

Chapter 15

Exploring Online Learning Through Synchronous and Asynchronous Instructional Methods

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ABSTRACT

Teaching and learning in the online environment are challenging. Students and instructors must employ technological tools and strategies to be successful. Merely having a computer and software does not equate to being technologically literate in the 21st century world of work. Learning how to incorporate virtual reality games, webcams, video conferencing, and brainstorming platforms such as Padlet, Bubbl.us, Zoom, Twitter, Instagram, interactive whiteboards, chat rooms, YouTube, and screencasting videos is encouraged. Polleverywhere, Socrative, and Flubaroo are a few assessments to investigate interest by examining the world of synchronous and asynchronous learning environments. The digital natives of today's classrooms are the future employees of tomorrow's real-life world of work; therefore, organizations must take control of the situation and prepare workers to meet future job demands. The question of how to do so effectively will be answered in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The classroom environment for students in the 21st century differs from classroom environments in the 20th century. Some students now attend all or part of their classes online. The instructor need not stand before a group of students to lecture, disseminate questions for homework, and dismiss the students. In a virtual environment, students and teachers use technology to transfer teaching and learning (Hall, 2012).

BACKGROUND

In 2017, one third of the students in colleges and universities reported taking a class online, and 15.4% of students were enrolled entirely online (Lederman, 2018). During the 2014-15 school year, 2.7 million K-12 students were estimated to have been enrolled in digital learning (Herold, 2017). Some states require students to enroll in at least one online class to earn their high school diploma. The question is how might schools, colleges, and universities maximize teaching and learning so all students reach their potential? The pedagogy of online learning versus face-to-face learning is and continues to be a concern for many K-12 and post-secondary educators, particularly student academic preparedness, maturity level, and study skill acquisition (Hall, 2012).

Online teachers must redefine their teaching and learning roles and switch from a disseminator of knowledge to facilitator of learning (Wiesenberg & Stacey, 2008) shared the following:

Given the expanding interest and demand for online learning, coupled with the results of studies showing that higher levels of learning are not easily achieved in online courses, there is an imperative to advance our understanding of how to facilitate effective online learning activities (p. 121).

In the online environment, the responsibility for learning and success shifts from the teacher to the student. Teachers are facilitators and guides (Berge, 2009; Salmon, 2004; Smith, 2005). Teachers are supporters, resource teachers, and guides who supply students with the tools needed to be successful.

Teachers must prepare well-planned syllabi and produce clear instructor policies consisting of rules and expectations. The online students must carefully read and synthesize syllabi and policies. "Reading the documents several times, highlighting pertinent information such as assignment due dates, and examining assignment criteria and rubrics are most important" (Hall, 2012, p.2). If a student is unclear of teacher expectations, the student must seek clarification from the instructor. A syllabus quiz provided by Flubaroo or by Google Forms is one formal assessment instructors can use to determine student understandings of course information explicitly outlined in the syllabus during the beginning of a course. Of importance for students is to note is that online instructors are bound by institutional policies they must follow, which may lessen the flexibility for things such as late assignments and personal emergencies.

According to Berge (2009) successful institutions and school systems that embark on establishing online teaching and learning environments encourage and support teamwork. A sense of community can be fostered by encouraging students to work in teams or groups to engage, discuss, and complete projects (Hall, 2012). Through team assignments, students learn how to lead and learn how to follow. The online classroom is one more teaching and learning environment available to help foster learning.

Information literacy is a skill required to acquire knowledge. Information literacy is the ability to search for and locate information, to evaluate and comprehend the information when located, and, most

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