

Preface

Many scholars view blended learning as one of the emerging trends in post-secondary education (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Although the concept “blended learning” has been used in corporate and organizational learning training for a while, progress in information and computer technology has contributed to greater interest in post-secondary institutions. Face-to-face learning and teaching has shown its limitations to meet the educational demands of some categories of learners with scheduling constraints. The alternative offered by online learning and teaching has not completely satisfied some learners who are still in quest for face-to-face interactions despite their limited availability. Blended learning has emerged as a compromise that reconciles the need for high-tech and high-touch learning and teaching interactions.

There is greater consensus that institutions of higher learning have integrated blended learning in their educational practices (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004). However, some studies have questioned the merit and quality of blended learning in comparison to fully online learning (Reasons, Valadares, & Slavkin, 2005) and with respect to the ability of faculty to effectively use the technology related to the implementation of blended courses (Hanley, 2001, & Morgan, 2003). On the other hand, other studies found that blended learning and teaching is very effective (Graham & Robison, 2007). Lynch and Dembo (2004) found that self-regulated blended teaching contributes to increase in learning motivation and self-efficacy. Blended teaching and learning is viewed as a cost reduction strategy by many scholars (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2005), which provides flexibility for students (Aspden & Helm, 2004). Blended learning has contributed to challenge faculty to rethink the way they design, teach, and assess their courses (Stranbi & Bouvet, 2003). Comparisons of fully online with face-to-face teaching revealed that a combination of both approaches provides better learning outcomes (Cragg, Dunning, & Ellis, 2008; Stacey & Wiesenber, 2007).

BLENDED LEARNING AND TEACHING

Blended learning and teaching is not just the use of technologies or the combination of technologies with classroom teaching. It provides a unique opportunity for human and social interactions, pedagogical richness, knowledge acquisition, learning empowerment, transformative experience, research-informed teaching, and cost effectiveness that neither traditional face-to-face teaching nor fully online teaching can deliver alone. Blended learning and teaching is a whole process in itself, and must be considered through a systemic approach that involves the cultural, social, cognitive, psychological, and economic implications of any educational practice.

Bonk and Graham (2006) define blended learning as “the combination of instruction from two historically separate models of teaching and learning: traditional learning systems and distributed learning systems. It emphasizes the central role of computer-based technologies in blended learning” (p. 5). Blended learning and teaching found its theoretical foundations in several pedagogical paradigms, including, but are not limited to, collaborative learning (Holtzman, 2005), constructivist learning (Duffy, Lowyck, & Jonassen, 1993), and situated learning (Wenger, 1998). In other words, blended learning provides students shared ownership opportunities in the learning process (collaborative learning), helps them construct their knowledge based on prior learning (constructivist learning), and facilitates the learning process within a social context (situated learning). The concept blended teaching and learning is used in this book to refer to a combination of classroom (face-to-face) and online activities, which enables to reduce the amount of classroom contacts (Graham, 2006; Hartman, Dzuiban, & Brophy-Ellison, 2007).

TRANSCULTURAL BLENDED LEARNING AND TEACHING

Culture is the combination of beliefs, values, language, communicating styles, norms, history, and other habits that an individual acquire through education, and which influence one’s actions, thoughts, behavior, and understanding. Cultures vary by countries and regions of the world, because culture is usually shared by a significant group of people. Cultures vary within national borders based on race, ethnicity, region, or history, and cultural variation within a national culture is referred to as subcultures. Face negotiation theory explains how individual and groups manage faces in intercultural communications (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992). According to the face negotiation theory, individual and cultural identities are managed through faces, which are public image of individuals and groups that society sees and evaluates in the light of cultural norms and values. The threat to individual and group faces lead to conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The stranger theory asserts that one of the people involved in intercultural contact must be a stranger. The stranger is most likely well aware of cultural differences and tend to overlook people behaviors in the light of their cultural identity. Individuals have cultural and socio-linguistic variabilities based on their cultural backgrounds. With mobility of students and partnership among postsecondary institutions across national borders, many blended classrooms are become transcultural. Simply put, a transcultural classroom is one that includes the presence of two or more cultures or subcultures that cross national borders. In a transcultural classroom, individuals engage in interactions and transcultural communications. In a transcultural classroom the teachers or instructors must accommodate such cross-cultural reality in order to facilitate effective learning experiences for students (Delgado-Gaetan, 1991; Davidson, 1992). According to Wolfgang (1999), cultures are inseparably linked with one another. Therefore, cultures or subcultures are not isolated islands. They are interconnected universes with uniqueness and sameness. The attempt to promote homogenization, under the assumption that the world is a global village, will simply not be able to capture that complexity. However, a transcultural approach may increase the likelihood to capture at least facets of the complexity related to human diversity. This book is an attempt to suggest such transcultural perspective in blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education. The term transcultural blended teaching and learning will imply the systemic integration of cross-cultural dimensions in the conception, design, planning, implementation, and assessment of blended learning courses, programs, or activities, in order to achieve quality learning outcomes and provide a transformational course experience to students.

ABOUT THE BOOK AND ITS PURPOSE

This publication on “transcultural blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education” is inspired by a need for texts that address blended teaching and learning in a more systemic way, as acknowledged by Bluic, Goodyear, and Ellis (2007). Boyle (2005) rightfully argues that blended teaching and learning should not only be driven by the course outcomes, but also by the needs of the learner. In that sense, the cultural context surrounding the teaching and learning process as well as the learner should also be taken into consideration. One of the ways to do that is through an integration of cross-cultural dimensions into the overall blended teaching and learning process. This inspired the use of the term “transcultural blended teaching and learning.” A transcultural approach partly involves texts from various cultural contexts and authors with diverse backgrounds to help fill the gap, by providing a holistic perspective, which combines the interests of various students, instructors, administrators, and practitioners.

Overall, the serious competing titles focus on research and teaching strategies related to the use of technologies. Also, they use the concept of blended learning when in reality they emphasize on blended teaching. They failed to use a holistic approach of blended learning and teaching and do not adequately address the transcultural dimensions of the process as a whole system. This publication focuses on research and practices related to learning and teaching in cross-cultural contexts, and considers learning and teaching as distinct activities that are part of a holistic process.

This book is designed to help the readers across nations and cultures strengthen their understanding of theories, models, research, applications, best practices, and emerging issues related to blended learning and teaching through a holistic and transcultural perspective. The readers of this book will have an opportunity to:

- Explore the theoretical and conceptual framework of transcultural learning and teaching
- Examine transcultural students’ ways of knowing
- Explore principles of curriculum design in a diverse world and for diverse learners
- Examine the implications of technology in global education and for blended learning and teaching in transcultural contexts
- Explore cross-cultural instructional strategies for blended learning practices
- Explore transnational leadership, management, and administrative principles in the planning and implementation of blended learning programs
- Explore principles of evaluation and assessment of blended learning programs and courses in cross-cultural contexts, as well as issues of quality assurance
- Examine current and emerging trends in transcultural blended learning and teaching

There is no existing publication that addresses the theories, research, practices, and issues related to blended learning and teaching in a transcultural and systemic manner at the same time. Given the extensive utilization of blended learning and teaching approaches in postsecondary institutions worldwide, this book poises to meet the needs of researchers, faculty, practitioners, and administrators of higher education in transnational and transcultural contexts. The book not only provides frameworks for creativity, critical thinking, in-depth analysis, transformative teaching and learning, but also introduces transcultural and holistic contexts through contributors from diverse backgrounds. The peer reviewers who approved the chapters included in this book represent a convenient sample of all the major continents in the world.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This publication is an edited book. It compiles 19 chapters, including the introduction, organized in eight main sections:

The first section is entitled “Concepts and Theories,” and includes chapters 1 and 2, which are related to the conceptual and theoretical framework of the book, including concept and theories about transcultural learning and teaching, blended teaching and learning in postsecondary education, and transcultural blended teaching and learning. Chapter 1 introduces a conceptual framework for transculturality. The conceptual framework in this chapter includes the levels and dimensions of transculturality, as well as their implications for blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education. The chapter suggests a framework for blended learning and teaching interactions that are grounded in one’s own cultural experiences while providing general and targeted awareness and tools to interact and perform in cross-cultural contexts.

Chapter 2 offers a traditional African perspective of blended learning. The chapter draws from extensive literature by experts in traditional African education who are indigenes of the culture (including some of the authors) for its analysis of blended learning in traditional African lifelong learning. It also uses literature from Western and other educators to compare the concept across the two worlds.

The second section is about transcultural students’ ways of knowing. This section includes chapters 3, 4, and 5. Chapter 3 explains how cultural and learning style differences impact students learning preferences in blended learning. This chapter suggests that offering a blended learning environment that allows students to select their personal composition of different learning tools accommodates the transition of a strongly diverse group of freshmen. The chapter argues that the facilitation of different learning dispositions in a freshman program might especially be helpful in the transition of less academically adapted students.

Chapter 4 explores Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (2001) using Hollins’ structured dialogue (2006) to attain a conduit for effective intercultural experiences. This chapter includes an in-depth analysis of the knowledge and understanding about minority and majority culture with respect to individualism and collectivism. The chapter argues that the acquisition of a non-superficial, research-based, and participant-generated understanding and knowledge of diverse culture includes one’s own culture. It provides tools that may be used for prevention or avoidance of conflict (proactive) and the promotion of intercultural understanding.

Chapter 5 is titled “Cyborg in the Village: Culturally Embedded Resistances to Blended Teaching and Learning.” The primary purpose of the chapter is to explore the tensions that exist between institutions’ surging reliance on blended learning and the preference for face-to-face interaction expressed by many adult students who are members of racially, ethnically or culturally marginalized groups. This chapter offers a theoretical argument articulating the existence of culturally embedded resistances among marginalized adult postsecondary students. Also, it highlights some current best practices and strategies for acknowledging, leveraging, and/or mitigating culturally embedded resistances to blended education.

The third section is under the sub-title “Curriculum Design in a Diverse World.” Topics that are developed include, but are not limited to, curriculum development theories and models, designing blended learning programs, blended learning curriculum, blended learning syllabus, and blended learning lesson plan. Chapters 6 and 7 are about the aforementioned topics.

Chapter 6 addresses the issue of curriculum design in blended learning within the context of postsecondary education, which is often a problem for teachers wishing to use it. This chapter includes a

literature review about the issue of blended learning in general and its use in postsecondary education specifically. It analyzes the challenges faced particularly by instructors to overcome curriculum and technology issues when deciding to teach a blended course. The chapter suggests a curriculum design model that faculty can use when planning their blended courses in a transcultural context. The chapter includes applications of the model in transcultural settings, in Israel.

Chapter 7 offers blended learning design and teaching strategies in the context of a program planning course in Taiwan. This chapter includes a review of literature on blended learning, provides the cultural context of the blended learning and teaching interactions, and outlines curriculum and instructional strategies used.

The fourth section is on “Technology and Global Education,” and includes chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 8 analyzes the transformative learning and educational technology integration in a post-totalitarian context among school teachers in rural Siberia, Russia. This chapter describes the results of a case study conducted in rural Siberia with in-service teachers learning to integrate educational technology into their practice. Then, analyzes teachers’ perspective transformation related to their attitudes and actions when undergoing this process.

Chapter 9 is a skeptical essay that puts on trial what is referred to as the ideological conflict and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) - driven pedagogical change in Africa’s higher education. The chapter analyzes the challenges faced by many African countries with respect to access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and offers a critical perspective on the challenges for blended learning and teaching.

The title of the fifth section is “Cross-Cultural Instructional Strategies,” and includes chapters related to teaching theories and models, fostering effective participation in blended learning, instructor-students interactions, student-student interactions, instructional strategies, and development of technology-based instructions. This section includes chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13.

Chapter 10 is about educational technology and instructional design in synchronous blended learning environments. This chapter introduces the readers to many of the ideas, theories, and practices associated with synchronous online learning environments. It looks at multiple case studies at the postsecondary education level and in global contexts. The chapter argues that although technology may be useful in successful learning and teaching, informal and formal settings do not depend on a single technology or environment. Instead, it depends on situations that bring together a well-chosen confluence of effective learning resources and the choice of partnership with technology that can unfold potential knowledge.

Chapter 11 provides best practices and strategies to facilitating learning with adult students in the transcultural classroom. The author of this chapter uses his own experiences to develop a series of “guidelines” that an instructor might consider when working with adult, transcultural students. The chapter analyzes the challenges that many of these students face in using today’s technology, given not only their inexperience and discomfort level, but the other demands on their lives which makes use of this technology both a blessing and a curse.

Chapter 12’s title is “Crossing into the Dreamtime: Evaluating the Benefits of Weblogs as a Blended Learning Tool for University Students to Teach Elementary School Students about Australian Culture.” The chapter asserts that if an individual have a chance to tell his/her story about his/her experience it will enhance the value of the experience for that individual and would benefit anyone who is able to hear that story.

Chapter 13 provides innovative approaches in project management blended education through a case study on introducing agent-based simulation in a Master’s degree program, in Romania. The study

was based on a ResourceLever software, an agent-based resource leveling plug-in for Microsoft Project. The ResourceLever is based on a multi-agent system and an auction market. Furthermore, the chapter explains that the introduction of advancement in project management education, in order to be successful, requires a good mix between theory, tools, and practical professional expertise, combined in a professional pedagogical design.

The sixth section is entitled “Leadership, Management, and Administration beyond Borders.” The chapters are on blended teaching and learning and instructional leadership, blended teaching and learning and educational administration, planning and implementation of blended learning, faculty support, student support, financial sustainability, blended teaching and learning and institutional partnership, and technology project management in cross-cultural contexts. Chapters 14 and 15 are at the heart of this section.

Chapter 14 concerns a case of blended learning initiative in a university-wide program to develop, deliver and assess blended courses, at Penn State University, United States. This chapter discusses lessons learned regarding planning and implementation, the faculty recruitment process, the importance of appropriate technology support, assessment, and provides some insights about the optimal mix of online versus face-to-face activities in hybrid courses.

Chapter 15 argues that blended learning is the road to inclusive and global education. The chapter presents the results of two pilot projects in Canada, with a focus on providing best experiences for students’ and instructors’ in the area of new approaches to learning, the technical skills required, and the options for support both in the local communities and online. The first case study focuses on blended learning models developed for Aboriginal students from rural areas across British Columbia, Canada. The second case study looks at a 30-credit Master’s degree cohort program on teaching French as a Second Language in British Columbia and across Canada. The chapter analyzes the management and administrative challenges related to blended learning and teaching. Also, it explains how the instructional designers and faculty collaborate to create a highly immersive environment, which would allow instructor and students to interact with each other and with the course material without barriers.

The seventh section is about “Evaluation, Assessment, and Quality in Cross-Cultural Contexts.” This section addresses the issues of performance assessment in blended teaching and learning, assessment and evaluation strategies, quality assurance in blended teaching and learning, and continuous quality improvement. This section includes chapters 16 and 17.

Chapter 16 is a case study exploring the student experience of technology for enhancing learning, in the U.K. The chapter explains how students use technology to enhance their learning and their stated enthusiasm for studying in a blended environment where instead of choosing between either online or on-campus, they can profit from a both online and on-campus’ blended environment. The chapter argues that students do not necessarily enter a postsecondary institution with the technology skills needed to participate in a blended course. The chapter explains that older students may enter a college or university without the technological prerequisites and may be expected to have the facility to use technology for their studies while not having grown up in an environment of daily technology use.

Chapter 17 provides a conceptual framework for quality assurance in blended learning and teaching. The framework includes a transcultural blend of institutional fitness, teaching effectiveness, and learning outcomes.

The eighth and last section is entitled “Current and Emerging Trends in Blended Learning and Teaching,” and includes chapters 18 and 19. Chapter 18 analyzes intercultural issues in graduate blended learning environments. The case study in this chapter concerns a private, non-profit, regionally ac-

credited institution granting Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees and serving a diverse student population, in a small community in California, United States. Chapter 19 is a conclusion chapter, which offers some thought on current and emerging trends in transcultural blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education.

The sections in these books are interrelated. Therefore, chapters across sections may show overlapping. This is part of the complexity of the topic covered in this book and the attempt to ensure a synergy in the publication. The order in which one reads the chapters will depend on the needs and the context.

USING THIS BOOK

The publication will serve as a good companion for faculty, administrators, and leaders in postsecondary institutions to plan, develop, implement, and evaluate blended learning programs and courses. It provides researchers with the latest research in transcultural blended learning and teaching theories, findings, best practices, and emerging trends. Practitioners will find best practice cases and frameworks that they can cross-culturally adapt to develop, implement, and assess their own courses and programs. The publication provides leaders and administrators in postsecondary institutions with research-based support to make decisions related to blended learning and teaching in a systemic way.

This book will be particularly useful for advanced Master's and Doctoral students in various fields or disciplines such as adult education, career and workforce development, college teaching, comparative education, continuing education, educational leadership, higher education, human resource development, human services, instructional technology, international education, international development, lifelong learning, teacher education, and student services. The book contains a wealth of theoretical and conceptual frameworks and case studies that will be helpful to students working on their Master's thesis or their Doctoral dissertation.

Regardless of how one uses this book, my hope as the editor is that it contributes to advance the debates and strengthen the scholarship in transcultural blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education.

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