Chapter 14
The Effects of E-Learning on African American Males:
Three Case Studies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The chapter examines the experiences of three African American males who were placed in an electronic learning (e-learning) classroom in a rural secondary school. The three case studies provide detailed descriptions of the young men's backgrounds, educational experiences, and academic achievement results before the implementation of e-learning. Furthermore, the case studies detail their academic achievement results and dispositions during the e-learning process, pitfalls of their e-learning program, and lessons learned from the implementation of the program. It is the authors' hope that educators and business professionals will utilize the information and lessons learned in this chapter when planning and implementing e-learning classes and trainings in order to enhance e-learning experiences for African American males.

INTRODUCTION

In this age of blogging, texting, electronic mailing (e-mailing), instant messaging, and computer gaming, one school in the Southeastern United States decided to pilot a version of electronic learning (e-learning) with students who are in danger of being dismissed from school. These students are repeating ninth grade for at least the second time. They have a history of numerous discipline referrals, and the

e-learning program is their last hope for earning enough credits to graduate from high school.

This chapter follows the accomplishments and difficulties of three African American males participating in the pilot e-learning program.

BACKGROUND

The high school selected for these case studies has approximately 430 students and is located in the southeastern section of the United States, approxi-

mately 20 miles from the closest city. It is a rural farming community with four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The high school population is 99% African-American, with approximately 82% of the students living in poverty.

The high school is considered a low performing school with high dropout rates, high retention rates, high suspension and expulsion rates, and low test scores. However, the school has made major changes to improve its state report card rating in the past few years. In 2005, the school was rated as an at-risk school with an at-risk growth rate, indicating that the school failed to make adequate progress towards the state's 2010 performance goal. However, in 2008, the school was rated as an average school with an excellent growth rate, indicating that the school exceeded the expected level of progress toward the state's 2010 performance goal (SC Department of Education, 2009).

In order to decrease the 2.7% school district dropout rate, each high school in the county was issued access to the Apex Learning Academic Curriculum, a standards based online offering of courses to high school students. The district granted individual schools the freedom to decide how to implement the e-learning program. Because 18% of the school of study's students are overage for their grade level, the school decided that the optimum use of the Apex e-learning program would be for credit recovery. Students were enrolled in a variety of different classes, including math (Algebra I and Geometry), science (Physical Science and Biology), English (English I and II), and social studies (Global Studies I and Geography). Each course consists of units, lessons, and activities. A typical lesson has activities that include "practice, readings, journals, labs, discussions, projects, web explorations, reviews, and both computer- and teacher-scored assessments" (Apex Learning, 2009). The Apex Learning Academic Curriculum provides active learning experiences, in which the students read, watch, listen, write, and discuss to gain better understanding of the concepts presented. Different learning styles are addressed through the images, movie clips, sound clips, animations, charts, and graphs. The goal is to allow students that are overage and unsuccessful in the traditional classroom the opportunity to work through an alternative, self-paced instructional program in order to earn high school graduation credits.

Because the high school has a limited number of computers in classrooms as well as a limited number of computer labs that must be reserved in advance, a special classroom was converted and named "the virtual classroom" for the e-learning program. Student computers with internet access and head phones were placed in a classroom that is located in an annex of the school building. Additionally, a teacher's computer was added in order for the teacher to upload and reset student lessons and assessments.

The administration has been unable to hire a qualified teacher who is interested in taking responsibility for the class on a full-time basis. As a result, during the first semester, the principal appointed a different faculty member to supervise each ninety-minute class. A behavior intervention specialist directed the first ninety-minute class. She appeared to be the only one of the three teachers to have a positive relationship with all three case study students. Despite the relationships, the teacher indicated that the students did not want her help, and she was not observed to offer help.

Since most of the students have extreme difficulty with math, a retired math teacher supervised the second ninety-minute class. She has a reputation for being a strict teacher and does not put up with any misbehavior in the classroom. The three students responded to her when she spoke but typically did not ask her for help when needed. However, by mid-semester, one student started asking for her assistance, and she responded positively to his requests. As a result, this student passed his Algebra I class by the end of the first semester.

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