

Falloon, G. (2011). Making the Connection: Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance and its relevance to the use of a Virtual Classroom in Postgraduate Online Teacher. *Education Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 43(3), 187-209.

In this article Falloon uses the principles of Moore's Transactional Distance Theory to explore the effectiveness of a virtual classroom in an online teacher education course. The overall aim of the study was to explore student perceptions of the virtual classroom in terms of any impact they considered it made on their sense of Transactional Distance. The secondary aim of the study was to identify aspects that affected student engagement in the virtual classroom. An interpretative case study approach was taken and a range of data collection tools were utilised. Falloon discusses the findings under three separate headings illustrating points with sample student comments and concludes with the most relevant findings in terms of Moore's Transactional Distance framework.

In this comprehensive study Falloon provides adequate rationale for the use of Moore's Transactional Distance theory as a framework to study the effectiveness of virtual classroom technology, though concludes that the theory may need to be reviewed in light of the increasing use of digital technologies. He suggests that the structural element of the theory may need to be extended to those structural elements that are external to the course such as the virtual classroom itself and how synchronicity affects learner autonomy. Falloon identifies the aspects which impacted on effective dialogue as stemming from a lack of structure both within the course and externally. These aspects range from the purpose of use of the technology and the personal relevance for use to a lack of prior information being provided about modules and the absence of agendas. In addition students felt the classroom imposed a structure on their learning that affected their learner autonomy impacting on their ability to plan their learning to suit their own times and schedules. Lastly Falloon identifies technical and infrastructural issues as external structural issues that affected the level of dialogue.

This study highlights the need for structure to be present within online courses. My initial reaction is that too much structure may impact on engagement but it would seem that the online and synchronous characteristics of the virtual classroom environment dictate a higher level of structure is necessary to guide students on how to interact with each other and provide specific opportunities or procedures for communication. Like the previous

study Falloon refers to the lack of reflective time available to students in a synchronous virtual classroom but suggests that providing prior reading and agendas could improve this. Once again this article like the previous one is well written with a clear structure for the reader to follow. The findings are of particular importance for trainers dealing with learners who are new to the virtual classroom environment.