Matthew Brue
Article Summary #4

Online Learning Revealing the Benefits and Challenges
Brittany Gilbert - April 2015

The article I chose to review explores whether high school students could benefit from online courses and examines the potential challenges and drawbacks of online coursework. It goes on to review questions on how to best support high school students enrolled in an online course. The first section on the paper defines what online learning is and why it has such an appealing range to learners.

In the literature review, the author points out how critical the understanding of online learning is, and that there is not a single description that would encompass all assets of online learning environments. The Department of Education conducted the "Distance Education Courses for Public Elementary and Secondary School Students" survey in 2002-03 school year to gain insight into the prevalence of distance learning in public school districts. The findings revealed that approximately one -third or 5,500 out of a total of 15,040 public school districts had at least one student enrolled in a distance learning course during the 2002-03 school year (Setzer & Lewis, 2005). In 2009-10, the number of public school districts offering distance education courses rose to an estimated 53 percent (Institute of Educational Sciences, 2014).

The article stated that distance learning is far more widely used in postsecondary educational settings, and there were statistics to prove that this is true. Online learning seems to appeal to diverse populations of students with ranging academic needs that traditional education classes are incapable of meeting. It has much more flexible learning environments for learners who might have phobias linked to the more concrete environment of the traditional school setting.

The next paragraph explores the various advantages of the online learning format. The benefit of flexibility in online courses cannot be overstated. Online learning allows for students to

work at a time and a place that is compatible with their learning needs. Another major benefit

the article stated was the accessibility it allows students. One student went on to state, "I can

take classes that my school doesn't offer, and I can work when I have free time or a lighter

homework load in my school classes" (Thomson, 2010). It also went on to state the importance

of feedback, which is an area that both instructors and students stressed as being vital to

success in an online course.

The following article covered the drawbacks and potential issues that students may face

while participating in an online course. One factor that is frequently examined is the

development of community and peer interaction in a traditional classroom setting compared to

an online learning environment. Literature suggests that a strong and active social life on

campus can be important to learning satisfaction.

The last couple sections went through the design and data collection stages of the

research project. It explained the participant population and enrollment numbers of the course.

Next, It explained that researchers' stance in this study was to observe and interview the

participants. Then the researcher analyzed the data and gave us the results of the study. Lastly,

it wrapped up with the conclusion and future study.

Article Reflection/Application

I think this article does a great job of indicating that the benefits of online coursework

outweighs the challenges that students face. I think it's important to note that the sample size of

this study was particularly small and all of whom were enrolled in the same course, under the

same instructor. This could skew the results in certain ways. It might be interesting to see further

research on a larger scale, involving more students, professors, and online courses. Analyzing

these various variables may offer more insight as to the type of content that is more suitable for

an online environment. Also, the study does not take into account the different types of

instructional methods of the online instructor. If you were to broaden the population, this would allow for more insight on student ability. I think this applies to me and my classroom because it gives me concrete evidence to why and how online courses offer such an excellent way for students to broaden their educational opportunities. It allows students to stay competitive in the ever evolving world of education. Especially for high school students who are about to enter the world of college. In college, some of the classes they need to take so they can graduate might only be offered online. If they have some background in online education before they get to college, they will understand the need to be self-motivated, independent, and responsible. Not to mention, they will have a leg up because they know how online classes typically work and what's expected of them. In summary, after reading this article, I think the last sentence does a good job of summarizing the whole study. "Online learning has the ability to disassemble barriers that have been constructed by poverty, location, disability, as well as other factors." There are no limitations from online learning, it doesn't restrict you to being in a certain place at a certain time. It allows you that flexibility to learn when and where is convenient for you.