

Guide to a Blended Learning Environment

The scenario for the conversion from face-to-face (f2f) to an online environment is as follows: The trainer wants to change the instruction from teacher-centered to learner-centered, which means: Instead of delivering knowledge to students, we want students to discover and construct knowledge. He also wants to create an effective learning environment. If this describes you, then this guide applies to the one reading this.

What will Change

Instead of fixing the time for learning, where learning varies, we can have time vary and learning to remain constant. Let each student demonstrate learning and not merely attend a fixed number of hours to satisfy requirements for training. Let faculty and students work in terms with each other, independently of each other (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 126, as cited in Barr & Tagg, 1995).

The reader may notice that the idea is to change from face to face, to a blended style, or hybrid (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p. 125, as cited in Oblinger, 1999):

FromTo
Lecturing	Coaching
Attendance	Logging in
Competing to collaboration	Requirements/Performance standards
Passive learning	Active learning
Solely a textbook desired attitudes and learning outcomes	Materials customized to produce desired outcomes
Library	Network connections

What the trainer may want to understand is that a blended course has 30 percent or more of the education online. According to Allen and Seaman (2009), there is a 30% and 80% separation between learner and facilitator. Most of the content is online, typically for discussions and collaborations. In addition, students gain skills and experience, either face-to-face in the classroom or online (Allen & Seaman, 2009). However, instructors must manage dual environments. Further, online discussions are onerous.

Prepare to Change

Please note: What the trainer needs to know is how to divide the course (Allen & Seaman). The classroom location must be available for everyone in the class. It would be worthy, as well, to consider if the class will use any Web-2.0, and possibly Web-3.0, tools on the Web. Will there be visual tools, social networking, blogs, wicks, or podcasts? What will be of necessity is to use a course (or learning) management system (CMS/LMS), such Cogentys (<http://lms.findthebest.com/1/67/Cogentys>) or Litmos (<http://lms.findthebest.com/1/240/Litmos>). Each of these two is SCORM-based. SCORM—Sharable Content Object Reference Model— is a collection of standards and specifications for web-based E-learning (Cabedge, n.d.). They accommodate any organizational size.

Transform the Learning Organization

Consider establishing the need; identify the opportunities for the stakeholders. It would be wise to designate a planning team. With that, it is important to form a vision. What could happen is risk-taking: give credit and power to those who take risks on the vision. Alongside, the team should try to make short-term wins. Know what distance-learning activities are successful for producing and promoting change; then, incorporate the changes (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, pp. 342-343). Design for the transformation is in the

Design phase of ADDIE.

Change of Leadership Role Imminent

It is important that the role from teacher-centered will change. The trainer will want to teach the facilitator and instructors the ideal traits mentioned on the right side of the table (above): to coach, log in, and know the desired outcomes that match the standards. Inform students what tools they will need to be productive, working both in the classroom and online. The transition for this leadership will be somewhat easier if the trainer, facilitator, and instructors know what to expect. Knowledge of the Web is necessary, and knowing the CMS (or LMS) is one to know thoroughly.

Discussion Difficult but Valuable

Furthermore, the trainer will want to teach instructors on how to facilitate, successfully, discussions. What is also important is for students to have an idea about their environment. This, as the reader understands by now, is where the majority of the work lies. The instructor or facilitator absolutely must keep students engaged in the instruction, especially in the discussion. It is a great idea to seek opportunity to keep students encouraged to achieve their goal: to demonstrate their learning. The payoff is in this end.

It is best to offer the instructions on the web. Allocate pertinent material per unit, for each week or meeting day, but in small, “portions.” Some refer to these portions as chunks. In this manner, if possible, all the material should be online.

Communication

Communication is the backbone. The best place to start communicating with the students is in an introduction of the course and in the syllabus, which would comprise information regarding class procedure, rubrics, policies, student support, concerning the earning of

grade/points, instructor information, and so forth. Through communicating with students about which parts of a rubric, they fulfill and where students can improve. It can and must go out in more than one format: announcements, notes, E-mail, etc. Communication is important also, when providing feedback to students; this includes praises and encouragement in comments, in students' graded work, as these encourage. Besides these, students can find encouragement through working with wikis, blogs, and by contributing to social sites by announcing accomplishments, and assignment outcomes.

References

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