

Tracking Student Experiences with Edmodo in a  
Remedial Alternative Education Setting

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A Special Project

Presented to

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### Background for the Project

Since its inception just over forty years ago, the alternative education movement in the United States has increasingly moved away from schools of choice towards schools of remediation. At these schools, students have generally fallen further behind their contemporaries and have not received the educational experiences that would help them be ready to contribute in the educational settings and workplaces that they have entered into.

Meanwhile, the recent development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has come as a response to the need of helping all students receive the education and skills they need to be successful in college and the workplace. Since the use of technology has become a vital part of the twenty-first century experience, the CCSS addressed the need to educate students with the technological skills they need by mandating that students meet standards that forty-five of the fifty states in the United States have formally adopted. The switch to the CCSS makes the use of technology a part of the general curriculum by incorporating it into reading, writing, math, and science standards.

Sugata Mitra, a highly respected Professor of Educational Technology, recently stated that he believed we were living in an age where "knowing is obsolete" (Mitra, 2013). What he meant was that knowledge has become readily available in ways in which it never has before. He argued that a simple search on Google can yield a wealth of knowledge that no person could ever possibly possess. In this Age of Information, Mitra made the point that it has become increasingly important that students learn how to use the technology that will allow them to access the wealth of information that has become available.

In the midst of the sea changes that have taken place in the field of education, Nic Borg and Jeff O'Hara developed a social learning platform called Edmodo in September of 2008 with the intent of creating "a tool that closed the gap between how students live their lives and how they learn in school" (About Edmodo, 2013). During the 2012-13 school year, Edmodo was among the 5,000 most visited websites on the internet and as recently as July 2013, Edmodo had attracted over 20 million registered users, which is far more than any other social learning web platform (About Edmodo, 2013; Edmodo Site Info, 2013). Despite Edmodo's immense popularity, little research has been conducted about its impact on students and learning.

### Statement of the Problem

Students in an alternative setting have needed access to the same educational opportunities and experiences that students in mainstream settings have been afforded. By virtue of being referred to an alternative setting, students have become less likely to receive the rich educational experiences that their contemporaries have been receiving. Students in such alternative settings have largely been deemed at-risk of dropping out of school and have had specific challenges and obstacles to overcome in order to meet graduation requirements. Unfortunately, the behavioral and academic deficits of at-risk students are often exacerbated by the remedial alternative settings that these students are sent to.

#### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project has been to investigate whether or not a social learning platform such as Edmodo could be beneficial to students in a remedial alternative education setting.

#### Delimitations

The research for this project took place at an alternative high school in eastern Washington during a one month period over the duration of a summer school session in 2013. The summer school program was in place largely to meet the needs of students for credit retrieval. There were 12 students in a combined English course and 13 students in a US History course that were willing

participants in the study. Four of the students were enrolled in both courses, so there were a total of 21 students whose experiences were studied. Of the students, 12 were male and nine were female. Six of the nine female students were teen moms. Students varied from 15-20 years of age. There were 19 days of summer school and each class lasted three hours long each day. The combined English class took place in the morning from 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM and the US History class took place from 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM. There were enough computers in the classroom for the students to have individual access.

### Assumptions

The researcher/instructor had previous experience using Edmodo with middle schools students in an alternative setting. Based on that experience and based on the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 of this project, Edmodo seemed like an attractive option to use in a summer school alternative setting with high school students. To the researcher/instructor there seemed to be a great deal of crossover between the needs that are prevalent in alternative settings and the features that Edmodo offered that could potentially address those needs.

Edmodo afforded the researcher/instructor with an opportunity to address some the CCSS by incorporating technology into the instructional process. With Edmodo students could receive and submit their assignments online, use other digital tools and resources to complete assignments, receive feedback nearly

immediately, and could easily monitor their progress. Additionally, it was assumed that Edmodo might be a good fit for students who seemed disaffected by their experiences in the mainstream because it was assumed that the use of technology would give relevancy to the curriculum by delivering it in a way that students would presumably find meaningful to their present and future. Furthermore, it was assumed by the researcher/instructor that Edmodo would be beneficial to students in an alternative setting because of the flexibility it provided in allowing students to work at their own pace. The flexibility that students would have in accessing Edmodo from home or via their mobile devices was another factor that the researcher/instructor assumed would benefit students. By preloading videos, instructions, assignments, comments, and polls onto Edmodo, the researcher/instructor assumed that he would be more available to provide students with one-on-one interactions and provide students with immediate feedback.

### Research Question

Will the use of Edmodo in an alternative education setting be a positive and educational experience for the students in the setting?

### Significance of the Project

By researching the use of Edmodo and its impact on students in an alternative setting, the researcher/instructor will be contributing to the relatively sparse amount of research that has been done on the use of Edmodo in the classroom. Furthermore, it may be the first piece of research done that considers how well Edmodo can meet the needs of students in an alternative setting. This project should serve to be useful educators who are considering whether or not to incorporate the use of Edmodo into their classrooms, particularly educators that work in an alternative setting.

#### Procedure

The following procedures were established by the researcher/instructor prior to conducting the research. First, the researcher/instructor requested permission from the acting administrator that was responsible for the oversight of the summer school session. This was done by verbally explaining to the administrator the gist of the research that was being conducted. Second, the researcher/instructor obtained permission from the students to use the information and data they provided for research. The researcher/instructor did this by making a post on Edmodo that was visible to all students and giving them an opportunity to opt out by posting. Parents also had access to view their student's Edmodo accounts and students were encouraged to share with their parents about the research that would be conducted.

Finally, the researcher/instructor created an end-of-course survey to give to students towards the end of their summer school experience with Edmodo. The questions on the survey were designed by the researcher/instructor to give the students a chance to provide feedback about their experience with Edmodo as it related to best practice in alternative settings that were determined from the review of the literature conducted in Chapter 2 of this project.

### Definition of Terms

Social learning. In 1977, Albert Bandura suggested that people can learn in a social context. He offered these four points that relate to and define what social learning is:

- Learning can occur by observing others' behaviors and the resulting outcomes.
- Learning can occur cognitively without a corresponding change in behavior.
- Modeled behavior is reinforced by producing desirable outcomes (for both the observed party and the learner).
- Three variables in the social learning context—the learner, the behavior, and the environment—can influence each other.



Social learning platform. A social learning platform is a software framework that educators can use to facilitate social learning.

Acronyms

CCSS. Common Core State Standards

NCLB. No Child Left Behind.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Selected Literature

#### Introduction

Part of the stated agency mission statement of the U.S. Department of Education is to “close the achievement and opportunity gaps so that all youth—regardless of their backgrounds—graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). What role, if any, have alternative programs played in helping meet that challenge? This literature review has investigated the unique characteristics of alternative settings and the challenges they have faced as well as the key components that have been evident in thriving alternative schools. During this literature review, the following questions have been addressed:

- What have been the key characteristics of alternative programs?
- What kinds of students have attended alternative schools?
- What specific needs have alternative schools addressed?
- Have alternative schools truly served as viable alternatives?

In this chapter, these four areas of research were addressed: 1) a brief history of the alternative education movement; 2) defining characteristics of alternative

settings; 3) demographics, data, and current trends in alternative education; and 4) what has worked and what has not worked in alternative settings.

### A Brief History of The Alternative Education Movement

The alternative movement largely began in the 1970s when public alternatives increased from 100 to more than 10,000 (Raywid, 1981). While alternatives sprang up largely as a means to provide disenchanted students with an alternative choice from the mainstream, the movement shifted in the following decade “from a more progressive and open orientation in the 1970s to a more conservative and remedial one in the 1980s” (Young, 1990). A safe schools movement in the 1990s further shifted alternatives towards serving remedial purposes. The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 required that school districts expel students for at least one year, but permitted districts to refer expelled students to alternative settings. The propensity to use alternatives as place to remediate students continued well into the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and post-Columbine era. Between 2000 and 2008, school districts reported between a one to twelve percent increase in each of the following reasons that were deemed solely sufficient for a student to be transferred to an alternative setting: continued academic failure, chronic truancy, disruptive verbal behavior, physical attacks or fights, possession or use of a weapon, arrest or involvement with the juvenile

justice system, teen pregnancy, and mental health needs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

### Defining Characteristics of Alternative Settings

What alternative schools and programs look like has changed and evolved over time to mean different things to different people. The U.S. Department of Education's currently defines an alternative school as "A public elementary/secondary school that (1) addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, (2) provides nontraditional education, (3) serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or (4) falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The Department further clarified by stating that "some examples of alternative schools are schools for potential dropouts; residential treatment centers for substance abuse (if they provide elementary or secondary education); schools for chronic truants; and schools for students with behavioral problems" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

However, partially due to the variety of programs that fall under the alternative umbrella, comprehensive research regarding alternative education is lacking (Lange & Sletten, 2002). In a synthesis of the research on alternatives conducted in 2002, Lange & Sletten concluded that most of the research was anecdotal and theoretical. They stated, "While research on alternative education

does exist, it does not adequately address the many questions that remain. Issues of program character, student description, special education service, and academic outcomes are all in need of systematic, ongoing research.”

In a synthesis of the research in 1994, Raywid found there to be three categorizations of alternatives:

- Type I – Schools of Choice where innovative programs attempt to draw students in.
- Type II – “Last Chance Schools” where students are sent as an alternative to expulsion.
- Type III – Remedial Focus Schools focused on academic issues, social emotional issues, or both.

Raywid (1994) noted that the bodies of research on each of these types of schools varied widely.

While drawing a general definition that fits all alternative programs has been problematic, Lange & Sletten (2002) found that there are several characteristics that just about all alternative settings share in common.

Alternative schools have historically been described as:

- serving students that are at-risk youth;
- maintaining a small size;

- emphasizing one-on-one interaction between teachers and students;
- creating a supportive environment;
- allowing opportunities for students success relevant to the students' future;
- allowing flexibility in structure and emphasis on student decision-making

Lange & Sletten (2002) further found that there was a fourth type of alternative program that existed, which they termed a “second chance” program that combined school choice, remediation, and innovation.

#### Demographics, Data, and Current Trends in Alternative Education

One concern that many researchers shared is the idea that students in alternative settings were receiving separate but unequal educational experiences (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Sagor, 1999). In 2010, an investigation by the U.S. Department of Education found that 63 percent of all public alternative schools and programs were not housed in normal schools, but were housed in separate facilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Further, 4 percent of alternatives were found to be held in juvenile detention centers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). These separate facilities were often isolated, rundown, underfunded, poorly staffed, and lacked even the most basic of school

materials (Simmons, 2007). O'Shea (2006) found that the physical deterioration of buildings is linked with disorder and crime. Students in the alternative setting were found to respond accordingly when they got the message that they were less worthy of quality educational experiences than their more well-behaved peers (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Why have these separate and unequal alternatives become more and more prevalent? In a 2004 survey of 725 teachers and 600 parents, 85% of mainstream teachers and 73% of parents said that the school experience of most students suffers at the hands of a few chronic offenders (Public Agenda, 2004). Though thousands of alternative school programs were in place and at capacity, 78% of mainstream teachers said that they had students who were persistent behavior problems that had not been removed from school grounds but should have been (Public Agenda, 2004). 87% of mainstream teachers and 74% of parents were at least somewhat supportive of the idea of sending chronic behavioral offenders to alternative schools (Public Agenda, 2004). Richard Sagor, a respected voice in the field of alternative education, stated his belief that the increase in such Type II alternatives was either an advertent or inadvertent social movement to push those at-risk out of sight and out of mind (Sagor, 2006).

Simmons (2007) believed that school administrators had a great deal of latitude in determining which students got filtered out of their schools. Simmons

cited lenient laws that allowed any student deemed “at-risk” to receive an alternative school placement and found that the reasons cited for students being labeled “at-risk” varied widely and had very loose definitions. During the 1999–2000 school year, approximately 965,290 students were suspended by administrators for 5 days or more, while 127,930 were expelled with no educational services whatsoever (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Approximately 612,900 “at-risk” students were placed in alternative schools or programs in 2000–2001, which was about 1.3 percent of all public school students at the time (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Politics and educational policy appear to have played a significant role in determining who has attended alternative school programs and why. Many of these tens of thousands of students were removed from their schools for subjective reasons such as “disruptive verbal behavior” despite having never engaged in any violent acts. According to a survey of school districts taken by the Department of Education (2002), roughly half of all districts with alternative schools and programs reported that each of the following reasons was solely sufficient for transferring a student out of a regular school:

- possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (52 percent);
- physical attacks or fights (52 percent);



- chronic truancy (51 percent);
- continual academic failure (50 percent);
- possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50 percent);
- disruptive verbal behavior (45 percent);
- possession or use of a firearm (44 percent);
- arrest or involvement with juvenile justice system (38 percent);
- teen pregnancy/parenthood (28 percent);
- mental health needs (22 percent).

When the same survey was taken eight years later, school districts reported between a one to twelve percent increase in the likelihood that such behaviors would lead to a referral to an alternative for eight of the ten listed reasons (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

The same 2002 study found that that school districts with 50 percent or more minority student populations were far more likely than those with less than 20 percent minority enrollments to transfer students solely for disruptive behaviors, possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm, alcohol or drugs, physical attacks or fights, and disruptive verbal behavior (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The significantly higher propensity to transfer

students out was also true of school districts with high poverty concentrations compared to those with low and moderate poverty concentrations. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In other words, students that came from minority and high poverty backgrounds were far more likely to be sent to alternative schools for reasons that would otherwise have been overlooked had the student come from a different background.

Inequitable treatment of students from minority and high poverty backgrounds has continued to be a problem in public education system. Currently, the Seattle School District is currently being investigated by the U.S. Department of Education to see if they have been punishing African Americans “more frequently and more harshly than similarly situated white students” (Erving & O’Hagan, 2013). In the district, African American students have been three times as likely as white students to have received suspensions (Erving & O’Hagan, 2013). A similar investigation is taking place in the Durham School District as well, where the rates of suspension are at 14.1 percent for black students and just 3.3 percent for white students (Porter, 2013). Overall, between the 2009 and 2012 fiscal years, the Office for Civil Rights—an agency within the U.S. Department of Education—has received 28,971 complaints. The number of complaints is a 24 percent increase over the previous four-year period (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Inequities in the way that student discipline issues have been handled have inevitably led to inequities in determining which students have been found to be unfit for normal schools and sent to alternatives. Indeed, the number of students enrolled in alternative programs has been consistently found to be disproportionately drawn from low-income, minority, and disabled communities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Sagor, 1999). While it is only 26 percent likely that school districts that have a five percent or less minority enrollment will have an alternative program, it is 62 percent likely that a school district with more than 50 percent minority enrollment will have an alternative program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Additionally, while only 31 percent of school districts that have a poverty concentration of 10 percent or less have alternative programs, 45 percent of school districts that have a poverty concentration of 20 percent or more have alternative programs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In other words, alternatives have been increasingly seen as a solution to student remediation in areas of high poverty and minority enrollment.

Once students have been sent to an alternative school, there has often not been a path for them to exit and return to the mainstream. Indeed, many researchers have expressed concern that placement in alternative programs leads to social tracking (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Sagor, 1999). After 1,609 school

districts were randomly sampled out of 14,619 in the United States, the U.S. Department of Education found in 2002 that while 74 percent of school districts reported having a policy that allows alternative education students to return to their regular school, 25 percent reported allowing some, and one percent reported allowing none (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The same study was conducted in 2010 and found that only 63 percent of school districts would allow students to return to the mainstream once referred to an alternative—an 11 percent decrease over an eight year span (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Sadly, administrators have had incentive to push students out of their schools and into alternative schools of last chance. Low-achieving students have often been seen as undesirable students by administrators because they have had the potential to negatively impact the school's results on high-stakes testing (Simmons, 2007). While one would hope that administrators would not be deviously motivated to inflate their schools' test scores by transferring students out, anecdotal evidence suggests that such instances have not been uncommon (Viadero, 2004). Recent events in Georgia have brought to light just how significant high stakes test scores are in determining funding, enhancing careers, and earning bonuses. A Fulton County grand jury indicted 35 educators, including principals, teachers, testing coordinators, and the former superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools for their role in a cheating scandal involving such high stakes test scores (Rich, 2013). Simmons (2007) mentions that students who were

frequently tardy and truant were also potentially seen as undesirable by administrators because school funding has been based on actual attendance rather than the number of students registered for the school. The families of the students that get pushed out were found to be far less likely to have had political voice and were more likely to have gone along with the determinations of school administrators (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). When sent to alternative schools, it was found that students were often stigmatized and picked up negative self-identities that they carry with them for the rest of their lives (Sagor, 2006).

#### What Works and What Doesn't Work in Alternative Settings

Regardless of the lack of consistency in which students are placed in alternatives, have these schools been successful in serving these students by bridging the academic and behavioral and disparities that exist between them and mainstream students? In 1981, Robert Barr cautioned that “at their best, alternative schools have functioned as an exciting laboratory where unique and often daring experiments are conducted and evaluated. At their worst, alternative schools represent some of the most unfortunate tendencies toward social tracking, political manipulation, and educational hucksterism.” Some of the more troublesome aspects trending in alternative programs have already been highlighted in this literature review. What then, if anything, has been working in alternative education?

In her synthesis of the research, Raywid (1994) noted that the bodies of research on the various types of alternative schools have varied widely. Type I schools (choice) were shown to have been generally successful in truly providing an equitable alternative for students that were looking for another option, Type II schools (last chance) were generally found to have contributed nothing towards fixing the problems they were intended to solve, and Type III schools (remedial focus) were generally found to be only temporarily successful in student remediation. Lange & Sletton found that Type IV (second chance) schools had not been studied comprehensively, but anecdotal evidence suggested that some had been successful in lasting student remediation. However, a recent investigation by the Department of Education found that second chance schools in New York City had more dropouts than graduates (Lawrence, 2013).

Given the research, it is particularly concerning that alternative education has increasingly moved away from Type I schools and towards Type II schools. The lack of even normal rates of academic progress for students is generally accepted among researchers in last chance schools (Raywid, 1994). Students, in fact, have been found to fall further behind their contemporaries when assigned to remedial programs (Sagor, 2006). Student behavior has also tended to get worse when students have been placed in alternative programs as it was found that misbehavior becomes normalized when the student is placed in a setting that lacks role models (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Students assigned to receive remedial

services have often become “lifers” that have had little chance of leaving these programs and returning to the mainstream (Anderson & Pellicer, 1990). When students receiving remedial services have attempted to return to the mainstream, they have tended to be unsuccessful (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Once students arrive at alternatives, school administrators and teachers are tasked with implementing policies of best practice in order to at least stop students from continuing on a downward spiral. Lange & Sletten (2002) summarized the literature on alternative education programs for at-risk students and determined that the following are generally agreed upon best practices at most well-run alternative programs:

- Clearly identified goals to inform both evaluation and enrollment;
- Wholehearted implementation without a piecemeal approach to structuring programs;
- Autonomy;
- Student-centered atmosphere;
- Integration of research and practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies, and integration of special education services;

- Training and support for teachers who work with at-risk populations;
- Links to multiple agencies.

Lange & Sletten noted that these generally agreed upon principles have not been comprehensively researched, but rather are based on anecdotal evidence and theory. Furthermore, whether or not these practices are in-fact taking place in alternative programs has not been thoroughly documented either.

Lange & Sletten concluded their synthesis of the research by stating that alternatives have the “potential to provide a caring, nurturing, hopeful environment for the success of the many at-risk children” and further stated that there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that “students who were on the verge of completely dropping out of school... found the setting and relationships at alternative schools that allowed them to experience success.”

### Summary

This review of the literature on alternative education has found that the alternative education movement began with the intent to give disaffected students a viable alternative choice outside of the mainstream. Since then, however, social pressures and policy have caused the alternative movement to shift towards student remediation. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have largely been the target of such remediation.



The review of the literature also found that the research on best-practice in the field of alternative education was incomprehensive. If the needs of our most marginalized and vulnerable students are all that different from the needs of mainstream students, the question of how to best address those needs in an alternative setting has only been answered anecdotally. While it is impossible to determine how students deemed at-risk would have fared had they been left in the mainstream and received another form of intervention, it is clear removing students from the mainstream and placing them in alternative settings has largely exacerbated their academic and behavioral shortcomings.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology and Treatment of Data

#### Introduction

The experiences of 21 different alternative school students were tracked over a month of summer school to gain insight about the students' experiences with the social learning platform provided by Edmodo. The researcher/instructor tracked the experiences of the students by reading their blog posts and daily discussion posts, conducting pretests and posttests, conducting interviews, documenting their responses to an end-of-course survey that related to points of best practice in alternative settings, and tracking their grades. The researcher/instructor then examined the qualitative data and looked for patterns and themes that the researcher/instructor could express in the form of a narrative.

#### Methodology

This project utilized a qualitative research method in order to gain insight from the alternative school students about their experiences using Edmodo. The type of qualitative research that was conducted was narrative. The narrative approach was taken because the purpose of the research was to find out whether or not the students had a positive and educational experience with Edmodo and the researcher/instructor determined that the best way to document such

experiences would be through the collective narrative that developed through the blog posts, interviews, surveys, and grades that were used as qualitative data.

### Participants

There were 12 students in a combined English course and 13 students in a US History course that were willing participants in the study. Four of the students were enrolled in both courses, so there were a total of 21 students whose experiences were studied. Of the students, 12 were male and nine were female. Six of the nine female students were teen moms. Students varied from 15-20 years of age.

### Instruments/Design/Procedure

As a course requirement for the English class, the researcher/instructor had the students create student blog accounts online at <http://www.edublogs.org/>. During nearly every day of class, the students were given a writing prompt and were asked to blog a minimum of a paragraph in response to the given prompt. The following questions were devised by the researcher/instructor to give the students a chance to express their opinions and give them a chance to tell the researcher/instructor about who they were:

- If you could meet anyone in the world, who would you meet? Why?
- If you ruled the world, what is one thing that you'd change?

- Watch the Alanis Morissette video about ironic events and then write an anecdote about a time something ironic happened to you or someone you know.
- If you could go anywhere on vacation where would you go? Why?
- What animal do you think would make for the best pet? Why?
- If you could get better at something, what would it be? Why?
- What motivates you? What drives you? What's inside of you that pushes you to keep trying?
- What would your dream job be? Why?
- What has been your biggest accomplishment so far in life? What makes you proud of it?
- What's the most nervous you've ever been in your entire life?
- Using the copy of the book full of inspirational quotes that is on my desk, pick a quote from the book, and explain why the quote means something to you or how it relates to your life.
- What are the ideal qualities you look for in a friend? Do you exhibit those qualities?
- What are your plans for the summer?

The researcher/instructor would typically grade the students' responses nearly immediately after they blogged their response and submitted a hyperlink to their

blog to the researcher/instructor via Edmodo. Frequently, the researcher/instructor would make a specific comment to the student in response to their blog post entry. Such comments included an explanation of a grade received, a point of correction for the student to either immediately address or to take into consideration for their next blog entry, or a personal response to the blog post itself to validate the students' work and/or elicit a follow-up response from the student.

In the U.S. History course, news articles of current events were posted daily by the researcher/instructor and students were required to participate in academic discussion by making at least two posts in response to the article. The students were asked to find a way to participate in the conversation by asking a question, posting their thoughts, or by making a comment in response to someone else. The researcher/instructor would also participate in the discussion by asking guiding questions, making clarifying comments, and validating student responses. The current events discussed included the following topics: the passage of laws relating to transgender students in California, immigration reform, food stamps, student loans, sterilization of female prisoners in California, fireworks and safety, cyber threats, guns in schools, drones, Guantanamo Bay, Bradley Manning, National Security Agency phone monitoring, Zimmerman, an abortion bill filibuster in Texas, and a Supreme Court ruling on the Defense of Marriage Act. The students would nearly immediately receive positive feedback regarding their

participation after making their second post in the thread. Frequently, the researcher/instructor would make a specific comment to the student in response to their posts. Such comments included an explanation of a grade received, a point of correction for the student to either immediately address or to take into consideration for their next post, or a personal response to the post itself to validate the students' work and/or elicit a follow-up response from the student.

The researcher/instructor also chose to conduct open-ended interviews with two students. One student was chosen because his experiences seemed to be typical to the experiences that most students had with the course. The other student was chosen because his experiences seemed to be an outlier as compared to the other students and the researcher/instructor sought an understanding as to why this particular student's experiences were so different.

An 11 question end-of-course survey was also developed by the researcher/instructor in order to get some feedback from the students about their experiences as they related to points of the best practice in alternative settings, as determined from the research conducted in Chapter Two of this project. Students were offered a small amount of extra credit for the course in exchange for their participation in the survey. Of the 21 students whose experiences were studied, 16 chose to participate in the survey. The five students that did not participate

were absent during the day or time that the survey was administered. The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. Do you feel you had enough opportunity for one-on-one interaction with the teacher? Circle one: Yes / No. Comment:
2. Did you feel more or less supported by the teacher in the classroom as a result of the way the teacher used Edmodo? Circle one: More / Less / Same. Comment:
3. Were you more or less motivated to come to class as a result of much of the class being on Edmodo? Circle one: Yes / No. Comment:
4. Did you feel you had more or less freedom in this class compared to a more traditional class? Circle one: More / Less / Same. Comment:
5. Did you feel that you had more or less flexibility to complete assignments because of Edmodo? Circle one: More / Less / Same. Comment:
6. Did you feel that you were more or less aware about your progress and grades in the class because of Edmodo? Circle one: More / Less / Same. Comment:
7. Did you feel that the assignments you completed in this class were relevant to your future? Circle one: Yes / No. Comment:
8. Did you feel that learning how to use Edmodo will help you with other challenges in the future? Circle one: Yes / No. Comment:

9. As a result of being on Edmodo, do you feel that you learned more, less, or about the same as you would have learned in a traditional classroom covering the same content? Circle one: More / Less / Same.

Comment:

10. Do you prefer an Edmodo classroom or a more traditional classroom?

Circle one: Edmodo / Traditional / No Preference. Comment:

11. Any other comments?

The students were informed in advance that their responses to the survey would be entirely anonymous, that their honest feedback was appreciated, and that the clarifying comments made about any of their responses would be valuable for the purposes of the research that was being conducted.

A copy of the grade book for both courses was also maintained by the researcher/instructor at the end of the course for the purpose of further examination as qualitative data. The grade book contained detailed information in regards to specific assignments and was copied and pasted from Edmodo. The students' individual grades were only a mouse-click away from the students as they worked on Edmodo using the progress link at the top of the page.

#### Treatment of the Data



Each of the items of qualitative data mentioned above was treated as a part of a larger narrative that was sought to understand the experience that the students had using Edmodo. The researcher/instructor sought to find recurring themes that related to the points of best practice discussed in Chapter Two of this project.

### Summary

This chapter of the project provided a description of the research methodology used in the study (qualitative, narrative) and a description of the participants, instruments used, research design, and procedures used. Further, details about the treatment of the data by the researcher/instructor were also provided.

## CHAPTER 4

### Analysis of the Data

#### Introduction

Based on the experience that the researcher/instructor had with Edmodo and based on the literature review conducted in Chapter 2 of this project, Edmodo seemed like an attractive option to use in a summer school alternative setting with high school students. To the researcher/instructor, there seemed to be a great deal of crossover between the needs that were found to be prevalent in alternative settings and the features that Edmodo offered that could potentially address those needs. For the duration of the summer school US History and English courses, the researcher/instructor used Edmodo as a social learning platform by which course curriculum was primarily delivered. The researcher/instructor collected a variety of qualitative data to develop a narrative and find a deeper understanding about whether or not using Edmodo in an alternative education setting would be a positive and educational experience for the students in the setting.

#### Description of the Environment

The research for this project took place at an alternative high school in eastern Washington during a one month period over the duration of a summer school session in 2013. The summer school program was in place largely to meet

the needs of students for credit retrieval. There were 12 students in a combined English course and 13 students in a US History course that were willing participants in the study. Four of the students were enrolled in both courses, so there were a total of 21 students whose experiences were studied. Of the students, 12 were male and nine were female. Six of the nine female students were teen moms. Students varied from 15-20 years of age. There were 19 days of summer school and each class lasted three hours long each day. The combined English class took place in the morning from 8:00 AM – 11:00 AM and the US History class took place from 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM. There were enough computers in the classroom for the students to have individual access.

### Research Question

Will the use of Edmodo in an alternative education setting be a positive and educational experience for the students in the setting?

### Results of the Study

The following is a compilation of the results gathered from the 11 question survey mentioned in Chapter Three of this project. The comments included were taken verbatim from the student surveys, from which no comment was omitted or edited. Of the 21 students whose experiences were studied, 16 chose to

participate in the survey. The five students that did not participate were absent during the day or time that the survey was administered.

1. Do you feel you had enough opportunity for one-on-one interaction with the teacher? YES (11), NO (5). Student Comments:

- Came in and was given a fair opportunity even though i was here late
- When I had a problem Mr. Fairfield helped me solve it.
- yes I kept on asking questions and I got along with him lol
- he was cool.

2. Did you feel more or less supported by the teacher in the classroom as a result of the way the teacher used Edmodo? MORE (9), LESS (4), SAME (3). Student Comments:

- I think we get more support by the teacher in a original classroom
- It gives me a view of all my progress it quick and easy and I can do thing s from anywhere anytime and get assignments in fast and safe.
- well I like how he would comment and tell us how he thought we did
- I felt supported lol I'm fine I'm still here.

3. Were you more or less motivated to come to class as a result of much of the class being on Edmodo? MORE (5), LESS (0), SAME (11). Student Comments:

- It made class feel more one on one and easier to sort through assignments  
not hauling papers and just having my laptop
- School is school.

4. Did you feel you had more or less freedom in this class compared to a more traditional class? MORE (12), LESS (0), SAME (4)

Student Comments:

- Because you can work in your own pace.
- was allowed to go at my own pace and the working environment would keep me going

5. Did you feel that you had more or less flexibility to complete assignments because of Edmodo? MORE (11), LESS (1), SAME (3). Student Comments:

- Like I said before it was very comfortable
- I thought it was easier

6. Did you feel that you were more or less aware about your progress and grades in the class because of Edmodo? MORE (9), LESS (3), SAME (4). Student Comments:

- I like just clicking and signing in once instead of waiting for servers to load and not knowing the assignments it was all in front of me with the directions and material
- I knew I was going to pass with good grades I just try my hardest to achieve the highest.

7. Did you feel that the assignments you completed in this class were relevant to your future? YES (14), NO (2). Student Comments:

- Yes I think we live in a technological age where I will need to be on the latest technology and getting rescourses from another world and not just books. I got better on my knowledge in geography and events that led to the great birth of MURECA
- it was stinking funn haha I enjoyed it videos were good after I was done I just listen to it again haha.

8. Did you feel that learning how to use Edmodo will help you with other challenges in the future? YES (14), NO (2). Student Comments:

- Like the last response it's always changing so I need to be on top of things
- Its just like a Facebook
- yes by how to the computer to make cool projects

9. As a result of being on Edmodo, do you feel that you learned more, less, or about the same as you would have learned in a traditional classroom covering the same content? MORE (6), LESS (1), SAME (9). Student Comments:

- I have more time and I can go back and review and not wait till after the teacher grades.
- idk I felt like I would learn about the same cuz we don't have enough time to learn everything in the book.

10. Do you prefer an Edmodo classroom or a more traditional classroom?

EDMODO (7), TRADITIONAL (5), NO PREFERENCE (4). Student Comments:

- I feel comfortable and like I can do more.

11. Any other comments? None.

An analysis of the survey data showed that 98 of the circled responses were positive toward Edmodo, 23 were negative, and 35 were neutral. An analysis of the student comments showed that 24 comments were positive toward Edmodo, one comment was negative, and two comments were neutral.

In the first interview conducted by the researcher/instructor, a student was chosen whose experiences seemed to mirror those of most of the students in the courses. When asked by the researcher/instructor about what worked for him in

the course, the student responded by stating that “Edmodo is a great way for me to learn.” When asked why, the first reason the student gave was that he could complete coursework “anywhere that there is an internet connection.” The student also stated that “being notified when an assignment is due or late” helped him stay organized and on top of his work. The student further stated that he liked how “the teacher walks around asking if anyone needs help on anything.” When asked what didn’t work for him in the course, the student responded by saying, “Nothing, everything was great.”

The researcher/instructor interviewed a second student that failed both the English and the US History courses to gain insight as what wasn’t working for this student in particular. Other than stating that he “didn’t like some of the assignments,” the student had overwhelmingly positive things to say about the use of Edmodo in the classroom. When asked what he liked about Edmodo, the student stated that he liked the freedom of being able to work independently, that completing assignments was easier because “the instructions and everything I needed was right on the computer,” and that he liked “the flexibility of being able to work from home.” When asked why he thought he didn’t pass the courses, the student responded by citing his absences and tardiness, stated that he “talked too much” while in class, and said that “he took full responsibility” for failing both courses. When asked if there was anything else the instructor could have done to help him be more successful, the student said that he didn’t think so.



A review of the grade book showed that three students did not pass the English course and that two students did not pass the US History course. One student that failed both courses simply stopped coming at one point during the third week of the courses and was not formally dropped from the courses. The researcher/instructor was not able to determine why. The experiences of the other student who failed both courses were cited in the previous paragraph. The other student who didn't pass the US History course had a death in his extended family that caused him to miss the final week of class.

An attempt by the researcher/instructor to monitor student engagement every hour was abandoned during the first week of data collection. The primary reasons for this were that the researcher/instructor frequently forgot to gather the data and the measures used to determine whether or not the students were engaged or not were not well-thought out prior to the attempts to record the data. Additionally, while pre-test and post-test data concerning the ability of students to identify U.S. States and U.S. Presidents demonstrated a great deal of growth, the researcher/instructor deemed that it was almost entirely irrelevant to the research question as such data was an extremely poor measure of whether or not an entire social learning platform was delivering an educational experience.

### Findings

On the basis of the qualitative data gathered, the evidence of the anecdotal data suggests that the use of Edmodo was a positive experience for the vast majority of the students in the alternative setting. Whether or not the experience was educational is inconclusive based on the data gathered.

### Discussion

Given the findings in Chapter Two of this study about best practice in alternative settings and the characteristics of the students that alternative settings serve, the researcher/instructor expected that use of Edmodo would be a positive and educational experience for students because it seemed to address a number of needs that were especially important for students deemed at-risk—particularly those related to creating a supportive environment, putting emphasis on one-on-one interactions between teachers and students, allowing opportunities for students success relevant to the students’ future, and allowing flexibility in structure and emphasis on student decision-making.

Having students work on Edmodo during class time allowed the researcher/instructor to frequently cycle through the room and provide students with one-on-one interaction and support. The one-on-one interaction and support was further enhanced by the researcher/instructor being able to provide near immediate feedback to students upon their submission of assignments. This manner of providing feedback allowed for a quick feedback loop to take place

between the researcher/instructor and the student until mastery of various tasks was achieved.

The researcher/instructor also found that in just the short time that he was able to spend with students over the course of the summer school session, students were willing to open up and share about their personal lives. As a result of the writing prompts that the students responded to on their Edublogs account, back and forth online discussions were initiated about absent fathers, divorce, domestic violence, and about drug and substance abuse. While the researcher/instructor anticipated that the students would be sharing personal experiences given the nature of the writing prompts, the high degree in which such sharing took place and the depth of the conversation that followed was unanticipated. This openness appeared to be enhanced by the students' willingness to express in writing what might have been difficult for them to share out loud. It appeared to the research/instructor that the students in this class had a clear and genuine need for validation that the researcher/instructor's use of Edmodo appeared to help satisfy. It remains unclear whether or not this is generalizable to all students in remedial alternative settings.

The students in the class also felt that they had a lot of freedom in the classroom to work at their own pace and on their own time. While there was concern by the researcher/instructor that such freedom might lead to students putting off work, falling behind in the course, and being disengaged during class

time, the students actually appeared to be more motivated and engaged during their time working on Edmodo than they were during the times in which other more traditional classroom activities were employed. The researcher/instructor attributes the reasons for this higher level of engagement primarily to two reasons: first, students appeared motivated to stay caught up with their assignments as extra credit extensions were provided to students that stayed caught up with the coursework; second, students appeared to be motivated by the immediacy in which the submission of their assignments would lead to feedback about their progress—on both the assignment itself as well as the impact on their overall grade. Also motivating to the student was the possibility that such feedback from the instructor could be of a personal nature and/or reaffirming of the student as an individual.

The flexibility that Edmodo offered in allowing students to get caught up after joining the class late or after absences was seemingly one of the greatest aspects of using Edmodo that was observed by the researcher/instructor. This important design feature was frequently cited by the students as being of great benefit to them. For students deemed at-risk, frequent absences can be a challenging obstacle to overcome. Such absences that took place over the duration of the summer school session resulted from court dates, having sick children, or not getting enough sleep the night prior. Through the use of Edmodo, the researcher/instructor was able to design the course in a way that would allow

for flexibility by putting soft deadlines on assignments and allowing students to complete coursework outside of class time. Students were observed to have frequently logged into Edmodo to complete assignments in the evenings and over the weekends.

Simply learning how to use Edmodo itself was seen by the students as a relevant and meaningful task. For students deemed at-risk, there has often been a prevailing attitude that school is disconnected from their everyday lives and futures. Edmodo addressed those needs by requiring students to learn twenty-first century skills that they needed to be successful in a society that is operating in an increasing digital environment.

While five of the twenty-five grades earned in the courses were failing grades, those five grades were represented by just three of the 21 students studied. In an alternative setting where the rate of academic failure had been far more prevalent (students were largely taking these summer classes to retrieve credits from classes that they had previously failed), the researcher/instructor felt that using Edmodo in the classroom helped students find success where they had previously been met with failure. By removing obstacles and mitigating factors that had previously led to academic failure, the researcher/instructor believed that students were able to more easily access academic content and accomplish the tasks necessary to demonstrate learning and earn a passing grade. While the survey response of 15 out of 16 students that they learned more if not as least as

much supports that finding, there is simply not enough quantifiable data to conclude that the students had a truly educational experience. The lack of quantifiable data is attributable to the inadequate methodology used by the researcher/instructor, but would have also been a byproduct of the small sample size with which the research/instructor was conducting his research.

### Summary

This chapter of the project introduced the reader to the nature and purpose of the qualitative data that was gathered in this study and described the environment in which that data was collected. The results of the data were shared and the researcher/instructor attempted to weave a narrative from the data to address the research question, which concerned whether or not the use of Edmodo in an alternative education setting would be a positive and educational experience for the students in the setting. Based on the overall analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher/instructor concluded that the use of Edmodo in an alternative education setting was a positive experience for the students in this setting, but in the absence of conclusive data it is beyond the scope of this research as to whether or not the experience was educational.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

It was apparent to the researcher/instructor that students deemed at-risk and placed in alternative settings had unique needs that came in addition to the needs of students in mainstream settings. The researcher/instructor sought to gain a better understanding of what those unique needs were for the purpose of being able to implement points of best practice aimed at addressing them. The researcher/instructor conducted research about the history of the alternative education movement, the key characteristics of alternative programs, the characteristics of the students that attend such programs, and whether or not alternative programs have addressed the needs of the students that have been in them.

After conducting this research, the use of Edmodo in the classroom appeared to the researcher/instructor to have the potential to meet the unique needs of students in alternative settings while at the same time addressing the need to provide all students with academically rich experiences that would prepare them for the present and the future. This project sought to explore whether or not that was in fact the case.

## Summary

The instructor/researcher sought to determine whether or not the use of Edmodo in an alternative education setting was a positive and educational experience for the students in the setting. In order to make this determination, the instructor/researcher considered different sorts of qualitative data including student blogs, interviews, grades, and an end-of-course survey. From this data, the researcher/instructor looked for themes and attempted to draw a narrative that encapsulated the experiences of the students involved in the study.

## Conclusions

From the research conducted in Chapter Two of this project, the researcher/instructor learned that the alternative movement began to give disaffected students an alternative choice from the mainstream, but that alternatives quickly became seen by school administrators as sites of remediation where they could send students deemed at-risk. In their attempts to remediate students, alternative schools have generally made worse the problems that they were intended to solve. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds have been the most likely to suffer as a result of such placement in alternative settings.

The researcher/instructor also found research that provided valuable information about the different types of alternative schools, their characteristics,



and the characteristics of the students they served. However, comprehensive research was lacking in regards to points of best practice for teachers working in alternative schools of remediation. Such points of best practice were based on anecdotal evidence and theory rather than thoroughly researched practices.

Based on an analysis of the qualitative data gathered by the researcher/instructor, the researcher/instructor concluded that the use of Edmodo in an alternative education was a positive and educational experience for the students served in the setting. This conclusion was reached after the researcher/instructor considered different sorts of qualitative data including student blogs, interviews, grades, and an end-of-course survey. The narrative that developed as a result of the data collected was overwhelmingly positive in regards to the overall experience that the alternative school students had.

### Recommendations

Based on the research conducted in Chapter Two of this study, the researcher/instructor is concerned about the trend in the alternative education towards schools of remediation and away from schools of choice. School administrators that are charged with structuring programs might consider the body of research that shows that schools of remediation exacerbate the academic and behavioral problems of the students that they are meant to serve.

Further, the researcher/instructor would recommend that more formal methods of measuring student outcomes be developed so that the progress or lack of progress for alternative school programs can be adequately measured. While it is true that more traditional methods of measuring academic outcomes (such as MAP and HSPE scores) would not be the barometer by which one ought to measure an alternative school that is focused on behavior remediation, it remains the case that many alternative schools have nothing more than anecdotal evidence to suggest that their programs are effective. While it would be difficult to find universal methods by which one could measure the effectiveness of the diversity of alternative programs that exist, the fact remains that comprehensive research in the field of alternative education is lacking. It is unfortunate that alternative education is being left behind at a time in which research-based practice is a driving force behind producing better student outcomes in the mainstream.

Finally, the researcher/instructor would recommend that alternative school administrators and instructors consider the potential of Edmodo as a means of delivering curriculum to students in alternative settings. While the research conducted for this project was conducted over a short period of time, students overwhelmingly responded positively to the experience that they had with Edmodo in the classroom—even in the cases in which students were using Edmodo up to six hours a day. While such heavy usage of Edmodo would most likely not be plausible over the course of an entire school year, it seems that its

usage by well-trained teachers would be a net positive to the alternative school experience for the vast majority of students enrolled in such programs.

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FACULTY APPROVAL

Tracking Student Experiences with Edmodo in a  
Remedial Alternative Education Setting

Approved for the Faculty

\_\_\_\_\_, Faculty Advisors

\_\_\_\_\_, Date



## ABSTRACT

This purpose of this project was to investigate whether or not the use of a social learning platform would be beneficial to students in a remedial alternative education setting. The social learning platform chosen was Edmodo and the experiences of 21 students were monitored over the course of two summer school classes. Qualitative data was gathered including student surveys, interviews, blog posts, and grades. On the basis of that data, the researcher/instructor came to the conclusion that using Edmodo was a positive experience for the students studied.

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