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

<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>

(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
  o Read comments multiple times
  o Time delayed feedback allowed for a bit of distance
  o Compare own work to that of others
• Encouraged equitable participation
  o Equal opportunity to participate asynchronously
  o Discuss topics of personal importance
• Impacted on f2f learning
  o Prompted people to complete work because they had to post it
  o 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
  o F2f: Consider discussions, generating ideas, making connections
  o 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


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.