Building a Blended Class: Face-to-Face, Online, Anytime

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Introduction

The co-present classroom is the “gold standard” for education. The communicative richness of this environment and, as discussed by Boden and Molotch (1994), a basic human “compulsion to proximity” make face-to-face interaction ideal for learning. Recognizing that the restrictions of time and space limit the accessibility of a traditional classroom, the model of “blended learning” presented here is meant to document and assess an ongoing attempt to open up the classroom both spatially and temporally. This model builds upon research by Irons, Jung, and Keel (2002) that documents how “accessibility” can be a key factor in predicting student satisfaction with a course, and a study by Irons, Keel, and Bielema (2002) that documents the positive effect of a blend of learning modalities on student satisfaction. The blended class model developed here includes multiple modes of teaching and learning (face-to-face, online, synchronous, asynchronous, individual, group), allowing students to learn on their own time and in their own way, yet still providing an overall structure for consistency and community.

Rationale

Students entering university classrooms today are individuals who have grown up in a world that has always had an Internet and World Wide Web. They are mobile device users: interactive, online, and “multi-channel” as documented by Lenart, Madden, Smith, and Macgill (2007) in a Pew Internet and American Life Report. Another Pew Report, by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr (2010) documented that 72% of online 18-29 year olds use social networking Websites, 81% of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 are wireless Internet users, and 2/3 of 18-29 year olds (66%) own a laptop or netbook. A Department of Education (2009) study suggested that students in online classes do as well or even better than students in traditional classrooms, independent of whether the course is blended, hybrid, or totally online—across content areas and learner styles. With students already adapted to such diverse communication styles, it makes sense to design courses that incorporate the benefits of anytime/anywhere learning.

The Blended Learning Model

The blended learning model discussed here attempts to incorporate a variety of resources in ways that make attending class, engaging learning resources, and participating in collaborative work possible regardless of the time and geographical limitations of the individual student. Multiple modes of teaching and learning (face-to-face, online, synchronous, asynchronous, individual, group) allow students to learn on their own time and in their own way, yet still provide a structure for consistency and community. The class is designed to allow students to participate face-to-face (as in a traditional class) or remotely via a “virtual classroom environment” (Wimba Classroom: http://www.wimba.com/products/wimba_classroom). Class sessions use online, hypertext lecture notes and other learning aids that are available to all students in and outside of the classroom. Student-to-student interaction is facilitated by online discussion board and small group projects (for example, see: http://www.umslo.edu/~keelrl/010/GroupActivities/ga.html). All students in online groups have access to a variety of means of collaborating—Wimba Classrooms, Wikis, email, social networking sites, etc. Students interact with course content both traditionally (textbook), via online lecture notes (see: http://www.umslo.edu/~keelrl/180/180lec.html) and a wide variety of other course content (tutorials,
readings, quizzes, and tests) organized via a course management system (Blackboard©). Table 1 displays the variety of modalities and some of the available resources for this blended class model.

Table 1. *Blended Learning Modalities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Teacher/Student</th>
<th>Student/Student</th>
<th>Student/Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-present</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Co-present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous</td>
<td>Face-to-Face Lecture/Discussion</td>
<td>Wimba Classroom</td>
<td>Small Groups, Wikis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asynchronous</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Wimba Archives, Recorded Videos</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acceptance and Student Satisfaction**

The current presentation does not attempt to document learning outcomes. Documentation of student satisfaction and acceptance of technology in the classroom (especially Wimba Classroom, Wikis, and Blackboard©) is based on data collected over the past ten years (see: http://www.umsl.edu/technology/mgwhelp/mgwinfo/mgwinfo.html), and conclusions concerning student perceptions of Wimba and Wiki use are based on surveys spanning the past 10 semesters with responses from over 1600 students (see: http://www.umsl.edu/%7Ekeelr/fttc_2010/building_a_blended_class_fttc_2010.htm).

**Findings**

Table 2. Selected *Mean Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>MGW</th>
<th>Wimba</th>
<th>Wiki</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. MGW/Wimba/wiki helps me do better (learn more).</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Satisfied with courses because of MGW/Wimba/wiki.</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Use MGW/Wimba/wiki in all my courses.</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Take another course at UMSL because it uses MGW/Wimba/wiki.</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Complete my degree at UMSL because of MGW/Wimba/wiki.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Learning and Satisfaction with MyGateway (Blackboard©) WS06-SP10 and Wimba and Wikis SS06-FS09 (Keel, 2010a, p. 11 and 2010b)
Although the results of these surveys are not definitive—except in the case of MyGateway use, the overall support for the positive impact made by the introduction of these technologies indicates ongoing student acceptance and satisfaction. Wiki use appears as less appreciated, yet an intervening factor—wikis are used for group work in high enrollment classes—may explain the higher mean scores. The higher levels of dissatisfaction seen here may be to student frustration, not because of the wiki use, but due to uncooperative group members. Nonetheless, students express an interest in having these technologies used more and in more courses—whether online or traditional face-to-face.

Conclusions
The development of blended class models to extend access and interaction beyond the confines of the traditional classroom fosters increasing openness in education (access to information and learning spaces), accommodates change and adapting to diverse users’ needs, and promotes interactivity and transparency. Brown and Duguid (2000) provide a clear image of such open and transparent educational opportunities:

> Essentially, a student’s university career in such a system would no longer be through a particular place, time, or preselected body of academics, but through a network principally of their own making, yet shaped by a degree granting body and its faculty. A student could stay home or travel, mix on-line and off-line education, work in classes or with mentors, and continue their learning long after taking a degree. (p.239)

References


Learning and Satisfaction with MyGateway (Blackboard©) WS06-SP10 and Wimba and Wikis SS06-FS09


**About the Presenter**

**Robert Keel**, Teaching Professor in Anthropology, Sociology, and Languages at UM-St. Louis, has been teaching sociology for 34 years, and has been integrating Web- and Internet-based instruction into his classes since 1993. From 2000-2005, he served as the faculty coordinator of the MyGateway (Blackboard) system at UM-St. Louis. In 2010, Prof. Keel was named an eMentor for the University of Missouri System. He has made numerous presentations to professional, academic, and community groups on a variety of topics relating to online and distance education, as well as the social implications of the Internet.

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