

Chapter 1

Questioning Prompts to Examine Blended PK–20 Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

The decision to deliver a course or an academic program must address issues of learning outcomes and curriculum, what is to be taught along with choices of pedagogy or how the content is taught, as well as face-to-face or online delivery. The question of whether or not online or blended instruction is more effective than face to face teaching is not about the delivery decision but about curriculum and pedagogical issues. A set of questioning prompts, organized by public school and undergraduate/graduate programs, help educators systematically think through issues of learner differences, learning outcomes, teaching options, including the use of technology and instructional delivery approaches. Best practices are organized by public school and undergraduate/graduate programs. Research questions are suggested.

EDUCATIONAL ISSUES UNDERLYING BLENDED INSTRUCTION

The decision to deliver a course or an academic program online needs to examine the full range of issues beyond reducing costs or providing student convenience or just “going online.” For any educational program which offers courses or programs online educators need to address questions of curriculum, what is to be taught and pedagogy, how that content might be taught. While curriculum is decided through working groups, the pedagogical question has traditionally been left to instructors to answer, the design and enactment of teaching considered a province of faculty decisions. With the advent of online capabilities, the question of teaching quality for online instruction has been raised in some quarters, and several formal mechanisms have been used by institutions to ensure quality of instruction (e.g., Quality Matters, 2019). Face-to-face (F2F) teaching has received less scrutiny, although institutions have adopted a variety of professional development initiatives for instructors in higher education, no matter what the delivery mode.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0242-6.ch001

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Blended instruction, where some of the instruction and student activities are delivered face-to-face (F2F) and other activities are delivered online, has been regarded as an optimum delivery method for instruction (U. S. Department of Education, 2010). The flipped classroom, for example, is an example of blended instruction where the principal content is delivered online usually through video while F2F instruction consists of customized activities keyed to learner needs (e.g., Ogden & Shambaugh, 2016).

It is helpful to make decisions about curriculum, pedagogy, and delivery separately to help an instructor or faculty group ask questions about what is to be taught, how the content is to be taught, and what delivery method is optimum given an awareness of the context of the course and academic program. In some cases, such as the development of individual courses, the choices for all three can be made by the instructor. Some programs, however, especially those targeted for online delivery, either the conversion of existing courses or the creation of new programs, require a significant amount of faculty work to design and receive approval from an academic institution.

The challenge for faculty looking to add online capabilities to courses and programs is how to proceed? A question for this volume asks the following question: What constitutes the most ideal combination of online and traditional pedagogical strategies in blended education? Because the answer to this question cannot be specified by a single formula, this chapter provides a conceptual approach to examine the instructional problem, centered around student learning as opposed to delivery selection, by using prompting questions to help K20 educators think through the use of blended instruction to establish a learning environment to support learning outcomes. This use of questions has been field tested in teacher education courses on instructional design where the student had a field placement, and college settings where the author taught a master's level instructional design course and a professional development setting for health educators (Shambaugh & Magliaro, 2006).

The prompting questions equate to phases of instructional design, which have traditionally been used to analyze instructional needs, design features to address those needs, and evaluate their implementation. Prompts for delivering blended instruction in elementary and secondary classrooms will be discussed in terms of how online delivery augments existing teaching using technologies, such as podcasts and inquiry approaches, such as project-based learning (PBL). For undergraduate and graduate levels, questioning prompts will address teaching decisions for individual courses or across entire academic programs. The list of prompting questions to help educators examine the issues for using blended instruction are the following:

- What is to be taught?
- How is content taught?
- How is instruction delivered?
- What is known about students?
- What is the context of the learning setting?
- What is the nature of the content to be learned?
- What are the assessment and teaching options to support learning outcomes?
- How is blended instruction evaluated?

The chapter concludes with a discussion of best practices organized by pre-teaching/semester, pre-teaching, teaching, and post-teaching across public school, undergraduate, and graduate levels.

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