

Benefits and Limitations of Different Learning Formats

E-learning can be described as the use of a wide range of technology devices by students in an educational setting. It was once believed that the introduction of e-learning into the educational environment would eliminate the need for brick and mortar educational institutions (Guri-Rosenblit, and Gros, 2011). However, administrators and educators have determined that implementing e-learning is much more complex than expected, and the important roles of the teacher include designing meaningful lesson activities and selecting appropriate electronic formats that will produce the intended learning outcomes. Face to face, online learning, blended learning, and massive open online course formats all offer benefits to the learning experience when the limitations of these approaches are recognized.

Face to face learning allows teachers to develop a personal connection with their students. For example, Cox (2012) found that students were more engaged in lessons when the instructor provided personal anecdotes about experiences working as a former journalist. Students participated in discussions and asked questions about the many adventures that the instructor shared with them. The students became engaged in the lesson, and the personal surfing online and checking updates on social networking sites, which was once a distraction, suddenly disappeared. One disadvantage of face to face discussions is the interactions are synchronous, so reflection time can be a minimal. When students are given activities in which they can spend more time on reflection, the learning effect size can be greater (Curtis and Lawson, 2001).

With the implementation of one to one devices in the K-12 environment, online learning methodologies are embedded in the instructional design of the classroom. For example, online discussions allow students to interact with fellow classmates and provides students with extra time to reflect upon their thoughts before responding in forums as compared to traditional face to

face interactions. Online learning technologies offer increased learning opportunities for students who need flexible learning schedules and are separated geographically from academic institutions (Kiraly, 2010). For example, people who work full-time are now afforded the opportunity to attend college through classes offered completely in an online environment through a learning management system. Disadvantages of online learning occur when educators create lessons that do not take advantage of collaborative and effective online tools.

Blended learning approaches can help leverage the advantages of both face to face and online learning environments. However, unless the school or teacher has established a clear vision and understands the potential it has to offer, blended learning approaches could come and go before the true advantages are realized (Strauss, 2012). The blended learning instructional model usually incorporates a learning management system that delivers a wide range of courses for students and instructional programs for teachers. For example, Castleberry ISD currently utilizes the Canvas learning management system to provide professional development to teachers for a more flexible and personalized experience.

Learners that are self-motivated may choose to enroll in a massive open online course, or MOOC. This format offers open learning in which learners can take advantage of ongoing learning their entire lifetime. Large numbers of participants enable a vast array of expert knowledge to be shared among participants. The downfall is that completing the course is self-regulated and participants may not be self-motivated to complete the course.

It is important to acknowledge that the learning format is only one aspect to consider when designing instruction. Understanding how to use the learning format in an effective way is the key to improving instruction and learning (Kiraly, 2010).

References

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