Chapter XII
Instructional Design for Class–Based and Computer–Mediated Learning:
Creating the Right Blend for Student–Centered Learning

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ABSTRACT

Blended learning occupies a prominent place within higher education teaching strategies, yet there is no clear definition for what we mean by this term as an instructional approach. In this chapter, we present a working definition for blended learning that is based around a learner-centred framework, and outline three instructional models for blended course design in support of student-centred learning. We have applied these models to a series of course experiments that were undertaken at two international business schools: Nyenrode Business University (The Netherlands) and Euromed Marseille École de Management (France). Common to each course design was the use of e-tools to solicit and share knowledge for the out-of-class phase of student learning. We discuss the reception of these models by students and their relevance to Net Generation learners in promoting socially active learning through collaboration and experience sharing. Drawing together the lessons learned from these experiments, we present an instructional framework for course designers, focusing on the key phases in the delivery of a blended course and the accompanying instructional responsibilities that underpin this instructional approach.

INTRODUCTION

Technological change has brought with it new opportunities for teaching and learning within higher education (HE). E-learning, so often associated with distance education, is now assuming an important role in the way that instructors interact with campus-based students. Over recent years, the adoption of e-learning tools by instructors has become widespread within higher education, and course innovation along these lines has underlined the potential for new ways of teaching and learning. Impressive claims have indeed accompanied these changes. Computer-mediated learning offers educators the opportunity to transform pedagogic practice, shifting instruction from the physical to the virtual classroom (Hiltz, 1994). The introduction of technology also provides the scope for enriched learning opportunities, facilitating the sharing of knowledge and understanding among members of a group, increasing interaction between students, and supporting higher order learning (Harasim, 1989; Jarvela & Hakkinen, 2002; Meyer, 2003; Salmon, 2000a).

Whilst the case for e-learning on an institutional level is now firmly established, and online activity occupies a prominent place in campus-based teaching strategies, there is still no commonly agreed definition for what we mean by blended learning: the combination of computer-mediated and face-to-face learning. The plethora of terms (hybrid, mixed mode) reflects the confused status of this instructional approach and the pedagogic properties that underpin it. Poor definition has hampered the development of instructional models and frameworks that can be applied to blended course design and delivery, and the dearth of research literature reflects this state of affairs. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that instructional design methodology has been slow to realise the benefits of student-centred learning, with traditional teaching models applied to online activity, supporting an e-teaching rather than e-learning design approach. In our view,

current practice in the design of blended courses runs counter to Net Generation study patterns and the interrelationship between formal and informal learning activities, where students control the pace of learning. It is timely, therefore, to consider instructional models that are appropriate for today's learners, and that emphasise the responsibility of individuals in managing their own learning.

In this chapter, we seek to address these issues by positioning blended learning within a learner-centred pedagogic framework. We present a series of instructional models that employ e-learning tools to engage course participants in sense making and knowledge building through self-directed and collaborative learning activities. The models have been applied to a series of blended modules that were delivered to management students at Nyenrode Business University (The Netherlands) and Euromed Marseille Ecole de Management (France). We report on the results from these courses and draw together the lessons learned in course delivery from these institutional experiences.

This chapter therefore offers course designers and instructors a selection of models for blended course delivery that may be applied to other disciplines that place the control of the content and pace of learning in the hands of students, a variation from traditional e-teaching pedagogy. The lessons learned from the blended modules are presented in the form of an instructional framework, which is intended to serve as a practical guide for course designers and instructors who are preparing to deliver their own courses. The guide draws on our own experiences in blended course design, with our observations on student learning referenced against the emerging literature in this field.

In summary, this chapter addresses the following objectives.

1. To provide a working definition for blended learning as an instructional approach that is learner centred in focus and relevant to Net

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