

Hrastinski, S. (2008). Asynchronous and Synchronous e-learning. *Educause Quarterly* 4, 51-55

In this study Hrastinski suggests that improvements in technology have led to the growing popularity of synchronous e-learning and comments that while organisations are interested in implementing both asynchronous and synchronous e-learning they have limited understanding of the benefits of each mode. The study is an analysis of synchronous and asynchronous discussions in online seminars with students studying at master's level. Analysis of the discussions indicate asynchronous e-learning leads to cognitive participation indicating increased reflection and an ability to process information while synchronous e-learning promoted personal participation which led to an increase in psychological arousal and motivation. Hrastinski suggests the findings demonstrate that asynchronous and synchronous e-learning complement each other and the implication for instructors is to ensure they take advantage of both types of e-learning in ways that benefit learning.

To provide the reader with some background to the topic Hrastinski opens the article by defining both types of e-learning. He continues by providing full details of the groups involved and how the research was conducted. Although the study analyses the content of the discussions Hrastinski also conducted interviews to understand student opinions. The results of the analyses are presented in a table which allows the reader to compare the types of discussion that took place in each environment. Hrastinski uses the statistics and the data from the interviews to outline the benefits and limitations of each mode of e-learning before drawing his conclusions. He acknowledges that the media investigated in the article have transformed the focus from e-learners as individuals to e-learners as social participants. He suggests that the move to web 2.0 will lead to new ways of collaborating online and the challenge will be to critically study the benefits and limitations of emerging types of asynchronous, synchronous and hybrid e-learning.

This study took place in 2008 and looks only at online asynchronous and synchronous discussions. However the findings are replicated in other later studies such as that carried out by Falloon. The research indicates no one type is better than the other, they facilitate different types of discussion and as suggested in the webinar facilitated by Lewis are suited

to different pedagogical approaches. Whilst this study suggests both modes complement each other Clarke and Kwinn take it a step further and illustrate how when used together asynchronous e-learning may be harnessed to extend the benefit of synchronous e-learning and vice versa.