Chapter 15
Blended Learning: The Road to Inclusive and Global Education

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ABSTRACT

The evolving student expectancy on the quality and accessibility of education has resulted in a new landscape of delivery modes of educational programs. This chapter presents two case studies that demonstrate the blended learning models as a mean to enable students in distributed locations to gain access to programs not otherwise available. The first case is about a mixed-mode course for Aboriginal students in British Columbia where the course format was tailored to be culturally sensitive to the Aboriginal ways of knowing. The second case is about a French Master’s program delivered in a hybrid mode to offer educators in remote parts of Canada access to this specialized degree. By applying the blended learning model, instructional designers assisted in establishing a learner-centered approach rather than an institution-centered approach, which made the programs more inclusive and meaningful for learners.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of technology-enabled learning has created a global education market, which has allowed learners to choose educational programs that are most suitable to their learning needs and not limited by their geographical location. This broader competition to attract more students imposes a need on educational institutions to constantly strive for higher quality and more accessible education. In this new environment, the institutions are faced with technical, and more
importantly, new pedagogical challenges. Students who have traditionally been excluded from the education process for various reasons are now demanding, and rightly so, to take advantage of the wider options of how, where and when they learn. In response, many higher education institutions have set a goal of broadening access to education as part of their mandate, but in some cases, it remains an aspiration, not a practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the increasing potential of blended (also called mixed-mode or hybrid) learning in the context of inclusive and global aspect of higher education. Two very distinct examples from the practice are presented and discussed, as an illustration of the changing spaces where teaching and learning occur.

The first case is about a mixed-mode undergraduate course for Aboriginal student-teachers and the second case is about a Master’s degree cohort for French teachers. Both are offered to students in British Columbia through the University of British Columbia (UBC), in Vancouver, Canada. The case studies present transformative efforts to engage students in different ways and enable them to reach their full potentials.

The chapter explores the topic from the administrative and institutional perspective. This includes taking initiative in curriculum redesign by anticipating the changing student expectations and restructuring the existing pedagogical models, as well as by re-conceptualizing the institutional administrative affordances to deliver and support such programs.

BACKGROUND

Education has always been important for the personal and national growth. It is even more so in today’s knowledge-based economies of the 21st century. Although it may seem that the use of computer technology for education is widespread in Canada, the reality is far from that. According to the 2006 Census (McKeown & Underhill, 2007), “one-third (7.9 million adult Canadians) reported never having accessed the Internet for personal or non-business reasons.” Current jobs, however, increasingly rely on computer use and tech-literate people (Guy & Lownes-Jackson, 2010).

Networked information technology provides educational institutions with both the opportunities and responsibilities of offering programs, courses and learning experiences to learners from remote locations, with disabilities, marginalized groups, or people from specific, distinctive social structures, such as religious organizations, corporate sectors, etc. In other words, education has become more inclusive and global (Ashman, 2010; Gaskell, 2010; Watson, 2008).

According to the US Department of Education Report (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009) blended learning, or mixed-mode programs proved to be the most efficient way of teaching and learning comparing to the fully online or fully classroom-based instruction. The combination of face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers, and independent learning seems to be bringing “the best of both worlds” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, Gautsch, Griffy-Brown, 2010; Parry, 2010).

However, there is no unique blended learning model that is successful and applicable to all. For some it may mean classroom instruction supported by online course components, such as discussion forums, or virtual meetings. For others it may mean use of video conferencing, where the instructor remains with one group of students in the classroom, while the other group connects remotely, with or without a facilitator. Bridges, Bothelo & Tsang (2010), for example, describe blended learning environment as a fusion of in-house digital resources and face-to-face tutorials. Generally, it means combining traditional learning and web based on-line learning approaches, i.e. combining various pedagogic approaches with all kinds of technology.

The goal of the instructional design support team at in the UBC’s Faculty of Education has