Chapter 9
Reflections:
Two Years after Implementing a Blended Educational Research Course

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the case of a pilot course implementing blended learning at an American Pacific island university. This case provides a detailed overview of how the instructor applied blending learning design to an introductory educational research course. The author compares her goals for the course with the concept of blended learning, and discusses reasons why the two complemented one another. Analysis of student self-ratings (quantitative data on achievement) and student self-reflection narratives (qualitative data on satisfaction) revealed that, overall, student blended learning experiences were positive. Students liked the course and indicated that they had achieved their learning objectives, although they clearly indicated dissatisfaction with some aspects of blended learning. The case further confirmed the prediction drawn from the literature that pedagogical and technological difficulties present major challenges to providing quality blended courses. Surmounting these challenges enhances both the effectiveness and efficiency of learning experiences in blended courses.

INTRODUCTION

In Such a Short Time

Computers are everywhere, and our lives are affected in all kinds of ways by their operation—and non-operation. It is truly amazing that computers have infiltrated our lives so thoroughly in such a short time. (Beekman, 2005, p. 33)

In 1993, there was no World Wide Web; but now it seems as if it is everywhere (Ko & Rossen, 2004). "There was a time, not many years ago, when word processing was the most popular computer activity among students….Today, a PC can be a window into the global system of interconnected networks

known as the Internet" (Beekman, 2005, p. 16). Indeed, the change came with the development of the Internet and Web-based communication.

University faculty increasingly rely on the Internet to support the activities of teaching and to supplement face-to-face class time: for example, by disseminating course information and resources, providing space for students to upload assignments, and providing students with an online discussion forum.

Certainly the future looks increasingly *digital*, *wireless*, and *networked* (Koohang, Briz, & Seymour, 2006). Rudestam and Schoenholtz-Read (2002) note: "From stepchild to wunderkind, technology that spawned the Internet has moved online distance learning to the forefront of educational innovation…. Sensing an opportunity to reach more students and supplement flagging tuition revenues, major educational institutions have expanded their mission to include activities in online education" (p. 3). A. W. (Tony) Bates (2000), project leader for a study on cost-benefit analysis of online teaching for the Canadian National Center of Excellence in Tele-learning, has identified six rationales for the use of technology in higher education:

(1) improving the quality of teaching (using technology is seen as one way of alleviating problems such as increased student-to-teacher ratios and increased teaching loads);

(2) providing students with information technology (IT) skills they will need in their work and life (integrating technology into the learning environment is a way to develop such skills);

(3) widening access to education and training (the trend toward lifelong learning and the need for reeducation and retraining are leading to a changing student population);

(4) responding to the technological imperative (those who believe that technology can play a valuable role in teaching and learning see ar-

guments against the technological imperative as valid but insufficient to deny it);

(5) reducing the costs of education (using technology, however, is more likely to lead to increased rather than reduced costs, at least, in the short term); and

(6) improving the cost-effectiveness of education (technology is unlikely to reduce absolute costs but can improve the cost-effectiveness of operations in higher education by freeing faculty members for more productive use of their time). (pp. 16-20)

Educational technologies definitely play increased roles, "partly driven by students' expectations, but also because they demonstrably improve the quality of teaching and learning and represent an efficient use of resources" (Ryan, Scott, Freeman, & Patel, 2001, p. 169). Furthermore, "students are now not only more diverse following the massification of higher education but also more consumer-minded….Students increasingly seek choice—in the subjects to be studied, in delivery modes, in assessment, and in the time spent on campus" (James & Beckett, n. d., p. 2).

Kim and Bonk (2006) conducted a survey in both higher education and corporate training to explore the future trends of online learning. Most of the respondents (N = 562) expected huge growth in online programs and predicted that 'monetary support' and 'pedagogical competency' of online instructors would most significantly affect the success of the online programs. The respondents further predicted that emphasis would be placed less on fully online learning, and more on *blended learning*: a balanced mix of traditional face-to-face instruction with adequately designed online activities. Why blended learning? According to Lorenzo (2004):

Because blended learning is an important topic related to where educational technology, in general, is heading. It aims to please all higher education stakeholders—students, faculty, and

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