updates in the field.
5. The first class should be a distance learning orientation session for the students enrolled. The professor should define distance learning, communicate the purpose for the class, and outline the professional dispositions that are necessary to ensure student/course success.

For Students:

1. A prerequisite for enrollment in the distance learning class should be documented proof of successful completion of an introductory computer course that requires students to be proficient in all hardware and software applications that will be needed in the distance course.

2. Students enrolled must have access to a computer that has applications that are required to successfully complete the course. Faculty should delineate the applications in the syllabus and review them during course orientation.

3. Students should read distance learning articles to apprise themselves of professional behavior, and pros and cons of taking a course via distance.

4. First time distance students should be paired with a mentor to help them become acclimated to the distance teaching/learning setting.

5. The institution should have a 24-hour technology help center. This center would assist distance learning students with computer needs in the center and via telephone.
Recommendations for Further Research

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge about teaching a synchronous distance learning class. However, additional research is needed. First, this study could be replicated with a different professor who has not taught a synchronous distance learning class. The methodology used in this study should be duplicated in the subsequent study. The recommendations for practice that were discovered upon data analysis in this study could be implemented in the proposed study. The researcher would then compare findings in both studies.
REFERENCES


Page 2 Cisco’s Committement to Education,

http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/779/edu/commitment/edu_internet_economy/higher_edu_market.html All contents are Copyright © 1992--2002 Cisco Systems Inc. All rights reserved.


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Instructional Technology Council (2002). Washington, DC.


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Summers, M. (on-line). From a distance: Or, how I learned to love my “TV class.” Indiana Higher Education Telecommunication System (IHETS), Retrieved on January 1, 2003 from http://www.ihets.org/learntech/distance_ed/fdpapers/1997/summers.html Marcia Summers is deceased. She did not include this entry on her vitae before her demise. Therefore, I do not know if a hardcopy publication is available.

University of North Alabama


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APPENDIX A

MODELS OF DISTANCE EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
### Table 4  Models of Distance Education: A Conceptual Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models of Distance Education and Associated Delivery Technologies</th>
<th>Characteristics of Delivery Technologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible Access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Generation - The Correspondence Model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Print</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second Generation - The Multimedia Model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Print</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Audiotape</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Videotape</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Computer-based learning (eg CML/CAL)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactive video (disk and tape)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactive multimedia (IMM)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Generation - The Telelearning Model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Audioteleconferencing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Videoconferencing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Audiographic Communication (eg Smart 2000)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broadcast TV/Radio + Audioteleconferencing</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Generation - The Flexible Learning Model</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interactive multimedia (IMM)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Computer mediated communication (CMC)(eg Email, CoSy etc)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS SURVEY
Table 15.—Percent of higher education institutions currently offering distance education courses indicating whether certain training opportunities are required, available but not required, or not available to faculty teaching distance education courses: 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training opportunity</th>
<th>Required</th>
<th>Available but not required</th>
<th>Not available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training in the use and application of distance education technologies</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in the development of curricula for distance education courses</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in teaching methods for distance education courses</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation with support center staff</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Data are for higher education institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Percents are based on institutions that offered distance education courses in fall 1995. Percents are computed across each row, but may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Distance Education Courses Offered by Higher Education Institutions, 1995.
APPENDIX C

IRB LETTER
Dr Esther Egley  
Curriculum & Instruction  
Mail Stop 975  

Re: IRB Docket #00-291 - Evaluation of the Pilot Northeast Distance Elementary Education Project  

Dear Dr. Egley:

The above referenced project has been approved via administrative review in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101B1. Please find enclosed your approval form for the above referenced IRB application.

Please note the expiration date for approval of this project is August 15, 2001. If additional time is needed to complete the project, you will need to submit a Request for Change in IRB Approval form prior to August 15, 2001. Please refer to your docket number (#00-291) when contacting our office regarding this application.

The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at 325-3994 or at tarwood@spa.msstate.edu.

Sincerely yours,

Tracy S. Arwood  
Regulatory Compliance Administrator

TSA/jm  
Enclosures  
cc: File
August 30, 2000

Dear MSU Student:

My name is Esther Egley and I am the Head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Mississippi State University. I am conducting research to determine the benefits of offering the undergraduate and graduate elementary education programs through the Mississippi Interactive Video Network (MIVN) at Mississippi State University. Please read the following carefully and sign below if you choose to participate. If you have any questions, you may contact me at 325-7123. For questions regarding the use of human subjects in research, please contact Tracy Arwood at the MSU Regulatory Compliance Office at 325-7404.

By consenting to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in taped interviews, to complete surveys, to share some of your work samples, to allow video tapes of the class to be used for observation purposes, and to allow your information that is non-identally collected in a college class to be used for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of this distance education class.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the study you may withdraw from the study with no negative effects. You may be assured that all of the data collected in this research will remain completely confidential.

Sincerely,

Esther H. Egley, Head
Curriculum & Instruction

________________________________________
Print Name

________________________________________
Signature

Elementary Education  Secondary Education  Special Education