Book Review

Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy

Norman Vaughan[1]

Citation: Francine S. Glazer, Editor. (2012). *Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy.* Sterling, Virginia: Stylus. 138 pages. ISBN: 978-1-57922-324-3 (pbk)

Publisher Description: This is a practical introduction to blended learning, presenting examples of implementation across a broad spectrum of disciplines. For faculty unfamiliar with this mode of teaching, it illustrates how to address the core challenge of blended learning—to link the activities in each medium so that they reinforce each other to create a single, unified, course—and offers models they can adapt.

Francine Glazer and the contributors to this book describe how they integrate a wide range of pedagogical approaches in their blended courses, use groups to build learning communities, and make the online environment attractive to students. They illustrate under what circumstances particular tasks and activities work best online or face-to-face, and when to incorporate synchronous and asynchronous interactions. They introduce the concept of layering the content of courses to appropriately sequence material for beginning and experienced learners, and to ensure that students see both the online and the face-to-face components as being equal in value and devote equal effort to both modalities. The underlying theme of this book is encouraging students to develop the skills to continue learning throughout their lives.

By allowing students to take more time and reflect on the course content, blended learning can promote more student engagement and, consequently, deeper learning. It appeals to today's digital natives who are accustomed to using technology to find and share information, communicate, and collaborate, and also enables non-traditional students to juggle their commitments more efficiently and successfully.

Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy is an edited book by Francine Glazer. The book describes five blended learning case studies. The case studies are from a variety of disciplines and institutions in American higher education. The authors of each case study have taken a self-study approach to explore their blended learning courses (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

The introductory chapter of this book does an excellent job of setting the stage for the five case studies by clearly defining blended learning as "courses [that] employ active learning strategies through the use of a variety of pedagogical approaches (p.3) . . . When done well, blended learning combines the best attributes of face-to-face and online courses" (p.7). Glazer also indicates that "one size does not fit all" when it comes to course redesign and that the

[1] Professor in the Department of Education and Schooling, Faculty of Teaching and Learning, Mount Royal University, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

"challenge of blended learning is to link, or blend, what happens in each medium so that face-to-face and online activities reinforce each other to create a single, unified course" (p.1). Avoiding what Twigg (2003) refers to as the course and a half syndrome.

Each case study describes the author's personal course redesign journey for blended learning. These chapters include rich personal narratives, course descriptions, lessons learned, and a description of the educational framework that was used to guide the course redesign process. Barkley (2006) stresses the importance of communicating these conceptual frameworks to our students so that they can become the "architects of their own learning" (p.1).

Two of the authors have used the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Krathwohl, 2002) to determine how to sequence the online and face-to-face learning tasks. For example, Carl Behnke in his Culinary Arts course indicates that "most of the online resources are geared toward basic remember and understanding dimensions, reserving the lecture for higher-order tasks of analyzing and evaluating" (p.17). This is similar to the approach that Tracey Gau uses in her World Literature course, "Lower-level objectives can be addressed and achieved online so that valuable class time is not spent merely summarizing" (p.91). Both authors emphasize "effective integration and leveraging the best of both techniques" (p.17). This approach to course redesign has been referred to as the 'flipped approach' where students complete individual web-based learning activities, outside of class time, and then work on collaborative problem solving activities, in-class (Baker, 2000).

Francine Glazer has combined a team-based learning and case-study approach to begin the implementation of a blended design for her Principles of Genetics course. Team-based learning is a highly structured form of cooperative learning where students are grouped into permanent teams for the semester and work on sophisticated problems and applications (Michaelson, Knight, & Fink, 2004). Whereas, the case-study approach helps students deal with abstract material by providing a story line to make the material more accessible (Styer, 2009). A rapid formative assessment approach based on the Angelo and Cross' (1993) classroom assessment techniques (CATs) framework has been used by Alan Aycock to guide the blended learning redesign of his Survey of World Cultures (SWC) course. Aycock describes CATs as "very short – typically one-page – assignments in which students respond to a question that reveals the extent of their learning or the tenor of their response to a particular module or course content . . . they are always *formative* or *progressive assessments* that occur during the learning process and therefore evoke a quality of immediacy that promotes rapid feedback (the hallmark of blended learning) and multiple voices in the classroom" (p.72).

Finally, Robert Hartwell and Elizabeth Barkley have used the concept of differentiation as the framework to anchor the blended redesign of their Music of Multicultural America (MMA) course. This is a "systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction" (Tomlinson & Strickland, 2005, p. 6) where "teachers individualize course elements such as content (the stuff we teach), process (the ways learners make meaning of content), and product (how learners demonstrate what they have come to know, understand, or do)" (p.115). For the MMA course, students choose from a menu of online and face-to-face activities that best meets their personal, scheduling, and learning needs. Some students do the entire course online or face-to-face, whereas about 60% combine both delivery methods.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book *Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy* as I discovered that each chapter had a 'key take away' or 'lesson learned' that I could directly apply to my own blended learning courses. This book also

provides some very valuable advice about how to manage the workload of a blended course and how to sustain the blend through the use of a community approach.

Personally, I found there were several limitations to this book. First, all of the blended learning cases were written from the perspective of the teacher. With the exception of the Hartwell and Barkley case, the voice of the students was noticeably absent. For me this is somewhat problematic as the goal of blended approach to learning is to promote student engagement and success. Second, how do we know if any of these course redesigns made a difference for the students? Gau describes the evaluation approach that she used for her World Literature course (e.g., pre and post course surveys, increase in course success rates - percentage of students receiving an A, B or C in the course) but again, I found this lacking in the other cases.

Despite these shortcomings, I would recommend *Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy* to faculty members in higher education who are contemplating redesigning their courses for blended learning. The insights and lessons learned from each of the cases are very useful and can immediately be put into practice.

References

Angelo, T., & Cross, P. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. (2006). Honoring student voices, offering students choices: Empowering students as architects of their own learning. *National Teaching and Learning Forum*, *153*(3), 1-6.

Baker, W.J. (2000). The 'classroom flip': Using web course management tools to become the guide by the side. Selected Papers from the *11th International Conference on College Teaching and Learning* (11th, Jacksonville, Florida, April 12-15, 2000).

Bullough, R.V., & Pinnegar, S. (2001). Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, *30*(3), 13-21.

Krathwohl, D.R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice*, *41*(4), 212-218.

Michaelson, L.K., Knight, A., & Fink, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Tomlinson, C., & Strickland, C. (2005). *Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Book for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 9-12*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Twigg, C. (2003). Improving learning and reducing costs: New models for online learning. *Educause Review*, *38*(5), 28-38.

Styer, S.C. (2009). Constructing and using case studies in genetics to engage students in active learning. *American Biology Teacher*, *71*(3), 142-143.