

Chapter 4

Instruction–Expanded Virtual Education Model: Shaping Cognitive Enrichment, Engagement, and Access

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has propelled school districts into virtual instruction with little advanced planning or preparation. This chapter deconstructs the gaps in the virtual learning environment and provides pedagogical strategies for teachers to increase cognitive enrichment, engagement, and access. The shifts in pedagogy from in-person to virtual learning will be examined with concrete strategies to develop student-centered learning experiences in a virtual context. Emphasis will be placed on differentiation as a means to enrich and the art of questioning to engage students. Woven through enrichment and engagement, the student's cultural, familial, linguistic, and social capital are incorporated as assets, or cultural wealth, and used to facilitate equitable access. When combined, these three instructional strategies interrelate and reinforce rigorous cognitive instruction that is accessible for all students in the virtual classroom.

A CALL TO ACTION: ADDRESSING THE VIRTUAL GAP

In 1897, John Dewey wrote a journal entry titled *My Pedagogic Creed*. In this seemingly unimportant three page document, he outlined his philosophical stance on the purpose of education. Beginning each paragraph with the phrase “I believe...,” Dewey passionately argues the connection that exists between active learning, social context, and the individual student. An education should, according to Dewey, provide opportunities for students to engage in conversations related to contemporary issues in society,

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develop their interests, and harness their own “power and utilization of their capabilities” (p. 362). W.E.B. Du Bois further reinforced this by proclaiming in 1935 to the National Education Association that “The school has but one way to cure the ills of society and that is by making [people] intelligent.” In times of crisis, educators, at all levels and institutions, find themselves teaching amid economic, public health, and social justice issues. Businesses, schools, and public places close as people shelter in place and brace for the uncertain times ahead. Our immediate focus, as educators, has merged to combine covering content and meeting the most basic needs of our learners together. Questions related to food, shelter, and personal safety highlight the truthfulness of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. Once these foundational questions and structures have been addressed, educators can turn their attention to meeting the cognitive needs of their students.

As in every crisis, large-scale catastrophes such as wars, global pandemics, and natural disasters highlight one very clear fact - even when the physical school builds close, teachers are TEACHING. Once a teacher is assured their student’s needs are met as defined by Maslow (1943), their emphasis focuses on cognitive engagement, enrichment, and access. They are answering the rallying cry set forth by Dewey and Du Bois as they examine new instructional strategies and rethink previous practices to boldly and bravely meet the learning needs of their students. The Covid-19 pandemic and the shift of the instructional delivery format from brick and mortar to virtual or hybrid are two major reasons the activation and delivery of instructional practices must be cognitively engaging, enriching, and accessible.

Infrastructure factors that impact these student populations include lack of access to the internet or technology equipment, such as laptops or tablets (Ali & Herrera, 2020). Service factors that impact these student populations include reduced or diminished access to aides, therapists, tutors, and coaches (Ali & Herrera, 2020). Wraparound services and support provided by the school district staff and partners may no longer be available in a virtual context because of their dependency on a school site location. The infrastructure and service variables are not within the direct control of the classroom teacher. This underscores the emphasis that needs to be placed on personalized pedagogical strategies that are within the scope of influence of the classroom teacher. Even though the *delivery method* for teaching has shifted from in-person to virtual, the basic premise and need for equitable access to learning opportunities remain the same. The authors take a page from John Dewey’s and W.E.B. Du Bois’ playbooks to examine how cognitive enrichment, engagement, and access can (and must) be created in an online learning environment during times of crisis. The purpose of this chapter for classroom teachers is threefold: (1) to examine the paradigm shifts in pedagogy necessary to promote access from in-person to virtual learning, (2) to provide educators with concrete strategies to design and execute engaging and enriching student-centered instruction in virtual classrooms, and (3) to pose questions that can extend current and future conversations around the intersection of cognitive enrichment, engagement, and access for ALL learners using technology.

Unlike crises of the past, technology now reigns supreme as classrooms move from desks and chairs to computer screens, discussion threads, and video lectures. The virtual landscape of education is filled with many and exciting opportunities for discourse and the open exchange of ideas. It is easy, however, to become enamored with the bells and whistles of online learning. This chapter is written to examine the gaps in a virtual learning experience through a pedagogical lens. Technology changes rapidly, with new programs and applications hitting the market daily. A reference to a specific application, learning management system, or website could render the examples provided obsolete or antiquated quickly. Rather than discuss specific platforms or programs, the authors have focused on how best-practice pedagogical models and instructional strategies could be modified and adapted to the virtual classroom. The authors

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