Chapter 23
Applying Web 2.0 Tools in Hybrid Learning Designs

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores how educators can harness the potential of a new wave of social software to respond to the challenges of tertiary education in the new millennium, by combining the interactivity and immediacy of face-to-face instruction with the openness, connectivity, and flexibility afforded by the new tools and technologies. It also argues for a new conceptualization of “hybrid” or “blended” learning in the Web 2.0 era, and presents a number of exemplars of Web 2.0-based hybrid learning that typify the emergence of a new pedagogy for the digital age. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the issues, barriers, and dilemmas that exist in implementing an effective hybrid approach to learning within a formal education setting.

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION OF HYBRID LEARNING IN THE WEB 2.0 ERA

Hybrid course delivery, sometimes called “blended learning,” has no single definition, nor is it a new concept. The idea of fusing or combining different approaches or modes of teaching and learning, with the hope of achieving the benefits of each of the constituent approaches and enabling a range of experiences for learners, has been part of pedagogical theory for quite some time (Williams, 2003).

The terms “hybrid learning” and “blended learning” have been found to represent many levels of meaning and may encompass multiple different perspectives (Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, & Francis, 2006). Since the advent of e-learning, however, the focus in the literature has appeared to be predominantly focused on the combination of delivery modes, i.e. face-to-face (F2F) and online. Education practitioners and researchers need to consider the possibility that such distinctions may become
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decreasingly significant or even irrelevant in a networked society (Hargreaves, 2004; Castells, 2004a, 2004b; Rudd, Sutch, & Facer, 2006) where information and communication technology (ICT) tools, including Web 2.0 and mobile technologies, are becoming increasingly pervasive, and where we are witnessing wider, societal shifts such as the merging of formal and informal learning. The new wave of ubiquitous computing and social software tools makes possible a fresh repertoire of learner–teacher interaction, distributed collaboration, and communication, and their transformative effects on society, learning, and networking are becoming increasingly visible.

In this chapter, the authors argue that a broader definition or conceptualization of hybrid learning is needed that incorporates innovative technologies, pedagogies, and learning designs, and that respects the need for student choice, self-direction, and autonomy. The chapter highlights the affordances of Web 2.0-based social software tools and how they can be leveraged for learning, in addition to proposing a framework, “Pedagogy 2.0,” which demonstrates the potential of networked learning and an extended conceptualization of hybrid learning that capitalizes on these affordances and tools.

DIMENSIONS OF HYBRID LEARNING

Hybrid learning sometimes refers to approaches to teaching that require students to meet for face-to-face classes while much of the course content and interaction is provided online. Some authors distinguish between “supplemented” e-learning, in which online supplementary materials are provided to augment traditional face-to-face delivery, and truly “blended” e-learning, in which a significant proportion of learning activities are carried out on the Internet. In other cases, hybrid or blended programs refer to programs of study that provide students with an option of taking some courses fully online and some in face-to-face classes (known at some institutions as “mixed mode”) (Williams, 2002). This technology-driven approach is not accepted by Bleed (2001), who argues that simply bolting on technology is not a sufficient condition for effective blended learning. Instead, he and other researchers would argue that effective hybrid learning design brings together sound classroom and online methodologies and is based on student-centered instruction (i.e. follows a learner-centered approach), effective and timely teacher intervention, peer-to-peer interaction, and the provision of multiple learning resources in a highly interactive learning context (Garrison, Kanuka, & Hawes, 2002).

Sharpe et al. (2006) maintain that blended learning may refer to transformative practices and course reengineering that entail changing forms of interaction, pedagogy, and learning. In some rare instances it may refer to a learner-centered holistic paradigm in which students take greater initiative and control. When the term “flexible learning” became popular, it, too, was intended as a mix of face-to-face and online learning, usually in response to student demands for variety, access, recognition of varied learning styles, and student control over the learning experience. With an increasingly diverse student base, larger student cohorts, and the need for practical, skills-based approaches to prepare graduates for their future vocations, higher education institutions have tried to maintain quality by adopting e-learning solutions that provide choice in terms of the time and place of learning (Matheos, Daniel, & McCalla, 2005).

Many hybrid models call for student and teacher participation and an instructional design approach that intentionally supports both specific learning outcomes and flexible delivery by blending modes of instruction, technologies, and learning activities. Such an approach, based on the concept of hybridization, brings together two dissimilar forms of learning (online and face-to-face) to create a third. McCray (2000) argues that when both face-to-face and online learning are
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