

Chapter 7

Blended Learning: Bringing the Idea to Life and What Does It Mean for Faculty and Administrators?

Mark B. Russell
Khalifa University, UAE

Irene M. Y. Woon
National University of Singapore, Singapore

Stylianos Hatzipanagos
King's College London, UK

ABSTRACT

Blended Learning should be a deliberately-designed and pedagogically-informed endeavour. Blended Learning integrates (blends) face-to-face learning environments with online learning environments so that learning can occur anyplace and anytime and can transcend the physical boundaries of traditional face-to-face settings. Moving towards successful blended learning does not happen by chance. It requires educational leadership and a supportive change management strategy. Such a strategy should include a vision for innovation, plans for diffusing the innovations and the provision of advice and guidance to faculty and administrators. The chapter offers examples of what is possible through the genre of 'Cluster Scenarios' and explores some implications for adopting a blended learning strategy for faculty and administrators.

INTRODUCTION

Good education is a deliberately and purposefully designed endeavour that often combines artistry and creativity with our emerging understanding of the science of learning. Moreover, good education is brought about by being evidence-informed, reflective and exploitative of the affordances of the various learning environments. Indeed, in the 21st century, good education surely transcends the traditional interactions of face-to-face instruction that typically occurs in lecture theatres.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2548-6.ch007

Blended Learning

Given technology is having an ever increasing impact on the daily lives of many people, it will be of little surprise that technology is affecting the education sector too. Arguably, student learning can now be motivated, supported and enhanced by maximising the benefits of the more traditional and conventional learning environments, (for instance lecture theatres, seminar rooms and laboratory spaces), and blend and/or replace those traditional interactions with additional interactions now made possible via online learning environments. Such an approach is often referred to as Blended Learning¹. Institutions increasingly embrace blended learning, as the claim is that a blended approach meets learning and organizational goals and can satisfy a return on expectations (Pankin et al, 2012). Deliberations have considered what this entails in terms of adoption and implementation (Porter et al, 2014). For example, blended learning is used as learning quality enhancement in various disciplines, by employing approaches such as the flipped classroom paradigm (Hsieh et al 2016) and established academic practice strategies like that of peer observation of teaching which are reinvented and reconceptualised in the blended learning environment (Hatzipanagos, 2016)

To transit from a traditional face-to-face learning environment to a blended learning environment within Higher Education institutions and to reap the often noted benefits of educational enhancement necessitates oversight of a blended learning strategy² along with fit-for-purpose, easy to use technologies and a supportive change management process.

The change management process should include a rationale and adoptable (and adaptable) ideas for busy faculty members to understand and readily implement. Such ideas, even within a blended learning environment, should remain focused on education and student learning and not on the technology *per se*. Technology should be presented as an enabler to better student learning, not the driver.

Administrators will need to ensure that a coherent blended learning strategy takes account of the readiness of the institution for a blended learning endeavour, is actionable and can be properly resourced. For example, resource is required to purchase, develop, deploy and support the needed technologies as well as support staff with the transition. Educators, in a blended learning context, will need to add to their Pedagogic and Content knowledge, a Technological Knowledge. Such leads to the TPACK Framework as espoused by Mishra and Koehler (2006).

This chapter, therefore, starts by introducing a technology enhanced learning continuum, a continuum that extends from being *technology void* through to being *technology rich*. In presenting the continuum, the authors highlight some of the implications for students, faculty members and administrators. The chapter progresses and outlines a relevant pedagogic background and subsequently introduces the idea of Cluster Scenarios. These scenarios are activity-based, link in-class interactions to out-of-class interactions and are related to some potential pedagogic needs (and aspirations) of faculty members. In doing so, the Cluster Scenarios are offered to show what is possible and could gainfully feature as important part of a blended learning strategy. The chapter extends the notion of the Cluster Scenarios and offers three examples of module³-wide blended learning and explores the implications both for educators and administrators.

BACKGROUND

Remaining with the themes of good education, briefly alluded to in the Introduction, the authors take a lead from numerous influences. For instance, curriculum design should be cognisant of the educational objectives (Intended Learning Outcomes) and ensure that the teaching and assessment is aligned with

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