

Chapter 2

The Definition of Blended Learning in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Through the beginning of the millennium, the education environments have witnessed the introduction of information technologies and new pedagogies. Especially, the extensive use of Internet technologies as well as the networked learning made it possible to design and utilize new generation learning environments that are realistic, authentic, and engaging. By means of educational developments, alternative content delivery techniques or technologies have been implemented into the teaching environments throughout the years. In an effort to capitalize on the advantages of instructional delivery modalities and minimize the disadvantages, scholars started to combine the most functional elements of the instruction in these learning environments and that is universally called as 'Blended Learning'. Although the blended learning as an instruction model has an increasing interest in the field of higher education, it is still in its infancy. The definitions of blended learning in the literature needs to be clarified or collocated for the readers, who would like to deal with blended learning in any level of instruction. Therefore, this chapter reviews the recent literature on blended and online learning and juxtaposes the definitions of the blended learning as well as the types of blended learning instruction that took place in the higher education environments.

INTRODUCTION

It is likely that the education process in today's world is different from those processes that shaped higher education in the last decades of the 20th century. Along with the developments in information technologies as well as the teaching

methodologies, the processes of teaching and learning are challenging the temporal and spatial boundaries of the classrooms. In other words, advancements in technology and developments in teaching and learning procedures have presented new circumstances for more efficient and effective implementation of learning environments, which "make it simple for students and teachers to communicate in non-traditional methods" (Hick-

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man, 2007) and which “are characterized by the introduction of flexible and innovative teaching and learning technology into teaching (Vogel & Klassen, 2001, p. 105).

Through the last two decades, the higher education environments have witnessed the confluence of information technologies and new pedagogies. For instance, the wide spread use of Internet technologies as well as the networked learning made it possible to design and utilize new generation learning environments that are realistic, authentic, and engaging. As Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) stated the availability of the Internet expanded the educational options available to learners and instructors.

Prior to the confluence of the technology, especially Internet, into the classrooms of the higher education institutions, the teaching and learning procedures were mostly based on face-to-face instruction, which typically occurred in a teacher-directed environment with person-to-person interaction. Such kind of learning processes frequently takes the form of front-of-class teaching, which was assumed as “an apprenticeship model of learning” (Schulz, 2005, p. 147). There is usually a teacher, as ‘sage person’, transfers core information to the students face to face and the learners actively or inactively try to grasp the information that teacher provides to them. As Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland (2005) acknowledged, face-to-face learning environment is largely instructor oriented or program controlled, and generally, the learner is a passive recipient of information. The effectiveness of face-to-face learning as a platform for teaching and learning is a subject of much debate and various novel attempts have been made to incorporate different methods into the traditional teaching environments (Sayers, Nicell, & Hagan, 2004).

Face-to-face teaching and learning environments are synchronous in nature, while no communications technologies are required for a face-to-face session, often, other technologies, such as televisions, video/CD players and overhead

projectors, or sometimes computers are used. Verhaart and Kinshuk (2004, p. 1) acknowledged the developmental process of the implementation of an alternative delivery techniques and technology into the face-to-face learning environments as follows: “The continuum began with the manual methods of working with a blackboard (chalk), through early duplication, then to whiteboards and overhead transparencies. This was followed by the desktop publishing era and included photocopiers and Word Processors (WordStar, Word Perfect, Word), and finally to electronic delivery in the last 5 years. These have included PowerPoint, Windows Help Files and finally to Web based technologies, static HTML and now interactive Web pages using ASP”. Moreover, Verhaart and Kinshuk (2004) summarized the fundamental characteristics of face-to-face learning environments as discussions are kept in context, instructors guide the learning, discourse occurs in context and instructors can demonstrate products. As Resta (2004) affirmed, though the face-to-face learning environments are often complex and unpredictable, we are very familiar with them and have developed high levels of skill in working in these environments.

Through the development of instructional pedagogies, the atmosphere of the face-to-face learning environments has been also subjected to change. By means of educational developments, alternative face-to-face content delivery techniques or technologies have been implemented into the teaching environments throughout the years. What is more, the advancement in technology has started a new era in traditional education and such initiatives contributed to the expansion of the educational opportunities by reaching people in various geographical locations thereby allowing learners global access to education (Heinich, Molenda, Russell, & Smaldino, 2002). Removing the restrictions of geography and time in educating the people was partially achieved by distant learning procedures which roots back to correspondence courses that were in scene as early as 1720 (Rautenbach, 2007). The distant

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