Chapter 19
Current and Emerging Trends in Transcultural Blended Learning and Teaching

Emmanuel Jean Francois
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter serves as the conclusion of the book and outlines some challenges and current and emerging trends related to blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education. The current and emerging trends include, but are not limited to: accelerated blended learning programs for non-traditional adult students, adaptability of blended learning and teaching to diverse disciplines, quality assurance, transnational extent, possible transition to blended learning orienting postsecondary institutions, and the development of self-pace blended courses in postsecondary programs.

INTRODUCTION

Blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education provides opportunities for various forms of interactions among stakeholders of higher education (student, instructor, administrators, and technical support specialists). The interaction can be rooted in the delivery format, which is the interactions between the student and the instructor, and interactions among students through meetings that take place face-to-face and online. This is what we called blended learning and teaching throughout the chapters of this book. Within these blended interactions through information and communication technology, other forms of interactions will occur among individuals with different cultural backgrounds, gender, age, including learning styles, personality, motivation, life experiences and circumstances. These interactions forces individuals involved in a blended learning program or course to face at some point the reality of intercultural communication, which may not
Current and Emerging Trends unfold in a healthy way if at least the interacting individuals do not understand the principles of transculturality, and ideally find themselves somewhere in the levels of transculturality. The intangible interrelations between blended learning and teaching and potential for dynamics of transculturality have inspired the idea of “transcultural blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education”. In that sense, blended learning and teaching programs that include participants from different cultural backgrounds will be considered as a terrain where transculturality could be observed or experienced. Similarly, the gathering of particular blended programs or courses on a same support or platform will also foster opportunity to observe or experience transculturality. This chapter serves in lieu of a conclusion of the book and outlines some challenges, current and emerging trends related to transcultural blended learning and teaching in postsecondary education.

CHALLENGES IN BLENDED LEARNING

Blended learning and teaching provides various benefits to stakeholders of postsecondary institutions. However, there exist some unsolved challenges that serve as justification for concerns by some critics. Some of the challenges are the time consumption nature of blended learning, technical difficulties, and the struggle to decide on what is the right blend format.

Time Consumption

Several studies found that the inability of faculty and instructional designers to find the best format of collaboration possible may transform the development of a blended program or course into a time consuming endeavor (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2005; Hartman, 2002; Rossett, Douglis, & Frazee, 2003). Part of the challenge includes the fact that some faculty members may not be willing or have time to participate in the various training workshops on redesigning for blended teaching, acquiring new technical skills, and shifting pedagogical philosophy, which are necessary to maintain quality assurance (Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal, & Sorg, 2005; Robison, 2004). The increase in time to teach a blended course involves both the planning and designing, but also the delivery (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2005). This time consumption challenge related to blended learning results from the opportunity offered by such delivery model to have more interactions between the student and the faculty, and among students. Once students feel that a safe place exists for meaningful interactions, there tends to be more engagement in the teaching and learning process (Dabbagh, 2002; Sands, 2002; Willett, 2002).

Technical Issues

Dealing with technical issues while engaging in the online facet of blended learning is another challenge that is common. Beisser and Steinbronn (2002) indicated that some students felt unprepared for online learning because they perceived themselves as having intermediate computer skills. High quality internet access is still an issue in rural areas of a country like the United States (Nielsen, 2012) and in many developing countries around the globe (James, 2005). One of the reasons that this is considered as a challenge is because a certain level of comfort with technology is essential for the students to have a meaningful learning experience (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004; Hartman, 2002). It is important to underline that recent studies found no predictive correlation between student internet self-efficacy and academic success (Lynch & Dembo, 2004). However, low computer and internet proficiency does create some anxiety (Haytko, 2001) that can affect student experience in a course. On the other hand, even with satisfactory internet proficiency, students can encounter inadequate bandwidth and firewalls that limit their access to aspects of