Foreword

With any book about models, I look for a process and a clear explanation of that process, and hopefully some evidence to back up the model. An effective model, one that routinely accomplishes its purpose, does not emerge fully featured and understood. Models improve by being continually tested and evaluated. For educational models in particular, I am looking for the developmental stage of the model. As Rowe (1991) outlined, models can be classified hierarchically, one type informing the other. Models initially are descriptive serving to help users to understand a system and its context. Next are predictive models, providing a forecast of what might happen. Explorative models enable systematic exploration and a variation of basic features. Ultimately, planning models are predictive but help us to evaluate predicted outcomes in terms of planning goals. Descriptive models, forming the foundations for the other models, look at the past, while predictive and explorative examine the present, and planning models focus on the future.

The study of these models can proceed along two directions; the first being a design focus or a design question: What are the features of the model design, how is the model used, and how is the model evaluated? A design focus pulls from design and development research providing a systematic approach to studying the model’s development along typical lines of instructional design (Richey & Klein, 2007). A second direction, more along program evaluation lines, asks how to help faculty members learn to teach using blended and online deliveries? Both study directions – instructional and professional developmental – are needed to systematically add to the knowledge base of models for online/blended learning. The instructional direction examines teaching decisions in light of learners, content, and context, while professional development addresses the contextual issues of the instructor, students, academic program, institutional mission, and professional organizations.

With a book about models for learning, I also look for learning outcomes and teaching options that support that learning. Multiple approaches pull from different learning theories and perspectives, so faculty members who move to online teaching have an opportunity to not only consider teaching options, but the perspectives that underlie those approaches. Thus, the move to online teaching affords a faculty member with a prompt to re-examine the purposes for a course and how that course is taught and delivered. Such a re-examination may conflict with a range of perspectives, from a faculty member who believes that a particular perspective (e.g., social constructivist) is essential or that no-re-examination is needed at all (e.g., a content-focus). Despite these conflicts, being clear about the perspective and/or purpose underlying the instructional activity can only help faculty and students. Teaching decisions can be pragmatically guided by what is needed. These needs can be primarily learning outcomes but can also include faculty and institutional goals and specific instructional and institutional situations, the contextual realities surrounding the content in that place and at a particular time for students.
The questions I pose to readers, then, are how has this edited volume (a) addressed process models for blended/online delivery, how have these models (b) supported learning outcomes and teaching approaches, and (c) how have these models helped faculty to be successful in their teaching and academic careers?

In terms of process models, many of the chapters discuss the constraints of a course management system (CMS) on providing student-centered activities. The use of a CMS is not by itself a model for learning. A CMS is usually a commercial product and is a major feature within an overall approach for how learning is supported in blended or online deliveries. Features of models for learning need to be based on learning outcomes, how teaching supports these outcomes, and what teaching decisions need to be made for how a CMS is used. Some of the chapters document efforts that prompt instructors to examine their own beliefs, re-examine teaching options, and document that learning has occurred, sometimes by both instructor and student.

In terms of learning outcomes within these models, I see student engagement and community-building as a major focus for the chapters. Words such as student communication, interaction, active engagement, community, groups, and collaboration suggest that the authors are viewing student engagement and community as key purposes (even as learning outcomes) for the online/blended environments. When active or engaged learning is an overall purpose for teaching, then it’s useful to define through learning outcomes what is meant by these engagement and community-building words, thus enabling student performance to be assessed.

Some of the chapters focus on professional development and models for delivering courses. These chapters report on the values of talking about student needs and peer sharing of specific cases and best practices. In addition, professional development delivery using online and blended approaches help to examine teacher and student perceptions of new delivery options and to discuss resistance to change.

I urge readers to study these chapters in terms of model features, learning outcomes, and professional development. Studying one’s teaching and the case studies of others provides opportunities to help educators examine the basis for teaching decisions and to re-examine the assumptions underlying these decisions. Any technology innovation, such as online and blended instructional delivery, serves to prompt us to re-examine teaching. Teaching can be examined by thinking through the full range of learning outcomes and that “developing community,” for example, might become a learning outcome if that performance is truly valued. Teaching decisions in online and blended environments also warrant a re-thinking of who the learners are. Finally, one’s teaching decisions can also be informed by the reality of the context of the learning setting. I also encourage you to contact the chapter contributors and engage in an ongoing discussion over how to build on their work through iterative and purposeful inquiry.

Neal Shambaugh
West Virginia University, USA

Neal Shambaugh is Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Education and Human Services at West Virginia University. A graduate of Virginia Tech, he is a professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development at WVU and former program coordinator of Graduate Programs for Instructional Design and Technology. He is the author of two textbooks on Instructional Design, one for teacher education, Instructional Design, A Systematic Approach to Reflective Practice, and one for graduate programs, Mastering the Possibilities: A Process Approach to Instructional Design. He has taught courses in instructional design, teaching methods, visual literacy, IDT professional practice, design and development research, and educational psychology.
REFERENCES