Learning: Investigating Small Group Culture in a Blended Learning Environment

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**Abstract:**

Higher education institutions are embracing various educational delivery modes that extend beyond traditional face-to-face classrooms. Many of these models are comprised of online teaching formats that have provided varying levels of success for today’s learner. This research is focused on the culture of interaction among cohort peers, specifically the non-intentional learning, that results in a professional graduate program where instruction takes place in a blended learning environment. The aim is to capture both the individual and the group’s perspective on the learning. This investigation will required a modified methodology. This poster serves to explore a methodological procedure that would include both semi-structured individual interviews woven within Schein’s cultural assessment procedure.

**Research Questions:**

Does the social involvement among the members of a cohort create or influence learning in a blended learning environment?

Sub-Questions:

- How does the cohort’s experience influence a student’s progress through the program?
- Does the cohort experience influence a student’s participation in the wider professional community as a student and as an alum a year after graduation?
- What phenomenon is taking place (as it pertains to learning) within this blended educational delivery model?

**Importance of Research:**

1. Adds to the body of blended learning research beyond best practices approaches.
2. Explores informal learning among peers in professional graduate education.
3. Explores the phenomenon of learning in a cohort and the culture created.

**Modified Methodology**

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

- Take a moment to remember back to when you were a student in the MLS program. Tell me what it was like moving through your coursework with the same group of students?
- What were the benefits of studying in a cohort system?
- What were the weaknesses of studying in a cohort system?
- Describe a class project you worked on with a group. What role did you play in the group?
- What affected your learning?
- Beyond the assignment goals, was there more that you learned from your interactions?
- Now go back to that very project and your group members. Did you want to work with any of your members again?
- Besides the course assignments, were there other times that the cohort interactions influenced your learning while in the program?
- In what ways, if any, has the cohort experience influenced you as an information professional?
- Are you currently in contact with any of your cohort peers?
- How, in what manner, and why?

**Cultural Assessment Process**

1. Obtaining Leadership Commitment
2. Selecting Groups for Self-Assessment
3. Selecting an Appropriate Setting for the Group Self-Assessment
4. Explain the purpose of the Group Meeting
5. A Short Lecture on How to Think About Culture
6. Eliciting Descriptions of the Artifacts
7. Identifying Espoused Values
8. Identifying Shared Underlying Assumptions
9. Identifying Cultural Aids and Hindrances
10. Decisions on Next Steps

**Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>Conduct Interview &amp; Cultural Assessment</td>
<td>Transcribe</td>
<td>Code &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>Write</td>
<td>Defend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theoretical Frameworks:**

- *Phenomenology*
- *Grounded Theory*
- *Organizational Culture*

**Key Literature Topics:**

- Cohort Model
- Higher Education Cohort Programs
- Blended Learning
- Learning Theory
- Aspects of Cohort Experience on the Influence of Informal Learning
- Communities of Practice
- Aspects of Learning and Functions of Online Learning Communities
- Communication & Small Group Dynamics in the Cohort Learning Experience
- Culture of a Cohort as a Learning Organization

**Analysis:**

- Researcher analysis for Semi-Structured Interview
- Group analysis through their cultural assessment

**Methodology:**

- Semi-Structured Interview with written response
- Schein’s Cultural Assessment - Group reflection and discussion brings about a discovery of their culture. The personal interview and group assessment: woven together & facilitated over the Internet in a synchronous platform.