Chapter 42
Moving Beyond a Focus on Delivery Modes to Teaching Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

The use of online methodologies to deliver coursework has become institutionalized in higher education. There is an urgent need to move beyond the question of which delivery model is most effective: face-to-face, fully online, or blended, and switch the focus to teaching pedagogy and strategies that effectively engage students in the learning process. This chapter posits that student-learning outcomes are less dependent on delivery mode and instead dependent on a teacher's pedagogical practices; it is the skill of the teacher as facilitator that drives the effective development of the learning community and influences student-learning outcomes. Further, it is suggested that constructivism, as a pedagogy of teaching, be considered, regardless of delivery mode; students construct their own knowledge as the teacher facilitates the process through providing opportunities for active engagement and critical inquiry within a community of learners. Teaching opportunities are adapted in response to the needs of students with technology as a tool to deliver learning outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement that enrollment in online courses, in institutions of higher education, is showing a substantial increase (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009); over 6.1 million students enrolled in at least one online course in the fall of 2010 (Allen & Seaman, 2011). In addition, the availability of online courses has also shown a significant increase in the last eight years (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011). The rapid growth of online education has been identified as one of four key trends changing institutions of higher education; increasingly students want to access educational opportunities whenever and wherever they choose (Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, & Haywood, 2011). The growth of online delivery of coursework increased 21% in 2009, a substantially higher rate of growth than the 2% growth in overall higher education student

enrollment (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Interestingly, 33% of baccalaureate awarding institutions view online courses as critical to their strategic plan (Allen & Seaman, 2008).

BACKGROUND

To be considered an online course 80% or more of the content is delivered via the Internet (Simonson, Smaldino, Abright, & Zvacek, 2009). Students vary in regard to the type of delivery model they prefer; some are drawn to blended (hybrid) courses that meet face-to-face (f-2-f) and have 30-80% of content delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Blended courses offer institutions, faculty and learners flexibility responsive to the context in which the course is being delivered. The combinations of f-2-f and online delivery of instruction vary and both students and faculty tend to like this combination and enjoying the benefits of each delivery model. When using the blended format, teacher sometimes meet weekly and use the online format to extend time to focus on discussion through online discussion threads. Others teachers may meet predominantly online with some f-2-f contact typically requiring a meeting at the beginning, middle, and end of the course.

According to Freeman (2010), distance learning occurs when time, location, or both separate teacher and the students, and contact can be either synchronous (real-time, teacher-led event in which all students are "in class" at the same time) or asynchronous (interaction between teacher and students occurs intermittently with a time delay). F-2-f, blended and online learning can occur in a variety of models using both synchronous and asynchronous strategies.

Blended learning has been found to offer the best of both online and f-2-f delivery (Vaughan, 2007) and has demonstrated effectiveness in the teaching-learning process (Picciano & Dziuban, 2007). Yet, some researchers have posited that blended learning is not "better" than an online

delivery model (Reasons, Valadares & Slavkin, 2005). Rovai and Jordan (2004) concluded that although a blended course allows another means of delivery in education, and one that is rather flexible in nature, it is the skill of the teacher as facilitator that drives the effective development of the learning community and promotes satisfactory learning outcomes for students.

There has been an ongoing debate in the literature as to whether online courses are as effective as traditional courses (Chen & Jones, 2007). However, the results have been inconsistent and lacking empirical data to support any definitive conclusions. Grandzol and Grandzol (2006) posited that in regard to delivering instruction online, it is time to move past researching which mode of delivery is "best," and rather focus on identifying and validating "best practice" for effective instruction regardless of the mode of delivery.

PEDAGOGY OF TEACHING

"Times are changing for higher education….. [From] using technology to expand distance education, to the recognition of the importance of sense of community, we are witnessing a transformation of higher education" (Rovai & Jordan, 2004, p. 1). The practice of offering education online is inviting an examination of the pedagogy of teaching approaches used by institutions of higher education for both face-to-face and online delivery (Giroux, 2001). Pedagogical approaches, how teachers orchestrate classroom learning, do matter, especially today as changes are occurring in traditional methods of teaching in order to meet the needs of students (McKenzie, 2003). If one's teaching pedagogy is clear, then it becomes easier to maintain that integrity as an instructor moves a course from face-to-face model to a blended format or fully online.

Russell (1999) concluded that the amount of learning that occurs in a course is independent of the instructional delivery model or the

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