

# Chapter 9

## Blended Learning in Teacher Education: Uncovering its Transformative Potential for Teacher Preparation Programs

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter acknowledges that there is sparse literature to consult about the pedagogical and empirical foundations of blended learning in teacher preparation programs because this field is in its infancy. This chapter will first define blended learning, identify the challenges in teacher preparation programs and indicate how blended-learning approaches will assist teacher educators to meet long-standing and newly emerged challenges, and help future teachers to be reflective practitioners, better problem-solvers, and critical thinkers. This chapter also will discuss pedagogical values of blended learning and factors affecting blended learning course designs, and then showcase best practices using blended learning in order to show the effectiveness of blended learning approaches in teacher education. Lastly, this chapter will discuss considerations when blending teacher education courses.*

### DEFINITION OF BLENDED LEARNING

Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns, at least in part, through on-line delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, pace, and/or

space, and, at least in part, at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home (Graham, 2006). Additionally, blended learning is called different terms such as distributed learning, open and flexible learning, and hybrid learning. The arbitrary nature of blended learning reverberates in the different definitions of the term:

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- Combining instructional modalities (or delivery media) (Bersin & Associates, 2003; Orey, 2002; Singh & Reed, 2001; Thomson, 2002)
- Combining instructional methods (House, 2002; Rosset, 2002)
- Combining online and face-to-face instruction (Reay, 2001; Rooney, 2003; Sands, 2002; Ward & LaBranche, 2003; Young, 2002)

This chapter is grounded in the definition that blended-learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Bonk & Graham, 2006).

## **THE FUTURE OF THE BLENDED MODEL**

The global revolution in information technology, which has transformed the international economy, is also destined to transform American education (Moe, Cuban, & Chubb, 2009). Hybrid schools facilitate the incorporation of a wide selection of educational technological innovations that transform the education process, which is why Moe and Chubb (2009) predict that most schools of the future will take a hybrid form.

Driving the movement toward hybridization is recognition of the considerable benefits that technology offers to the learning process. The promise of technology extends beyond customization of the curriculum and mode of learning. This “force of liberation” (Moe & Chubb, 2009) frees schools from geographic constraints, improves accountability by way of sophisticated data management systems that evaluate progress continuously, and provides significant savings in labor, which can make funds available for use in more effective ways, as the case studies have demonstrated. Furthermore, in the educational sector, computer-based technologies hold the capacity to

remediate, accelerate, review, preview, supplement or supplant the existing teaching/learning system. Having networking capabilities means resources can be borrowed from or shared with other educators and students around the country or around the globe, expanding access to top-tier teachers and instructional materials (Hassel & Hassel, 2009).

Hybridization of traditional pedagogical models presents a unique opportunity for schools to fight low enrollment and boost efficiency. By substituting specialized software for expensive college-trained workers for a portion of the school day, schools can significantly cut costs and reinvest those savings in more productive ways (Jacob, 2011).

A hybrid school model combines online, computer-based learning with traditional classroom learning. While still attending a “brick-and-mortar” school structure, students in hybrid schools spend all or some of the day taking online classes or utilizing instructional software under the supervision of school staff. The delivery of education is thus a hybrid of the online and traditional models and can be customized to the individual student. Smart assessments allow students to skip content they are familiar with and progress to more challenging levels. Data collection systems provide reports to teachers regarding which lesson plans can be crafted to address areas of high need or interest. The pace of instruction can be modified on an individual basis, and the format for assignments contains a broad scope from, crafting traditional essays to creating screen casts, podcasts, or video blogs. The development of hybrid schools should be unsurprising, considering the impact of technological innovation on modern society over the past 40 years (Jacob, 2011).

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