

# Chapter IV

## Redesigning Initial Teacher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*A teacher education programme previously taught in distinct on-campus and distance forms was redesigned to take advantage of the affordances offered by a blended learning approach. The redesign process described here drew on three areas – the research and practice base of adult learning, knowledge of and experience with the design of learning communities, and the findings of research activities focused on the original distance form of the programme. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) enabled blending of technologies, media, modes of delivery, and learning activities and was central to the redesign process. However that process was driven overall by a commitment to educational principles not the potential of technologies. Other considerations in the redesign process include the demands placed on staff, the value of programme-level redesign, and the need for ongoing monitoring of the redesign process and evaluation of the programme during implementation. The implications for blended learning in teacher education programmes are discussed.*

### INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is not new. What is new is the widespread recognition that new ways of blending technologies, media, modes of delivery, and activities provide opportunities to enhance and possibly even transform teaching and learning in

the higher education sector. Those new ways are particularly focused on changing traditional patterns of on-campus teaching and almost inevitably involve the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs). They represent attempts to meet the challenges of student engagement and connectivity, the requirements of lifelong learning

for a diverse student body, and demands for high quality learning experiences.

The challenges to which blended learning is a response are difficult and multi-faceted. The distinction between the 'traditional' young, full-time on-campus student cohort and the 'non-traditional' older, part-time distance student group is blurring as these modes of delivery converge and both groups are becoming increasingly diverse. Agencies funding higher education are demanding higher quality courses with higher qualification completion rates. The uptake of ICTs in social and work lives is considerable and means students bring ICT experience and expectations of use with them to their higher education experience.

Blended learning offers considerable potential to meet the challenges outlined, but also confounds many attempts because of its own multi-faceted nature. Stacey and Gerbic (2007) describe blended learning as "the combination of modes of learning and teaching made possible through the mediation of ICT" (p.166). The simplicity of the phrase 'combination of modes' belies the complexities of finding 'combinations of modes' that are manageable by staff and students, effectively support student learning, and are cost-effective for both students and institutions.

Many aspects of teaching and learning can be combined to create blended learning environments. Four areas that each contain many possibilities were noted above – technologies, media, modes of delivery and activities. The generic term 'ICT' signals blended learning's engagement with a range of digital technologies and these are complemented by the older, 'softer' technologies associated with on-campus teaching represented by such areas as knowledge of face-to-face group processes or mastery learning. Use of a range of media in on-campus teaching is not uncommon, but the possibilities that ICT use affords for combining media is considerable and relatively new. Our use of the term 'modes of delivery' represents the space-time dimension of study. Are learners and teachers present in the

same or different physical spaces? Are learners and teachers present at the same or different times? Combinations of responses to these two questions create a range of spaces for learners and learning. Finally, activity and interactivity is the basis of learning. Structuring activities and interaction with the resources, and within the frameworks implied by the previous areas to ensure consistent, sustainable and effective blended learning opportunities, requires considerable knowledge, careful planning, and thoughtful integration.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004) assert that institutions taking advantage of consistent, sustainable and effective blended learning opportunities will transform the higher education learning environment they provide to students. The emphasis on transformation reinforces the notion that blended learning is about integration rather than addition. Blended learning is undertaken effectively when courses and programmes are re-designed to integrate components and activities rather than adding more or replacing those past their use-by date. Effective integration ensures that courses will be media-rich, collaborative, interactive and personalised, assisting in the movement from teacher-focused learning environments to those that are learning-centred.

In this chapter, we report on the redesign of a university-based initial teacher education programme to take advantage of the potential of blended learning, and the research that underpinned that redesign. At the time of redesign the programme had been delivered for the past ten years with both a traditional face-to-face option and a distance option that integrated online communication with a more traditional print-based resource-driven approach. These options had been delivered, quite separately, at a dual-mode university with a long and successful history of provision of distance education. The redesign presented an opportunity to reconceptualise the delivery options, blending modes, activities and media, and to integrate, from the outset, affordances offered by new ICTs.

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