Week 4 - Approaches to E-Learning (Online versus Blended)

Tyler Wood

OTL531K – Models of E-Learning and Instructional Design

Colorado State University – Global Campus

Dr. Jacqueline Derby

October 26, 2014

As technology becomes more ubiquitous around the world, the obvious questions arise as to what to do with education. We already have an infrastructure built in many places, should we keep it and blend e-learning with traditional learning, or should we eliminate the brick and mortar education and switch to a fully online education? There is not clear answer because it would depend on the situation at the moment, but I believe what would work best in my school in South Korea would be blended learning. I will address the advantages and disadvantages of both systems and finish with why I would use blended learning in my school.

The advantages of fully online learning sound convincing. Online learning offers individualization, differentiation, flexibility for scheduling, accessibility, lower costs, and can help students communicate with students in different counties or countries (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 222). Computer systems are very versatile, so creating online learning that is individualized for each student is easier to do than in a classroom with limited resources. Because of the ability to adjust for each student's tastes and offer individualization opportunities, online learning also offers differentiation for students that need help with the work. Software can adjust difficulty or technique based on how well students are doing on work or quizzes. Online learning is on twenty four hours a day, so there is plenty of flexibility for scheduling. Online learning is available where ever the internet (or CD/DVD players are depending on the definition of e-learning) is available. Some students might live very far away from a school, but if they have internet access, they can stay right at home and have class. This is part of the lower costs, commuting to school. It can reduce the staff costs for the state/government as well. Less staff can manage more students this way without having security for a property, bus drivers, and maintenance as well. And because of the reach of the internet, students can have class with

students from many places around the world adding to their ability to communicate with people of different backgrounds, languages, and beliefs (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 222).

The disadvantages of fully online course are that isolation of students could be a problem, communication skills could be compromised, students may have trouble with receiving the clarification and explanation they need, and cheating is potentially easier (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 222). The "learner might suffer from isolation and the lack of direct social interaction" (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 222). This could lead to a problem with communication with peers in a face-to-face setting. Without a physical teacher present in a class, students may lack in clarification and explanation that comes from face-to-face encounters and non-verbal clues. And "cheating may be easier in some circumstances as participation and even assessment tests could possibly be done by proxy unless appropriate safeguards are put in place" Marc, 2002 (as cited by Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 222).

The benefits of blended learning are the best of both worlds. "As far as the overall effectiveness of the pedagogy goes, it was found that this teaching method will lead to higher-level and higher-order thinking skills, a deeper appreciation of an academic community and an increase in self-regulated skills, such as time management" (Pregot, 2013). If planned well, blended learning can have the same advantages as online learning, plus it would have the benefits of a traditional classroom as well. The class time with the teacher would address the concerns with explanation and reading non-verbal clues. The time with other students would address the concerns of communication and social interaction. Both of those are concerns related to traditional classrooms, and because blended learning still has a classroom, it would be safe to say that it would not have those same disadvantages that fully-online learning would have.

Another benefit from blending is the addition of the benefits of having online content. "Reading class content on the web increases opportunities to review and prepare. It is tied with settlement of the contents to learn many times until a learner is convinced. Even if a learner is absent from a class, the class content can be reviewed at his/her convenience" (Miyaji, 2011).

The disadvantages would be cost, accessibility, and teacher training. The online learning would still have the edge on cost benefits because blended learning still relies on the cost of having a brick and mortar location with all the staff that entails. The online feature of blended learning adds to learning opportunities of the students, but having it still tied to a school location, it does not allow for the expansion and access of fully-online learning because students would still need to be at school from time to time. That could be adjusted according the situations, but it would still be a disadvantage over fully-online learning. Having a fully-online course would mean hiring teachers who can design, develop, and teach an online course, in order to benefit costs anyway. Having a traditional classroom being supported by online material means there will be some training involved. Either traditional teachers will need training on how to implement and/or use the software needed, or the online teachers might need some extra training in a traditional classroom. Finding experts of both methods for a fully staffed school might be difficult to do, practically speaking.

The benefits, and research, in support of blended learning, however, make that the choice that would best serve my school. Having a school building offers other benefits as well. My school has just recently built a new soccer field and basketball court for physical education and after school activities. It is a meeting point for parents and children to gather and discuss. It is also a safe place the students can be cared for if both parents are working during the day. Not to

mention the "students' achievement in the blended learning approach was better than the students taught using a face-to-face approach in this study. There was also a very small positive, but non-significant, effect associated with e-learning and students' achievement compared with normal teaching" (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2012, p 226). This benefit, in conjunction with the fact that my school is still a brick and mortar school with much parental support that idea means that blended learning is the best approach.

<div align="center">References</div>

Al-Qahtani, A. A. Y. & Higgins, S.E. (2013, June). Effects of traditional, blended, and e-learning

on students' achievement in higher education. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning.

ISSN 0266-4909. June 2013. Vol. 29, No. 3, p 220-234

Miyaji, I. (2011, April). Comparison between effects in two blended classes which e-learning is

used inside and outside classroom. US-China Education Review, ISSN 1548-6613. April

2011, Vol. 8, No. 4, 468-481

Pregot, M. (2013, May). The case for blended instruction: is it a proven better way to teach? US-

China Education Review, ISSN 2161-623X. May 2013, Vol. 3, No. 5, 320-324