A Blended Faculty Development Program: Strengths of the Face-to-Face and Online Environments

Patti Dyjur, PhD

Purpose of the Study

- To investigate how the role of the learning community, both online and face-to-face, affected participants' approaches to learning in a blended faculty development program

The Program

- Course design program
- Three face-to-face (f2f) sessions, 4-6 hours in length, held one day per week for 3 consecutive weeks
- Online activities between f2f sessions
- Follow-up individual consultation

Research Questions

- How does the role of the f2f learning community affect the approach (deep or surface) taken by participants in the program?
- How does the role of the online learning community affect the approach (deep or surface) taken by participants in the program?

Deep and Surface Approaches to Learning

Deep Approach	Surface Approach
Understand new learning	Reproduce content and ideas
Relate new learning to previous knowledge	Try to minimize the work
Try to understand underlying meaning	Repeating information without adding anything new
Make connections	Accepting information passively
Intrinsically motivated	Extrinsically motivated

(Biggs & Tang, 2011; Entwistle & Waterston, 1988)

Research Design

- Case study approach
- Mixed methods:
    - Surveys
    - Interviews
    - Online discussion transcripts
    - Observation
- Methods of data analysis
    - Thematic coding
    - Descriptive statistics

Results

F2f learning community and a deep approach to learning:

- Clarified or reinforced concepts
    - Seeing how others completed tasks
    - Verbal clarification
    - Getting feedback
- Generated ideas
    - Brainstorming
    - Feedback
    - Approaches from other disciplines
- Felt a connection
    - Others experiencing same issues: "we're all in the same boat"
    - Connection across disciplines
- Felt inspired
    - Experienced instructors inspired newer ones
    - Energy was motivating

F2f learning community and a surface approach to learning:

- Discouraged involvement
    - Some in-class discussions were dominated by a few people

Online learning community and a deep approach to learning:

- Generated ideas
    - Brainstorming
    - Examining work of others
    - Get new perspectives
- Promoted critical thinking
    - More time for activities and at own pace
    - Permanent nature of discussions and feedback received

- Promoted reflection
  - Read comments multiple times
  - Time delayed feedback allowed for a bit of distance
  - Compare own work to that of others
- Encouraged equitable participation
  - Equal opportunity to participate asynchronously
  - Discuss topics of personal importance
- Impacted on f2f learning
  - Prompted people to complete work because they had to post it
  - Carry momentum between f2f sessions

Online learning community and a surface approach to learning:

- No themes
- Perhaps people who took a surface approach to online tasks did not bother to show up; therefore, the learning community did not have an impact

Recommendations

- F2f and online learning communities can both play important (but different) roles in participants' learning
  - F2f: Consider discussions, generating ideas, making connections
  - Online: Consider posting assignments and offering feedback, in-depth discussions
- Blended approach can help people to build relationships over time
- Cohort affects learning experience; use it strategically to promote a deep approach
- Programs should include application of concepts and ideas to personal context
- Be aware of participants who tend to dominate the conversation or topic selection

References

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for quality learning at university* (4th ed.). Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Dyjur, P. (2013). Face-to-face and online learning communities and their effect on deep and surface approaches to learning (Doctoral dissertation). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB.

Entwistle, N., & Waterston, S. (1988). Approaches to studying and levels of processing in university students. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 58(3*), 258-265.