

Big Picture Learning Model: An Alternative Learning Style

Assignment #1 EDTC804 Global Issues in ET Leadership

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The traditional learning model has lost its touch to engage students in the learning process. Priest, Rudenstine, and Weisstein (2012) point out “the traditional system of moving students to the next grade level after nine months of school seems less relevant each year” (Executive summary, p. II). The role of education is to create an atmosphere where students want to learn and to engage in the curriculum offered. Alternative education setting is a growing appeal to address the increasing demands of unique types of learners who feel the traditional approach is not sufficient for them.

The Big Picture Learning (BPL) is a form of an alternative learning environment that is receiving increasing attention. According to co-founders, Elliot Washor and Denis Littky in 1995, the goal of encouraging change in the education of students to better prepare them for the real world challenges. (Alger, 2016, p.2)

BPL model concept has aspects of pragmatic dimension emphasized by Arnove (2013) of the comparative education. The pragmatic dimension is about studying other societies to learn what works well for them and why to find out the reasons behind the achievements and see if the borrowed concepts can bring success translations to the learning environment. (Arnove, 2013, p.7) The BPL model addresses the need of the diverse body of students, whereas, the traditional approach of preparing studying materials for students to achieve high scores for standardized tests fail to address the students’ needs. Many universities are looking beyond the standardized tests as a form of admission, evaluating the candidates on a holistic approach. Simon (2015) explains “there is no significant difference in graduation rates between submitters and nonsubmitters” from a published study done by Hiss in 2014. (para. 5) Hiss’s

data also reveals “nonsubmitters are from first-generation-to-college enrollees, underrepresented minorities and students with learning difference” (Simon, 2015, para. 5).

Alger (2016) explains New York State Educational System is “offering students who perform low on achievement tests, fail to thrive or engage in a traditional setting, and the risk of dropping out to complete their secondary education in an alternative learning environment” (p.1). Alternative learning environment like BPL success lies on the focus of student-centered learning, involves learning opportunities in nontraditional environments through field works and internship programs, many feedbacks from mentors, and the support of the community to provide additional resources for the students to further develop and grow their professional plans. (“Big Picture Learning Start or Transform a School,” n.d.)

An essential characteristic of the BPL model is to have a strong foundation whether it will be resources or the support of the community to enhance students’ personal and academic development and progress. Arnove’s (2013) scientific dimension reflects in the firm foundation; he explains the correlation between education and the effects of the societal variables. (p.5) The support from the community plays a significant role in the successful implementation of the BPL model, learning is best when they are learning about phenomena that intrigue them, and the best method to explore these phenomena are through the support of out of school mentors in our society who are expert and have extensive knowledge in their respective fields. Students learn best when they study topics that have an interest to them. They become more engaged when learning in a real-world environment. They find purposeful meaning for concept explored and explained.

The success of BPL in the United States is spreading across to other countries including India and Israel. (“Big Picture Learning International, ”n.d.) Arnove (2013) articulates learning is a global phenomenon due to the economics of globalization, the need to prepare students to be ready for the global workforce. (p. 9) Educators want to make sure their students have opportunities available beyond their home boundaries. The implementation challenges included the lack of tools to assess and monitor student performance, especially when the students learning are custom tailored to their interests. Technology is the platform to bridge the gap of the scarce resources.

“BPL is successfully serving students, while also identifying gaps that may improve through professional development” (“Big Picture Learning Influence,” n.d.). This alternative learning method is filling in the gap where traditional learning approach is failing to enhance the engagement of student learning. The ultimate goal is to have students take ownership of learning, develop and master skills helpful for their future endeavors.

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