

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

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Context of the Study

- Teaching in higher education is very demanding
- Ongoing faculty development can strengthen skills
- Learning community is thought to be beneficial
- Few studies on blended programs

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

References: 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 and Deep

- Four themes emerged from the 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, connection across disciplines
 - Felt inspired
 - Experienced instructors inspired newer ones, energy was motivating

Results: F2F and Surface

- F2f learning community and a surface approach to learning:
 - Discouraged involvement
 - Some in-class discussions were dominated by a few people

“At some points some participants were too loud. Even before the instructors were done they began talking. Almost taking over the whole thing. It was almost like the other voices were being drowned out. You know, we also have stuff to say and it’s not all about your discipline... I just feel like, oh come on, can you just let other people speak.”

Results: Online and Deep

- Five themes emerged from the online learning community and a deep approach to learning:
 - Generated ideas
 - Brainstorming, examining the work of others, get new perspectives
 - Promoted critical thinking
 - More time and own pace, permanent nature of discussions and feedback received

Online and Deep, cont.

- Promoted reflection
 - Read comments multiple times, time delayed feedback allowed for a bit of distance, compare work to that of others
- Encouraged equitable participation
 - Equal opportunity to participate asynchronously, discuss topics of personal importance
- Impacted on f2f learning
 - Prompted to complete work because it was posted, carry momentum between f2f sessions

Online and Surface

- No themes emerged from the online learning community and a deep approach to learning: Why?
- 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: Posting assignments and offering feedback, in-depth discussions
- Blended approach can help people to build relationships over time

Recommendations, cont.

- Programs should include application of concepts and ideas to personal context
- Cohort affects learning experience; use it strategically to promote a deep approach
- Be aware of participants who tend to dominate the conversation or topic selection

Your Thoughts

- Might the study be relevant in your work context?
- Are any of the recommendations applicable to your programs?

References

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- 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.