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

Patti Dyjur, PhD

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deep Approach</th>
<th>Surface Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand new learning</td>
<td>Reproduce content and ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate new learning to previous knowledge</td>
<td>Try to minimize the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try to understand underlying meaning</td>
<td>Repeating information without adding anything new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make connections</td>
<td>Accepting information passively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsically motivated</td>
<td>Extrinsically motivated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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


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.