

## ABSTRACT

### THE LEARNER AND THE EXPERT MENTOR, LEARNERS AND A FACILITATOR, PEER FACILITATED LEARNING: A COMPARISON OF THREE ONLINE LEARNING DESIGNS

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This mixed method study addressed the question: Which online learning design - constructing knowledge one-on-one with an expert mentor, constructing knowledge with peers and a facilitator, or constructing knowledge with peers alone - most positively impacts learners' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge outcomes?

Participants were 46 graduate students in the Integrating Technology in Schools (ITS) program at GMU. Participants were enrolled in Technology and Leadership, a three-credit course designed to explore the relationship of leadership, change, and technology advocacy.

The treatment was the 10-week, online portion of the course. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups. In Group 1, learners constructed knowledge in collaboration with an expert mentor. The learner and mentor conducted a dialogue, via email, concerning the course materials, reflections, and the creation of the Personal

Leadership Plan (PLP). In Group 2, groups of learners constructed knowledge in collaboration with peers and an online facilitator. Students in this group discussed assignments and readings using a discussion forum. Group 3 was comprised of groups of learners and an instructor. In this group, learners constructed knowledge in collaboration with peers alone. Communication among the peers was via discussion boards. The instructor did not participate in discussions but served as a manager for their group.

To assess the effect of the designs for online learning, surveys were given to the participants before and after the treatment. Pozner and Kouzes' Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) was used to assess the participants' leadership skills. Chang & Fisher's Web-Based Learning Environment Inventory (WEBLEI) was also given pre and post treatment to assess students' perceptions of online learning. Participants also completed individual Personal Leadership Plans. These plans were assessed using rubrics.

Finally, selected participants were interviewed at the completion of the treatment. Transcripts were analyzed for information about the participants' reflections on their attitudes and beliefs concerning leadership as well as their online learning experiences.