

Transcription of Interview

Dr. Rosemary Lehman of Instructional Communications Systems, University of Wisconsin-Extension interviews Dr. Chuck Kater, Associate Dean of Professional Studies and Southwestern College Online.

This interview was held at the 19th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching and Learning on August 15, 2003 and was part of the New Directions Forum: Blending Asynchronous and Synchronous Formats.

Rosemary: Since the focus today was on blending technologies for teaching and learning, I'd like to begin by asking your definition of "blending."

Chuck: I know that's a popular buzz word in this the year 2003. We've probably been blending things for a long time, but we have not had access to the wide range of technology options that we have today for online learners to blend things. So when I hear the word blending, specifically in the online learning context, I'm thinking of the opportunity to use more than one type of online learning technology to impact the student or learner in a given course or program.

Rosemary: Now I'd like to know how you actually use blending in your work and – if you can, give us a few examples?

Chuck: Well, we've had asynchronous technologies for quite some time and they're very good at allowing students and learners to interact with the instructor and other students, vis a vis writing papers, responding to questions, posting thoughts, conducting threaded discussions, those types of activities. But with the advent of synchronous technologies, now people can interact in real time and in the business world that's how people do interact, they interact in real time. A few years ago I ran a program for the Walden Institute, and it was designed to help instructors become effective facilitators of synchronous technologies. Well, because the instructors who were signing up for the course didn't know very much about synchronous technologies, we used an asynchronous tool and posted information, we had questions for them, we had activities that they could do individually to learn the basics. But then to help them become proficient in the virtual classroom, which is a word I sometimes substitute for synchronous technologies, we actually had exercises that everyone participated in, in real time. So we basically put them through the paces, or you might say, put them in the co-pilot's seat and exposed them to situations that they would encounter in the virtual classroom in order to build their skills.

Rosemary: So, once you've made your decisions, designed your program or course, and implemented it, how do you know that it's been successful – how do you measure and evaluate it?

Chuck: If it's synchronous type of an activity, the evaluation is almost a self-evaluation. As soon as people have done an activity, they will tell you, "Oh, I think I could have done that better," so, it's almost looking in a mirror when you're doing a synchronous activity for someone who's learning how to do something. In the asynchronous world, you can, of course you can grade

things, you can have other people comment, that's the world where you can do things that are more factually based, where answers might be "yes" or "no". Or, you can of course generate a grading rubric and try to define ahead of time for people what's going to be evaluated and what weights different evaluations are going to carry.

Rosemary: As we wrap up – do you have a final comment on blending technologies?

Chuck: I think colleges and universities are going to face a dramatic challenge, and I think the challenge is this – because they have had access to asynchronous technologies for quite some time, I think many colleges define online learning as an asynchronous technology. And I think the challenge they're going to face is that as other technologies emerge, now synchronous technology really has emerged as a possibility, colleges and universities are going to have to reevaluate how they define online learning and they're going to have to take into consideration are they going to use a mix of technologies because they want to improve the quality of the education they're offering, or do they want to just stay with a single technology for ease of administration and cost? And I think that's going to be a big decision for colleges and universities to make in the next three or four years.