Preface

INTRODUCTION

A great many scholars argue that the era of an open, flexible, student-centered, interactive learning of high quality, free of spatial and time restrictions is forthcoming. For many years, e-learning was regarded as a technological and organizational entity according to the prevailed technology-centered perceptions. This view led to the downgrade of the pedagogical aspect of learning and teaching.

The book demonstrates the view that Information and Communication Technologies should not be considered as a neutral teaching medium but, instead, be implemented under pedagogical conditions aiming at the development of critical thinking through their creative integration into the social and cultural context.

The optimal combination of the new advanced learning technologies of synchronous and asynchronous transmission with face to face instruction allow for the implementation of a new Blended Collaborative Learning Environment, which is flexible in terms of location, time, and pace of adult learners.

The adult education literature generally supports the idea that teaching adults should be approached in a different way than teaching children. Adult learners include working adults with family responsibilities, older workers who may not feel confident about returning to school and people who are currently in the workforce and who need to upgrade skills and knowledge. So we have to meet the needs of adult learners in developing blended learning environments, and find out the optimal combination of learning theories that match with our learning goals. The pedagogical approach, on which we base the designing of a blended learning environment for adults, is a key issue analyzed further on.

Going from face-to-face instruction to the new Blended Learning Environment for adults, is not an easy process, as it requires optimal combination of learning theories, principles of distance learning, principles of adult theory and interactive media, and instructional methods and techniques.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is a collection of content based chapters and case studies, examining the pedagogical potential of Blended Learning Environments for Adult Learners.

The main objective is to bring together a group of scholars in order to build up a pedagogical approach and analytical implementation steps and directions for designing and implementing Blended Learning Collaborative Environments for adults. The proposed pedagogical approaches and case studies suggests the functional combination of advanced learning technologies of synchronous (videoconferences) and
a-synchronous learning (Web-based learning environments & social networking) and F2F instruction in order to provide an interactive learning environment for adults.

Following is a brief summary of each of the chapters.

In chapter 1, Donnelly and McAvinia contribute to the ongoing development of a common learning and teaching discourse about blended learning strategies in use in higher education today. The authors, by presenting two case studies, reach the conclusion that learning is becoming more social and informal and less structured. In contrast to the character of formal lecture halls and classrooms, modern learning space design seeks to provide freedom of access and interaction with peers.

In chapter 2, Caner introduces the concept of Blended Learning instruction that took place in the higher education environments. Caner summarizes that Blended Learning is the blend of face-to-face instruction with distributed learning facilities that highlight the use of Internet-based instruction, which is characterized by a reduction in the number of face-to-face meetings, and facilitates the use of e-learning instruments such as synchronous and asynchronous discussion forums or interactive Web pages in the delivery of instruction in higher education.

In chapter 3, Guzzo, Grifoni, and Ferri analyse the features that impact the success of the blended learning methods, by giving different definitions used in literature and by studies review about experiences, opinions and satisfaction of students in Italian Universities. Authors argue that advantages of Blended Learning can be enhanced by the use of mobile devices and the new collaborative tools of Web 2.0 allowing cohesion and interaction among students by improving collaboration and social relationships.

In chapter 4, Saleeb and Dafoulas provide recommendations and an initial architectural design framework for creation and deployment of 3D virtual learning spaces within 3D virtual worlds, used for students’ blended learning experiences. Authors investigated satisfaction rates of adult students with disabilities from different architectural design elements of 3D virtual learning spaces.

In chapter 5, Peachey argues that the challenge for effective blended learning design must not only include a pedagogical foundation but also a motivational imperative. According to the author any effort to design an efficient blended learning programme may be ineffective unless the element of enjoyment is added to the blend.

In chapter 6, Pietruszkiewicz and Dżega present how Artificial Intelligence (AI) could be used to support the management of e-learning platform and maintenance of e-learning quality by analyzing two AI applications.

In chapter 7, Bai identifies and discusses some benefits, challenges, and barriers that face instructors in adopting a collaborative elearning construction environment for blended learning.

In chapter 8, Stefanovic, Matijevic, and Cvjetkovic try to define a framework for the development of Web based laboratories as part of an on-line component of blended learning for adults.

In chapter 9, Brew and Kaplan describe a program-based approach to converting a site-based post-baccalaureate teacher education program to a blended format. This case study is based on a comprehensive survey of faculty and students at the University of Vermont School Library Media Studies Sequence (USA).

In chapter 10, Fang, Chow, and Soo suggest an evaluation framework to help identify, capture, and reflect learning for a blended learning level one core course for undergraduates at the SIM University (UniSIM) in Singapore.

In chapter 11, EL-Deghaidy sought to describe a study conducted in higher education in the Egyptian context, utilizing a blended e-learning cooperative approach with pre-service teachers in a science teaching methodology course. The proposed methodology is based on social interaction between participants within the blended e-learning environment, where social constructivism theories play a crucial role.
In chapter 12, Anastasiades presents the basic characteristics of the Blended Learning Environment for the Training of teachers in Greece. The author focuses on the analysis of the results of the survey on the training needs of the Education personnel, on which the design of the training program was based.

In chapter 13, Papadakis examines the context of learning design as an important aspect of blended learning and teaching in adult education. He describes how to participate, how to create, and how to teach a blended lesson using LAMS.

In chapter 14, Mouzakis, Tsaknakis, and Tziortzioti explore the underlying theoretical principles that provided the basis for the design and implementation of a professional development Blended Learning program for informatics teachers in Greece.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this book consists of course designers, e-teachers, e-tutors, e-moderators, and generally educational policy makers in order to design, develop, and implement Blended Learning Environments and courses for adults. Also, it is an important publication for researchers and academic faculty who engage themselves in the designing of Blended Learning. Finally, this book will be useful for the technicians who have to adjust the technological tools into the teachers’ and students’ needs.

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