

A Summary of : A study of Critical Learning Incidents in a Traditional Classroom and an Asynchronous Learning Network

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**If we teach today, like we taught yesterday, We rob our students of the future.
John Dewey**

America has approached education as the means to success; therefore, it is important that the widest access to its educational institutions be provided for its people. College students will soon face a new landscape as the delivery of educational services on-line (OL) becomes an integral part of higher education. In addressing the question, *How, if at all, does in-person reporting of critical learning incidents differ as compared to the reporting of critical learning incidents by asynchronous On-line (OL) students taking the same course with the same instructor?*, it was important to understand what was going on with the students' and instructor's perception of the class in each venue. To establish references, the instructor prepared a pre/posttest that asked the students to rate their knowledge of key topics to be covered which provides insights that will allow the reader to see how the students recalled and reported their critical learning incidents (CLI) from the course in the two venues. During the 8week course, the traditional class (TC) met two times a week on Monday and Wednesday. The researcher conducted interviews by phone after the Thursday class was completed and prior to the next week's scheduled class. Both sections were required to have assigned work posted to their respective Web discussion forum by Friday afternoon. Open-ended questions were used during the interview allowing the researcher to monitor any transformative or reflective learning that the student reported. The researcher obtained critical incidents during the course of instruction from the TC participants, or, in the case of the on-line class (OLC) participant, during the course of engagement of the material OL and any correspondence conducted with the instructor.

At the class start date, the instructor provided the researcher with a list of preregistered students--27 for the TC and 21 for the OLC. Twenty (87%) of the TC completed the course with a total of 10 As, 6 Bs, 3 Cs, and 1 D. Fourteen (65%) of the OLC completed the course with a total of 12 As, 1 B and one incomplete. Fifteen students in the TC and 16 students in the OLC initially agreed to participate. Ten did not participate due to varying reasons. A total of 21 completed the study with 10 in the TC and 11 in the OLC. This study confirmed results found in many previous studies in that there were no differences in performance between the two groups when comparing grades and GPAs. However, this does not necessarily indicate "No Differences" in student learning. The reporting of critical learning incidents provided more insights into what the real differences are between the traditional and asynchronous learning venues. For instance, none of the OLC asked for clarification or contacted the instructor to expand upon any of the material. Additionally, none of the students corresponded with other members of the class.

It makes sense to associate learning with the reporting of what the student deems to be a CLI. Often additional probing questions were asked to determine if the incident was a CLI. While details about a reported student's CLI were not solicited, further review of the transcribed interviews disclosed that there was more specific detail about the various learning incidents reported by the TC than the OLC. To identify this more clearly, Table 1 on the following page shows the key topics taken from the pre/posttests prepared by the instructor and they are noted as mentioned or described in detail by the students in both study groups.

how engaging his lectures were, or how he remained neutral about any particular point of view during the lectures and discussions. The OLC did acknowledge interest and appreciation for the material, but for the most part, they saw the OLC as a way to work and squeeze in one more required subject for graduation without being tied down to a particular class meeting time that would interfere with their work or other priorities. The reporting of the critical learning incidents by the students shows the difference between the breadth of material covered by the OLC versus the depth of the issues covered by the TC during class discussion. However, even though the OLC did not report more detailed explanations in their recalling of critical learning incidents than the TC, the OLC reported the same increase in knowledge as the TC in the pre/posttests.

The CLI applied in this study provided true insights into the individuals in both venues of instruction. Without this qualitative information, this study would have only confirmed the findings of previous studies regarding performance and very few insights into the issues addressed in this study. However, when addressing performance between TC and other learning situations, such as OLC or other distance formats, studies need to make sure that both groups are starting from the same point or at least establish what these points are. The students and instructor that were included in this study and their candor during the interviews provided the sapience required to answer the research question and provided insights into mediating variables. Further applications of this technique can provide answers to many questions rising out of the rush to incorporate technology into education. It is important for advocates of both venues researched in this study to discuss and continue to research the issues that arise out of new approaches to learning in a manner that examines both the positive and negative aspects. This will stimulate the research which ultimately equates to better education techniques and more enlightened students. The application of the CLI disclosed the difference in regards to how much depth the TC could recall versus the generalities that the OLC discussed when reporting critical learning incidents (Sarkozi, 2001). Consequently, there needs to be more research into the depth versus breadth issue and perhaps associate the two issues with longer-retention studies. How much of the information can the TC recall after six months or a year about the subject matter as compared to the amount of information recalled by the OLC would be an important area to research further. Additionally, trying to compare TC's to OLC's may be the wrong approach. While not new, the infusion of new forms of technology is just beginning in higher education and should be recognized as a separate approach to educating students. While there is no demand for clarification and a lack of requests from the student for the instructor to expand upon the material, perhaps the better approach may be to address the interaction between the OLC and the material covered and explore the extent to which the learner finds new ideas and develops new knowledge.

References

Sarkozi, Gary, W. (2001) A study of student and instructor interaction, performance, and critical learning incidents in a traditional classroom and in an asynchronous learning network, Doctoral Dissertation, Richmond, VA. Virginia Commonwealth University.

The complete data and information for this summary may be found in Author's Doctorial Dissertation at Virginia Commonwealth University