

Transcription of Interview

Dr. Rosemary Lehman of Instructional Communications Systems, University of Wisconsin-Extension interviews Dr. Rick Lillie, Instructor at California State University, San Bernardino and UCLA Extension Programs.

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."

Rick: Blending is really the willingness to use more than one way or more than one method or more than one technique to meet a learning objective or a delivery objective or however we want to do something. Nobody uses the term in exactly the same way. You know, that's why when you say you know what's your definition of blending, just because right now it's in a state of flux, nobody quite knows. And as Chuck and I talked earlier, I used the phrase "nobody has the keys to heaven" when it comes to all this.

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

Rick: I blend it by using the technology that's appropriate at the moment for the student's need. And it goes back to something that I described this morning where I look through the eyes of the student so that I can see the screen, see the experience the way that the student's seeing it. I make myself available in both synchronous and asynchronous approaches or methods at the same time, so that the student can use whichever one is most convenient. It's an investment on my part, the university doesn't pay for my high-speed connection. But for me, for example, to be available and to be willing to be available, so that students using like MSN Messenger can reach me throughout the day, or students using, you know, Groove can reach me throughout the day, or students use net to phone or they use the telephone, each one of these represents a different method and a different technology that can be used in whichever way is most convenient for them. The key to it is that whichever method they use, and I make them all available, is that I'm willing to be there respond to the request when it happens, and it's the timeliness of the response.

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?

Rick: Academia is, in my opinion is hung up on testing, and giving a survey where somebody clicks off "yes" or "no". I do that because there's required formal documentation. But I think the informal way of doing it is simply to ask, and I ask often. so that the student always has the opportunity to tell me if something's working. When I'm looking for attitudes I'll use a survey, and I've got, you know, online surveys, programs that I can use that a student can fill out very

quickly. They'll finish an exercise, there'll be a hyperlink – click, bing, bing, bing, - and it's always anonymous so that they can always feel that they can give me whatever comment they want. I ask students to talk to me, so we'll do this either through video-chat or finger-chat or telephone, whatever. But I ask them often, you know, tell me what you're thinking. What do you like, what don't you like? Give me your suggestions. So I think it's that open solicitation. The key to it is that while some things are quantitative, a lot of what I'm doing right now is qualitative because I simply want to know what their reaction is. And I think they find out pretty quickly that whatever their reaction is or whatever their feedback is, I respond to it and then I'll take the time to show them how I've changed something in response to their comment. The more that I do that, the more they believe that I do care about what they're saying, and as soon as they get that feedback, they start to give me even more.

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

Rick: One of the areas where I learn the most about how to do it, as I used the little phrase before, “nobody holds the keys to heaven.” I'll spend the day there wandering among the vendors and I learn a great deal by talking with them – they do more than selling, we've got to get past that point - I learn a great deal by watching what other people are doing and then asking myself, okay, am I ahead of them, am I with them, am I behind them? You know, what do I have to do to improve what I'm doing? Is there a better way to do this, always keeping in mind that the cost of what we're doing can be very, very expensive. And while I think that using the telephone conference and all of that is exceptional, not everybody can afford that.