Chapter 6
Not Just in Theory: Practical Aspects of Transcultural Blended Learning and Teaching Curriculum Design

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ABSTRACT
This chapter discusses the issue of blended course design, with particular emphasis on a transcultural context. The chapter provides a description of a 3-dimensional model of TBLT curriculum design as implemented in a teacher education institution. The model comprises of a six-step instructional design focusing on the institution’s student population. Four examples of blended courses designed through use of the model and the design process are presented, with particular emphasis on the institution’s transcultural student population. A literature review on issues of blended learning in higher education institutions and transcultural learning is included. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how lecturers in higher education institutions may be able to use the model and design process to successfully construct blended learning courses within a transcultural context.

INTRODUCTION
The literature about online teaching and learning in general, and in higher education institutions specifically, shows that this new approach to pedagogy is here to stay (Njenga & Fourie, 2010; Power, 2008). Most academic institutions are at present offering both online and blended learning courses in growing numbers, in addition to traditional face-to-face courses (Babb, Stewart & Johnson, 2010; Parker & Martin, 2010; Precel, Eshet-Alkalai & Alberton, 2009; So & Bonk, 2010). Enrollment in online courses in higher education in the US has risen in 2009 by almost one million students compared to the previous year, with over 5.6 million students taking at least
one online course. This represents a 21% growth rate, as compared to less than a 2% growth rate in higher education student population. In addition, nearly 30% of higher education students in the US now take at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2010). These figures reflect clear implications for higher learning institutions regarding the development of both online and blended learning courses. Thus, ways of designing effective blended learning courses need to be considered carefully.

The literature shows that even when a particular institution decides to develop such courses, faculty members often do not follow suit, with the unfortunate result that no substantial progress is made (Boyle, 2005; George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010; Oh & Park, 2009). It is thus necessary to consider the implications of the present situation for the faculty expected to carry the burden of designing, teaching and evaluating such courses, providing them with time, space and assistance to learn, reflect and to try things out when and where necessary (Shemla, 2007).

An additional concern is the growing awareness of the multicultural nature of the present world we live in. It has long been recognized that developing multicultural and transcultural competencies in students is important, as they provide a significant step towards the tolerant society we all wish to live in (Martinez-Aleman & Salkever, 2004). It is now widely recognized that online and blended learning can contribute towards achieving this goal in many ways (Gorski, 2004; Heemskerk, Brink, Volman & ten Dam, 2005). Thus, when undertaking the design of a blended learning course, all the above issues need to be considered. This chapter provides an initial discussion of the relevant literature on both blended learning and TBLT, followed by a brief presentation of a model for blended course design (Sela, 2010a), as used in four blended learning courses in a pre-service teacher education college. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the level of generalization possible in this case, and how lecturers in higher-education in general, and teacher education specifically, can make use of it in their own teaching contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Blended Learning

The term ‘blended learning’ refers to courses that include, in differing degrees, both face-to-face and online elements. Delialioglu and Yildirim (2007) view it as a combination of classroom and online activities in which teachers can work towards their pedagogical goals by making use of the benefits of both. They do not specify the proportions of the two types of teaching/learning activities, leaving this to the individual teacher. Similarly, Garrison & Vaughan (2008) emphasize the pedagogical rather than technological qualities of blended teaching: “…face-to-face oral communication and online written communication are optimally integrated such that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience congruent with the context and intended educational purpose” (p.42). A somewhat different approach is adopted by Allen and Seaman (2010), who define blended learning as courses that have between 30% and 80% online elements. Teachers often combine different online and offline activities, tools and resources to form a ‘blend’ uniquely suitable to their particular teaching situation, taking into account the students, the context, and their own educational beliefs and practices (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2010).

Much research has been conducted over the past decade on different aspects of blended learning, including its advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages include offering many possible variations through use of different teaching format combinations; allowing the teacher to achieve maximum suitability between the teaching/learning format and the target group; and