

Chapter 27

Successful Strategies in the Online Learning Environment Based on Theories, Styles, and Characteristics

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ABSTRACT

With the continuous increase in online student enrollment, it is important to examine the learning/teaching process in the online learning environment in order to develop the most effective model in this unique environment. This chapter will explore various e-learner and e-educator styles and teaching strategies in the online environment. Theories and an evaluation of their appropriateness in an online learning environment will be presented. The impact of learning styles, social styles, decision styles, and generational styles in the online learning environment will be analyzed. Additionally, there will be a discussion of the characteristics and traits of the successful e-learner, successful e-educator, and successful course and curriculum design model based on specific theories and styles.

INTRODUCTION

For years there has been an attempt to identify the ideal learning/teaching model. Knowledge transfer, understanding, and retention are important aspects of every educational experience. As researchers, a drive has always existed to dissect the learning/teaching process in order to develop the most effective model of learning/teaching. With the continuous increase in e-learning student enrollment, it is important to examine the

learning/teaching process in the online learning environment in order to develop the most effective model. E-learner enrollment more than doubled from 1.6 million in 2002 to 3.94 million in 2007 (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

Today a new classroom exists; in fact, there may not even be a classroom. In the 2006-2007 academic year, 66% of the 4,160 Title IV degree-granting postsecondary institutions offered distance education courses (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). This number is projected to continue to increase. Online learning via the Internet offers exciting opportu-

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nities for both learning and teaching. However, this new online learning environment demands a re-evaluation of designing the most effective learning/teaching model.

One attempt at better understanding the learning/teaching model is the consideration of various e-learner and e-educator styles. Learning styles have been considered in designing curriculum for many years. Although there are various definitions of learning styles, Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre (1974) defined learning styles as an individual's inherited foundation, particular past life experience and the demands of the present environment that emphasize some learning abilities over others. While there has been much controversy, learner and teacher understanding of learning styles may influence the learning/teaching process.

Several other style analyses, typically used in psychology and management, may be beneficial when attempting to design the most effective learning/teaching model for the online environment. Research supports (Edelstein & Edward, 2002; Funk, 2007) the need for collaboration and interaction in the online environment. Social styles are defined as "a pervasive and enduring pattern of interpersonal behaviors" (Bolton & Bolton, 1984, p. 3). Understanding personal social styles and social styles of others is based on behavior rather than personality and may improve communication and teamwork in the online environment. Social styles may explain the behavior when interacting with others in an online course. Decision styles are based on risk-taking, locus of control, tendency to procrastinate, impulsiveness, emotion control, and confidence. Understanding the decision-making style of online educators and online students may present opportunities to improve the learning/teaching model. Generational learning styles may be another source of information for the e-educator and e-learner and refers to understanding the course and curriculum design expectations based on the environment a person has experienced in their lifetime.

In addition to new learning environments, today's learner has been influenced by the many technology advancements. Teaching models and student expectations have been transformed by these advancements. Technology advancements have also had an impact on the skills that employers are demanding from employees. As a result, it is necessary to determine the essential factors and tools that will assist in designing the most effective teaching/learning model for the online learning environment.

This chapter will explore various e-learner and e-educator styles and effective teaching strategies in the online environment. A historical view of theories and an evaluation of their appropriateness in an online learning environment will be presented. Andragogy, Heutagogy, Constructivism, Connectivism, and Metacognition will be included in the discussion. The impact of learning styles, social styles, decision styles, and generational styles in the online learning environment will be analyzed. Additionally, there will be a discussion of the characteristics and traits of the successful e-learner, successful e-educator, and successful course and curriculum design. Furthermore, future trends will be included.

BACKGROUND

Growth of the Online Learning Environment

In a study by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities – Sloan National Commission on Online Learning (Sloan-C, 2009) more than one-third of public university faculty have taught an online course. In addition, almost 64% of faculty reported that online teaching requires additional effort to develop and teach than face-to-face (F2F) teaching. E-learning student enrollment has more than doubled since 2002 from 1.6 million to 3.94 million in 2007. Based on responses from over 2,500 colleges and universities, 88% expect

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