Chapter 109

Using Blended Learning and Emerging Technologies to Transform the Adult Learning Experience

Leslie Cordie
Auburn University, USA

Maria Martinez Witte
Auburn University, USA

James Witte
Auburn University, USA

ABSTRACT

Faculty are increasing the use of emerging technologies in their classrooms and are recognizing the value of blending face-to-face and online learning to meet educational needs. Blended learning is defined as combining face-to-face and online learning formats. This chapter discusses the definition of blended learning and how it is affecting adult learning experiences and classroom settings. This chapter also addresses faculty and instructional design practices that can be used for blended learning and to continue promoting a positive teaching and learning environment for both face-to-face and online learners. Future research efforts can be focused on faculty development and academic support to continue fostering blended learning and meeting the needs of today's learners.

INTRODUCTION

The use of online learning technologies in higher education institutions has increased rapidly throughout the past couple of decades and the way teaching and learning is being conducted is also changing. Online teaching may be provided in a strictly online format or in a combination of both face-to-face and online formats. Classrooms are being redefined as flexible learning environments in which students are collaborating and communicating with fellow students in both inside and outside of their classrooms (Watson, 2008). Serving the needs of online learners has been a higher priority for academic institutions

and they have added distance learning as an alternative to classroom-based programs (National Online Learners Priorities Report, 2013).

Allen and Seaman (2011) identified differences between the face-to-face and online courses. Traditional face-to-face courses will typically not use online technology and the content is provided during a class meeting. Although face-to-face and online instruction maintain separate characteristics for communication and interaction, combining them can promote a positive learning experience (Gerbic, 2011). The combination of face-to-face and online instruction is referred to as blended learning. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) reinforced the simplicity and complexity of blended learning; however, blended learning could be used as a thoughtful integration of both face-to-face and online learning. Emerging models in both higher education and the K-12 settings indicate that the future of education will involve the provision of content, resources, and instruction using online and face-to-face, even within the same classroom. "Blended learning, combining the best elements of online and face-to-face education, is likely to emerge as the predominant teaching model of the future" (Watson, 2008, p. 4). There are more adult learners entering higher education (Allen & Seaman, 2011) and blended learning may serve to meet their needs. Faculty can perform a vital role in transforming the adult learner's experiences in face-to-face, online, or in blended learning environments. The growth of online and blended education formats necessitate the importance of meeting the needs and demands of the adult learner.

Blended Learning Defined

In order to address the adult learner's needs and accomplish the educational objectives, it is vital to have an understanding of blended learning. In general, blended learning combines the traditional face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated technologies or online instruction (Driscoll, 2002). The origin of the definition for blended learning can be attributed to a variety of sources. Bonk and Graham (2006) solidified blended learning as a combination of face-to-face instruction and computer-mediated instruction in their *Handbook of Blended Learning*. Blended learning has also been described as learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and founded on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course (Draffan & Rainger, 2006). In higher education, the term blended learning is being used with increasing frequency and modifications of the terminology that include flipped or hybrid learning (Means et al., 2013) Unfortunately, the terms blended learning, hybrid learning, and mixed mode learning are used interchangeably and without a broadly accepted precise definitions or agreement. This makes it extremely difficult for instructors and educational institutions to understand best practices for blended learning.

A simple, usable definition of blended learning is a course that combines online and face- to-face delivery. In a blended learning course, a substantial portion of the content is usually delivered online and typically uses online discussions. To help design and develop a quality blended learning course, the adult instructor can look to the delineations provided by the Online Learning Consortium. An online course is also defined as:

One in which at least 80 percent of the course content is delivered online. Face to face instruction includes courses in which zero to 29% of the course is delivered online. The remaining alternative, blended instruction has between 30 to 80 percent of the course content delivered online. Although the definition for online courses has remained consistent, the blended learning definition varies considerably. (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 6)

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