Chapter 65
Using Blended Principles to Bridge the Gap between Online and On–Campus Courses

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning, and its relative HyFlex (Hybrid Flexible), are garnering up a lot of attention these days from both academics and administrators on college campuses. Organizations like the Sloan Consortium offer training in Blended Course Design; free Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) such as BlendKit provide ways for educators to start thinking about and begin implementation of blended course design. Despite the pedagogical benefits, not all institutions are equipped to handle blended courses, instructors are not ready to jump on the blended bandwagon if there is no institutional support, and on-campus students are not very comfortable with it yet. One proposed way to ease the transition into blended learning is to combine two sections of the same course, one running online, and one running on-campus. In this chapter, the authors describe a pedagogical trial in which they adopted this proposal as a way, based on HyFlex principles, to get students thinking about the benefits of blending two sections, thus bringing in some benefits of blended learning, while retaining the "safety net" that some students feel they need when they sign up for on-campus courses.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall semester of 2011 a unique opportunity for pedagogical experimentation and innovation was presented to us in the department of Applied Linguistics at our Institution. One of our faculty members was teaching two sections of the same course (Foundations of Bilingual Education) online and on campus. While the mere fact of teaching two sections of the same course isn't always enough for pedagogical innovation, the fact that these two sections of the course were designed and implemented for different modalities and serve different populations of students, gave us reason

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to pause and ponder the pedagogical possibilities of blending these two sections. Just as there are different types of "blends," as proposed by Singh & Reed (2001), we thought of blending together an on-campus course with an online section of the same course to see if there is merit in bringing together two different groups of learners to learn together and what might be some of the benefits and pedagogical lessons.

Program Information and Student Background

Our on-campus program in Applied Linguistics has existed since 1981 and has played a pioneering role in preparing K-12 teachers in the fields of bilingual education, English as a Second Language, and foreign language pedagogy, including English as a Foreign Language. It is the largest of its kind in the state of Massachusetts with approximate enrollment size of 124 students each year, and is consistently recognized as one of the most noteworthy graduate programs at our Institution. From 2001 to 2006, Applied Linguistics students comprised approximately 23% of the College of Liberal Arts graduate student body, including both masters and doctoral degree candidates. With the inception of the online program in 2006, the Applied Linguistics Department enrollment figures showed a significant increase. Since 2006, the Applied Linguistics enrollment has virtually doubled, representing 36% of the College of Liberal Arts graduate student body. Applied Linguistics faculty consists of highly qualified, well-published and diverse scholars in the field.

The Program´s mission is "to ensure (1) that our students master the technical aspects of applied linguistics; and (2) that they understand the political and ideological dimensions of language teaching and learning given their work with low socioeconomic status linguistic minority populations who often speak language varieties that are often perceived in biased and uninformed ways by the layperson" (Applied Linguistics Mission Statement 2011). In line with this mission, we have set the following fundamental core values: Languages and cultures are important individual and societal assets; All languages, dialects, and cultures deserve to be respected and cultivated; Multilingualism and multiculturalism are beneficial for individuals and society; Accurate information and research should be the basis for policies and practices that involve language and culture; Effective language education should be widely available, and; Civic-minded teacher education should help prepare language professionals that can theorize the world around them and make informed, critical and ethical decisions. These values inform both our on campus and our online program.

The online program was a pioneer in Distance Learning, being one of the very first degree-awarding Applied Linguistics programs worldwide to be fully online in 2006. The synergy between the two programs has been part of the conceptualization of the online program since its inception. The on-campus and the face-to face program run in parallel ways; they share the same curriculum, goals, objectives and learning outcomes. The ratio of on-campus students to online students has changed from a 63% face-to-face to 37% online ratio to a 50%-50% ratio in the last couple of years, with some years having more online enrollments than on-campus.

Our two modalities serve two different types of student population. Our on-campus students are predominantly focused on the English as a Second Language (ESL) track, with a number of students in the past few years also pursuing initial licensure to teach ESL in a K-12 environment. Our on-campus Foreign Language track, including English as a Foreign Language, has been smaller as compared to the ESL track. The on-campus program also attracts many students who are local to Boston and the surrounding cities and towns, thus the proportion of local to out-of-state students is higher in our on-campus program.

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