

Chapter XI

Blended Learning and Teaching Philosophies: Implications for Practice

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the similarities and differences between Canadian and Australian university teachers' face-to-face and online teaching approaches and perspectives in two comparable Canadian and Australian universities, both of which offer instruction in these two modes. The chapter explores whether moving from face-to-face to online teaching results in new teaching approaches or in the creative blending of those developed within the different teaching modalities. Qualitative data were collected with an open-ended survey which asked participants for their thoughts on their face-to-face and online teaching experiences. Quantitative data were collected with the "Teaching Perspectives Inventory" which assessed participants' teaching approaches and philosophies in terms of their beliefs, intentions and actions in both modalities. The authors discuss the findings in terms of how to assist teachers to successfully transition from traditional teacher-centred to newly emerging learner-centred teaching approaches in blended learning classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

Today's rapidly changing communication technologies are enabling teachers in all levels of education to move from traditional face-to-face

classrooms into online or blended classrooms, while opening up new learning options and teaching possibilities. In order to make a successful transition from a traditional face-to-face classroom to the new virtually enhanced classroom,

teachers may need to re-view their underlying assumptions about the learning process, and most fundamentally, their role in the teaching and learning process (Comeaux & McKenna-Byington, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Garrison, 2006; McShane, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 2000; Torrisi & Davis, 2000; Wiesenberg, 1999, 2002). The importance of having a clearly articulated philosophy or approach to teaching in traditional face-to-face classrooms has been a focus in the educational literature for over two decades (Elias & Merriam, 1980, 2005; Jarvis, 1999; Mott, 1996; Zinn, 1998), but there is a paucity of research on whether or not assumptions developed within a traditional face-to-face classroom apply equally well in a technologically more complex classroom (Collis, 1998; Gallini & Barron, 2001; Heaton-Shrestha, Ediringha, Burke & Linsey, 2005; Ruth, 2006; Shovein, Huston, Fox & Damazo, 2005).

Blended learning as a topic in the literature of higher education has been discussed in many ways without agreement about the best definition of the term (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, Graham, 2006, Stacey & Gerbic, 2007, Bliuc, Goodyear & Ellis, 2007). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) wrote that blended learning should be more than an adding on of technology but should be transformative, while Garrison and Vaughan (2008) defined blended learning as “the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences” (p5) involving a pedagogical redesign that should improve teaching and learning. Bliuc et al (2007) reviewed a wide range of research into blended learning in higher education and, agreeing in principle with this definition as the most common, refined it to “learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources” (p 234). In reviewing methodologies in the empirical research into blended learning they categorized research into case studies, survey-type studies, comparative studies (e.g. ‘online *versus* blended learning, face-

to-face *versus* online *versus* blended learning), and holistic studies. Although they were seeking the student perspective on blended learning, their categorization helps to situate this study as a comparative study which, in seeking to clarify the teacher perspective, asked participants to reflectively compare their face-to-face and online teaching contexts. This process revealed that these were no longer truly separate modalities but involved a blending of approaches to use the best aspects of both providing the potential for a transformative process.

The growing use in higher education of advanced communication technologies to enhance the learning process is seen in the current large international body of research about its effectiveness as a teaching tool (Fisher, Phelps & Ellis, 2000; van Schaik, Barker & Beckstrand, 2003; Stephenson, 2001; Zhao, Lei, Yan, Lai & Tan, 2005). A theme that emerges from this research is that teachers who are comfortable and competent in traditional face-to-face classrooms are often ill-equipped to teach with advanced technologies, often assuming that teaching approaches that work in face-to-face classrooms will automatically transfer to the new online one. Though they see the role of these technologies in course administration and content delivery, their lack of online experience means they may see little value in specific online interaction strategies that differ from face-to-face ones (Woods, Baker & Hopper, 2004). While some studies are beginning to compare the experiences of teachers transferring to the new modality (Comeaux & McKenna-Byington, 2003, Curtis 2002, Samarawickrema & Stacey, 2007), very few studies have explored how/if they teach differently in it (McShane, 2006). Ellis, Steed & Appleby (2006) have addressed this gap by investigating teachers on two campus-based Australian universities, interviewing them about their approaches to technology introduction (mainly through use of learning management systems) and their conceptions of blended teaching and learning. They have developed a categorization for

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