

# AALL Conference (2017)

## Blended Learning or 'Blanded' Learning? Reflections from a teaching and learning perspective

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# Outline

- Background/Opening remarks
- Defining 'blended learning'
- Implementation issues
- Concluding remarks
- Discussion

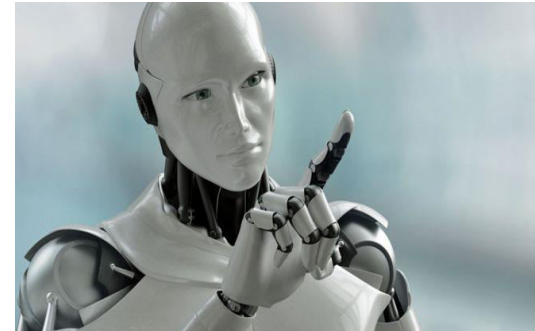
# My context

- Academic Language & Learning (ALL) educator
- Based in College of Health & Biomedicine
  - Nursing
  - Midwifery
  - Paramedics
  - Nutrition
  - Osteopathy
  - Health Sciences
  - Biomedicine
  - Biomedical Sciences

# Blended Learning Strategy Victoria University (VU)

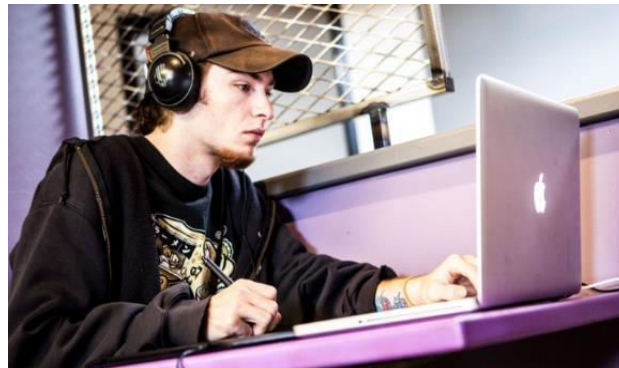
- Transition to new blended curricula
- Close collaboration between discipline educators and Technology Enhanced Learning Designers (TELDS)\*
- Targets set for development of online components and learning resources (relatively short timeframe)

\*The **learning** (not the Learning Designers) are enhanced – at least at this stage!



# Where I am starting from ...

“...when thoughtfully designed, blended learning offers an opportunity to enhance the campus experience and extend thinking and learning” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 102)



# Some key assumptions

## Blended learning is:

- necessary
- established
- valuable (when done right)
- much more than simply ‘moving learning online’

“...a fundamental reconceptualization and reorganisation of the teaching and learning dynamic” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 97)

# **Defining Blended Learning**

# The term Blended Learning

- Lacks clarity
- Means different things to different people
- Describes a range of different approaches
- Could sometimes be more accurately described as 'blended teaching'  
(Oliver & Trigwell, 2005)



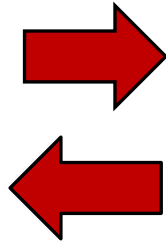
# Defining Blended Learning

- The “...thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 96)
- Synchronous and Asynchronous learning
- “...a fundamental shift from lecture based instruction to student-centred learning, where technology is used to support active student learning” (VU Blended Learning Strategy, 2016, www)

# Mutually exclusive...

- **face-to-face**

- learning
- instruction
- delivery



- **online learning**

- elearning
- computer-mediated learning
- technology-mediated learning

## ...or complementary?

Face-to-face learning and elearning need not be thought of as *opposing* options – blended learning involves harnessing the best features of both (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005).

# Blended Learning within a 'flipped classroom' model

- Online resources
  - Self-paced learning
  - Asynchronous
  - Inbuilt assessment and feedback
- Face-to-face learning
  - Student activity focussed
  - Real time support for learning from academic staff
  - Opportunities for dialogue (Hope, n.d.)

(Prof Joe Hope, ANU)

# *Resistance* to Blended Learning

What is being reacted against...

- Best practice in Blended Learning?
- Sub-optimal online learning resources?
- Online learning ‘interactives’ not clearly linked to the broader curriculum?
- A perceived lack of *balance* between online and face-to-face components?

Is resistance to Blended Learning *per se*, or to poorly conceived blended curricula that have not been ‘thoughtfully integrated’?

# My argument

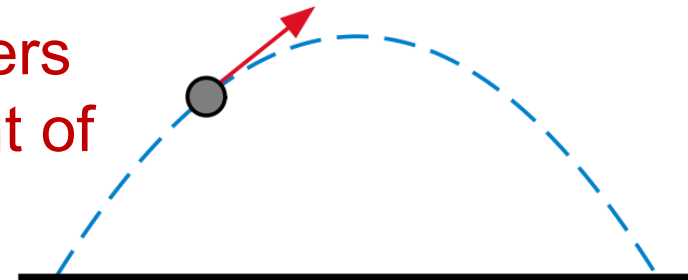
Creating new curricula based on blended learning is an opportunity to ‘set up’ teaching and learning for current and future generations of students. **Taking the time to do it right**, and ensure quality, is time well spent.

# **Implementation issues**

# Staff capacity – Curricula development

- Steep learning curve for many
- Gradual 'upskilling'
  - Mastery of **online teaching** applications and techniques
  - Knowledge of **online learning resource development** applications and processes

How well equipped are discipline teachers to engage effectively in the development of online learning curricula?



# Importance of staff engagement

“Previous attitudes and opinions were a major influence on [lecturer] ***willingness to engage*** with curriculum (re)design for elearning. Many staff did little more than ‘stretching the mould’....”

(Mahdizadeh, Biemans & Mulder, 2008, as cited in Holley & Oliver, 2010, p. 694).



# Compliance v Engagement

Meeting online learning targets:

- **tokenistic elearning activities may be ‘slotted into’ existing curricula**, simply to demonstrate compliance with institutional agendas, and *without regard for the pedagogical value or quality of the learning.*

Risks to quality and unit cohesion associated with *pressure to meet online learning targets*

# Staff Transition

Initially, curricula and learning resource development and delivery is *limited* by the capabilities of academic staff

- Professional development
- Skills development over time (through practice)

To what extent are academic staff supported through the **psychological** and **affective** aspects of a shift away from face-to-face delivery?



# Student capacity



- Social media skills ✓
- Digital learning skills?
  - Computer literacy is an important predictor of likely success in an elearning environment (Stricker, Weiber & Wissmath, 2011)
  - Self-regulated learning ability affects performance in online learning environments (Chen, 2009)

Online learning materials created to support the widening participation agenda were embraced by the traditional, well-prepared students, but **experienced as an additional barrier** by some non-traditional students (Holley & Oliver, 2010).

# Pedagogical considerations

## Software capabilities

- Which takes precedence?
- Which is the driver?
- Which **determines choices** in terms of content and activities?

Is there a risk that decisions on curricular change will come **to be determined more by the software capabilities and limitations** than by pedagogical considerations?

# Online interactive learning activities

- Novel
- Engaging
- 'Rich'
- Challenging

OR

- Formulaic?
- Predictable?
- Superficial?
- Unchallenging?

# Variety – H5P interactive content types

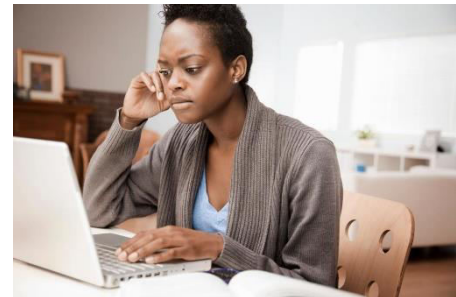


How deep is the learning generated by these activities? Will there be a 'sameness' over time?

# Conceptions of engagement – a contradiction?



The digital world is “...simultaneously [both] more connected and more fragmented and impersonal” (Christensen & Eyring, 2011, p. 331)



# 'Last in, first out' principle

- Academic literacies
- Careers
- Digital literacies

Will these become the  
'low hanging fruit'?





**Concluding remarks**

# A key relationship: Learning Designers and Discipline teachers

- Importance of genuine collaboration
- Risks where either excluded from (or not engaged in) the design and development process
- Need for an **on-going** relationship (beyond the implementation phase)

# Some queries and challenges

- Despite claims to the contrary, one of the challenges in developing engaging online learning activities which are sustainable and meaningful will be maintaining variety and avoiding activities becoming too *formulaic* and *predictable*
- Another will be ensuring adequate **depth of learning**

Do we need to challenge claims and assumptions that digital resources are **by definition more engaging** than paper-based or face-to-face alternatives?

# Getting the **balance** right

Online learning should form part of a broad educational diet, that where possible encourages students (when able) to eat whole foods and to engage in a natural digestive process.

Over-reliance on blending may in the short term speed up digestion, but may not confer the same benefits in terms of longer term health as a genuinely balanced curriculum.



Important to  
keep some  
of this!



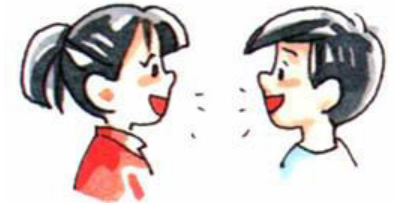
# Final comments

- Creating new blended curricula is an opportunity to 'set up' teaching and learning for current and future generations of students.
- It involves both staff and students acquiring new skills
- The transition requires adequate *time* and *space*, and to be done at a sensible *pace*
- **Taking the time to do it right, and ensure quality, is time well spent.**

Comments?

Questions?

# Questions to consider



1. What are the key features of blended learning curricula that you have found effective?
2. In your experience, to what extent is the online component of blended learning curricula influenced by software availability and capabilities?
3. In your institution how effective have Learning Designer/Discipline teacher collaborations been in the design of blended curricula?

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