**The Big Picture**

**Blended Learning Environments**

***What I Learned and How I Learned It***

Through reading and discussion within this module, I was surprised at the rate that online learning opportunities continue to expand. I am most interested in blended learning which is the combination of face-to-face and computer assisted learning. Graham ([2006, p. 7](#_ENREF_3)) believes that the trend towards blended learning systems will increase. He goes on to state that blended learning may even become so ubiquitous that we will eventually drop the word *blended* and just call it learning.

Teachers need to be adequately prepared to facilitate online learning. As a teacher, I have little experience with online tools to assist learning in the online portion of blended learning environments, hence, the reason that I have returned to University to gain knowledge and expertise in this area. Barbour ([2009, p. 19](#_ENREF_1)) made mention that in the United States teachers are now able to gain certificates in online teaching and learning through the University of Florida and Boise State University. Through participating in the online discussions it was apparent that fellow classmates are also beginning to grapple with effective ways of incorporating computer-assisted learning within classroom environments.

For students we need to gain a better understanding of the skills necessary for students to be successful in independent and technology mediated environments. It is necessary that schools provide ways for students to learn how to be successful in online environments. It is not simply a matter of providing computer access within classroom environments, which has been the case in the last two schools that I have taught. “Michigan, New Mexico, Alabama and others require students to take an online course or have online learning experience in order to graduate from high school” ([Barbour, 2009, p. 19](#_ENREF_1)).

To ensure success in the learning environment, students need to have access to the necessary scaffolding to support their learning. Current social software tools can be used so that instruction is learner centered by encouraging self-management ([McLoughlin & Lee, 2010](#_ENREF_5)). Scaffolding of essential skills and digital literacies will be needed as not all students will have the ability to use current technology for academic purposes. In creating a learning environment I will need to consider the goals of learners and the ICT tools available that will enable effective learning. I believe to successfully incorporate blended learning into secondary school, it will be necessary to redesign the learning environment. McMahon and Pospisal ([2005](#_ENREF_6)) characterize today’s students as having an information technology mindset that prefer a group-based approach to study and social activities. These occur both in the physical and virtual world. Steeples, Jones, and Goodyear ([2002](#_ENREF_9)) suggest that a blended learning environment would include activities involving peer collaboration, feedback on performance, and opportunities for reflection.

**Applications to Future Practice**

When I return to teaching I hope to design courses so that students learn in a blended learning environment. Graham ([2006](#_ENREF_3)) states that there are many ways to blend face to face and computer assisted learning but that course-level blending is one of the most common ways to blend.

I was reminded that technology does not inherently improve learning; it merely makes possible more effective pedagogy ([Jones & O'Shea, 2004](#_ENREF_4)). It is important that technology is not just added on to classroom activities but enhances the learning of individual students. I hope to provide synchronous and asynchronous learning that is not confined to the four walls of a classroom but takes advantage of the ever-increasing knowledge content and web tools not available through the internet. Rajasingham ([2011](#_ENREF_7)) believes that the learner, teacher, and knowledge are interconnected through communication and information technologies.

Learners are moving from being passive receivers of information to active participants in achieving learning goals ([St. George & Bourke, 2008](#_ENREF_8)). In my teaching experience I have found that the real application and understanding of knowledge often comes when students share and discuss ideas with others through peer-to-peer discussion and collaboration.   This collaborative learning that takes place can be both synchronous and asynchronous.  It can occur online, in person, in a meeting, in a classroom, through an email, in a tweet, or next to the water cooler during a work break. ([Taylor, 2011, April 5](#_ENREF_10))

Through this module I have realized that I need to develop successful methods of incorporating online activities into the classroom environments in which I teach. Nigel Crawford commented that good teachers have multimedia content embedded or hyperlinked from their presentations along with hyperlinks to numerous resources. ([Crawford, 2011, April 8](#_ENREF_2)) I am beginning to realize that blended learning environments will incorporate a network of linked resources and activities that will better suit individual students yet provide opportunities for more shared experiences with peers and online resources. I have also been reminded of the importance that sound pedagogy must form the basis for developing effective blended learning environments.

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