Chapter 18
Pedagogy Reconsidered in a Multimodal Blended Environment

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INTRODUCTION

Blended learning, an outgrowth of e-delivery, is central to the current discourse on technology and learning because of its connections to multimedia and its applications to a wide range of educational settings. For some, blended learning is, “any instruction where content is delivered both online and in onsite facilities” (Mossavar-Rahmani & Larson-Daugherty, 2007, p. 67). Defined in this way, blended or hybrid learning is a delivery model distinct from face-to-face delivery and from e-learning that takes place entirely in an asynchronous context. However, advances in electronic delivery, including CD-ROM, podcasting and video conferencing, are bending and broadening this definition (El-Gayar & Dennis, 2005; Sankey & Smith, 2004). The virtual classroom can now have the immediacy of a face-to-face learning environment. This investigation defines blended learning as a portion of learning done in real time, whether in a face-to-face or a virtualized meeting, and a portion conducted asynchronous, typically on a learning platform such as Blackboard.

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Multimodal is a core concept within any understanding of blended delivery, and links the latter with multiplying and morphing tools associated with Internet technologies that rely upon audio, visual, and interactive tools to engage participants (Brusilovsky, 2001; Console, 2004). These tools have expanded the range of learning styles and diversified the learning experiences supported by online learning environments. For this reason, any understanding of blended learning must take into account not only multiple delivery formats but also a wide range of electronic tools designed to actualize instructional goals.

As advances in technology propel the ongoing morphing of tools and delivery models, fundamental questions arise about the nature of learning, pedagogy and instructional design within blended learning environments. Educators caught up in the transformation of delivery models must embrace and address these challenges. How have education courses changed as formats of delivery have multiplied and diversified? How do instructors make decisions about the delivery medium and the nature of learning activities within a medium? These questions link decisions about tool use and delivery options to the broader context of learning assumptions, theories and methodologies associated with different delivery models. The goal of this investigation is to capture some of the shifts in the instructional topography of education courses resulting from multimodal, blended delivery models and to situate these changes “within a pedagogic cultural agenda where knowledge and reflection are still important” (Watson, 2001, p.261).

The heart of this investigation is the impact of human computer interaction on teaching and learning in blended graduate distance education courses. The multimodal, blended delivery model presents a unique lens through which to view the topic because it includes synchronous, face-to-face, and asynchronous elements. Developers of blended courses must directly address questions of whether content should be delivered face-to-face or electronically, and which multimodal tool best suits a particular learning goal.

This need to consider both live and electronic delivery within the framework of a single course enlarges a debate previously centered on the polarities of electronic or live teaching and learning. The discussion brought to the foreground important questions about learning and teaching with computers. How does teaching in an electronic environment compare to teaching face-to-face? How does the role of the instructor change in blended learning environments? How is learning influenced when mediated through electronic tools? These pedagogical concerns, in the background of electronic delivery since its inception, became more visible with the advent of blended learning. Larger questions about learning theory and the nature of knowledge lie beneath the surface of delivery choices.

Mapping the impact of these changes in methods will require systematic research with different learning populations, distinct disciplines, and from a multitude of perspectives, including instructors, learners, programs, and institutions. This investigation will focus on these questions from the perspective of graduate educators developing distance education courses for educational professionals. It will show how adopting a longitudinal view uncovers the ways blended learning is re-shaping the instructional practices and assumptions of university educators working with professional learners in graduate distance education programs.

**BACKGROUND**

In order to consider the question of the relationships between educational technology and instructional methods, three areas must be addressed. First, advances in multimedia tools must be contextualized within the parameters of a blended learning environment. Secondly, underlying theo-
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