



Blended Learning or 'Blanded' Learning? Reflections from a teaching and learning perspective

Key Words

curricula renewal, blended approaches, digitally enabled learning opportunities, challenges

Abstract

Adopting more blended approaches to curriculum development and delivery is increasingly expected and required in higher education. This paper reflects on this process at one Australian university which has recently initiated a Blended Learning Strategy. The paper does not outline this strategy or explore the rationale behind it, but rather focuses on its roll out at the curricula level and potential challenges it presents for those directly involved in teaching and learning, in particular discipline lecturers and Academic Language and Learning (ALL) educators. As such, the paper is exploring this process as it unfolds, in the 'action-research' tradition (Bassit, 2010). It starts from the premise that adopting more blended approaches has the potential to greatly enhance the student learning experience, provided the face-to-face and online components are "thoughtfully integrated" (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). However, it seeks to explore some challenges that follow if we accept that by definition blended learning involves a "...fundamental reconceptualization and reorganisation of the teaching and learning dynamic". (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p.97). Some potential implementation issues and risks in moving to more blended delivery are considered, including confusion over what constitutes a 'blended' approach, limitations in staff knowledge and capacity in designing and delivering curricula within a blended environment, the need to ensure less digitally literate students are not overlooked or left behind, and issues around quality, sustainability and the on-going development of curricula and teaching and learning resources. It questions whether design and development of new teaching and learning resources for online delivery is increasingly being determined by software capabilities and limitations rather than by pedagogical considerations. It also reflects on the central importance of effective collaboration between academic teaching and learning staff and Learning Designers in achieving quality outcomes in terms of both pedagogical and design principles. The curriculum renewal process, including the incorporation of "digitally enabled learning opportunities" (VU Blended Learning Strategy, 2016), is fundamental to HE courses continuing to remain meaningful, relevant and engaging to new generations of learners. Taking the time to make sure this is done effectively, soundly and in a coordinated way is, from a teaching and learning perspective, undoubtedly time well spent. The paper argues that in order to ensure quality and sustainability, and realise the potential gains of more blended approaches, academic staff (including ALL educators) involved in teaching and learning must be afforded the appropriate time, space and pace to work in genuinely collaborative ways with Learning Designers on effective curricula change and renewal.

References

- Bassit, T.N. (2010). *Conducting research in educational contexts*. London: Continuum.
- Garrison, D.R. & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: Uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *Internet and Higher Education*, 7, 95-105. doi:10.1016/j.iheduc.2004.02.001

Victoria University Blended Learning Strategy. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.vu.edu.au/learning-teaching/blended-learning-strategy>