

THE NEW LDL INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR BLENDED LEARNING:
CREATING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Student and corporate demands, along with funding concerns, have caused higher education institutions to examine how they conduct the business of education. Faculty-driven courses are more labor intensive and cost prohibitive, lead to higher revision costs, and cause a concern for equal learning opportunities for adult learners. To create a transformation in higher education, faculty-driven pedagogical frameworks need to switch to learner-driven frameworks. Faculty members need to become facilitators who support experiential, collaborative, and problem-based learning experiences. The Learner-Driven Learning (LDL) hybrid model serves as a tool for assisting faculty members in the transformation process, and provides them the pedagogical framework for producing quality learning experiences for adult learners.

As students continue to demand quality educational experiences for their money (Stevenson & Bell, 2009) and as corporations continue to demand quality employees, higher education institutions will need to change how they conduct the business of education. The Sloan Consortium was created to help institutions develop quality online instruction that meets consumer demands (Sloan-C, 1997). The Sloan Consortium has since branched out to include blended learning experiences. Professionals started discussing the use of blended or hybrid courses around 2004 (Picciano & Dziuban, 2007). The term blended learning or hybrid are used interchangeably in the literature. [To aid the reader, the term blended, will be used throughout the rest of this paper.] Higher education institutions have used blended courses as a means of saving money (Young, 2002), to lower online student attrition rates (Jones, 2006; Young, 2002), improve the pedagogical quality of online courses (Segrave and Holt, 2003), and increase the satisfaction of their learners (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2009).

Defining Blended Courses

Blended courses allow faculty members to conduct part of the class in the traditional classroom and the other part online. Blended courses pattern how people naturally learn by providing multiple perspectives and methods for learning educational concepts (Masie, 2006). The experts agreed that “30% to 79%” of the course must be conducted online to be considered a blended course (Simonson et al., 2009, p. 5). This definition is still broad in context, so Graham (2006) developed blended categories to provide further clarity. Blended courses can be categorized as enabling, enhancing, or transformational (Graham, 2006).

According to Graham, enabling blended courses promote accessibility and convenience for the learners. Enhancing blended courses exhibit small pedagogical changes (Graham, 2006) while utilizing supplementary materials and technology. Utilizing course management systems would be an example of the enhancing category (Graham, 2006). Transformational blended courses exhibit “radical” changes in pedagogical frameworks, activities, and the use of technology (Graham, 2006, p. 13). Mendenhall (2011) stated, “Most colleges, including online institutions, have yet to find ways to use technology to really transform education” (para. 3). Faculty members tend to use old pedagogical frameworks with new technological tools when designing online or blended courses (Verkroost, Meijerink, Lintsen, & Veen, 2008; Rust, 2010). When faculty members do this, it leads to course failure (Moore & Kearsley, 2005).

Transforming Pedagogical Frameworks

Developing blended courses may sound easy, but they require a different frame of thinking and a sound pedagogical framework to seamlessly blend traditional and online classroom experiences. Jones (2006) noted that blended courses often challenge faculty members’ epistemology and pedagogical frameworks. Faculty-driven content is the traditional pedagogical framework found in higher education. Bok (2006) stated faculty members do not change their pedagogy easily due to an “instinct of self-protection” (p. 49). Faculty members find it easier to create or alter course requirements than to focus on how to change the way they teach (Bok, 2006). A change in pedagogical frameworks will not occur if faculty members are not challenged to think in new ways (Graham, 2006).

Quality blended learning experiences in higher education will demand a change in pedagogical frameworks. Locker (2009) suggested that pedagogical frameworks need to

be studied throughout the entire university system. Research would bring an awareness of pedagogical frameworks being used in higher education, and how pedagogical frameworks could be transformed. For example, Bonk, Kim, and Zeng (2006) surveyed higher education institutions and found that 58% of the respondents would use problem-based learning; while 65% said they would use group problem-solving and collaborative tasks in their blended courses.

Macedo (2000) suggested that the word pedagogy means education “must always be transformative” (p. 25). To create transformational learning environments, the design discussion must include how learners can learn and how instructors can teach in new ways (Wenger & Ferguson, 2006). Blended courses that integrate collaborative, problem-based, or constructivist learning environments (Picciano, 2009) promote interaction, meet the needs of adult learners, and are perceived to be quality courses by professionals (Wagner, 2006). Learning theories, such as these, have been around for a long time. In fact, collaborative or social learning theory was originally proposed by Vygotsky (Gillani, 2003).

Blended courses using problem-based learning incorporate real life problems for learners to solve. Moore and Kearsley (2005) noted the field of education is in a “Copernican revolution” where teaching supports and responds to its environment and its learners (p. 20). To take blended learning to the next level, constructivism could be used to create quality courses. Constructivism embodies problem-based, discovery, and collaborative learning theories. It can best be described as learners making sense of their own knowledge and experiences, and using that to create knowledge and understanding of an educational concept or complex problem (Driscoll, 2005). Driscoll (2005) also

noted that constructivists may encourage learners to come up with their own learning goals for a course. Creating their own learning goals would appeal to adult learners and transform higher education's pedagogical frameworks.

A Transformational Instructional Design Model

To create transformation in higher education, faculty-driven pedagogical frameworks need to switch to learner-driven frameworks. Graham (2006) and Irlbeck, Kays, Jones, and Sims (2006) encourage educators to redesign their courses so that adult learners have control over their learning experiences and content. Learner-driven content appeals to adult learners (Boone, 1985; Heimlich & Norland, 1994) and saves on high development and technology costs (Wenger & Ferguson, 2006). To encourage faculty members to change their pedagogical frameworks, an instructional design model that focuses on learner-driven content is needed. Educational learning theories such as constructivism, experiential learning, or problem-based learning provide the backbone for learner-driven experiences.

The middle circle of the Learner-Driven Learning (LDL) model (Rust, 2010) affirms the fact that faculty members are still a pertinent part in the learning process, but that their role has changed from content expert to facilitator. Palloff and Pratt (1999; 2005) encourage faculty members to be learning facilitators, and offer advice on how to make the transition from content expert to facilitator. Designing problem-based, experiential, and constructive learning experiences will create interest in the course and challenge adult learners.

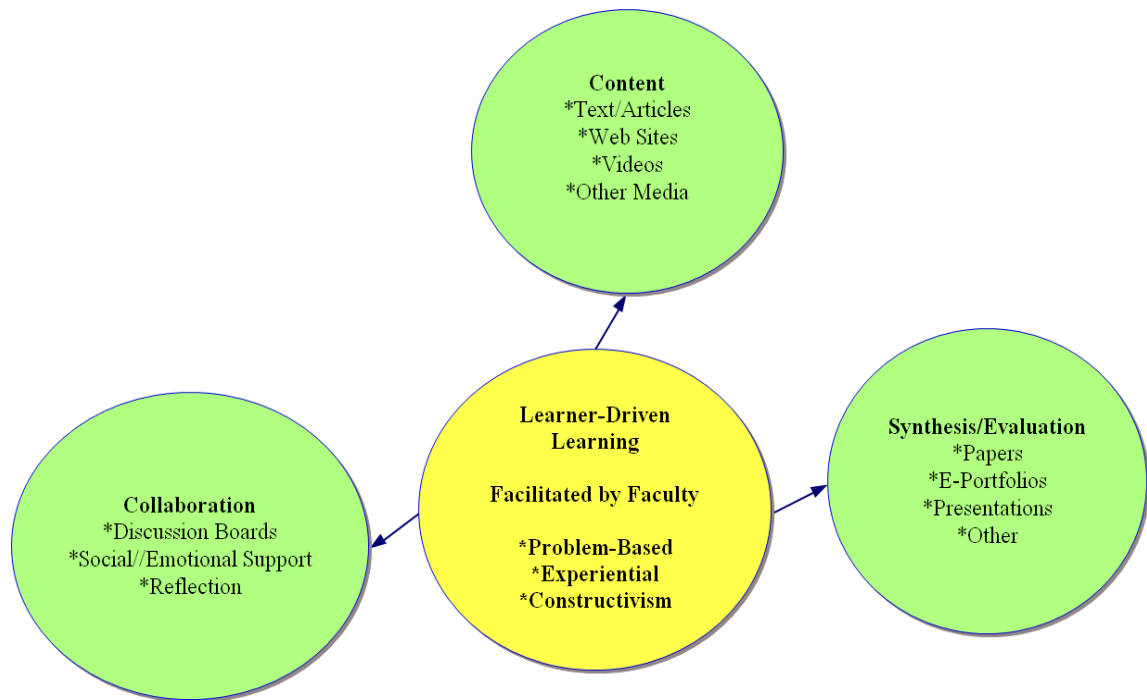
Faculty members will focus on the three outside circles or spokes of the LDL model to create learner-driven learning experiences. The three main spokes of the LDL

model are content, collaboration, and synthesis/evaluation (Rust, 2010). Higher education's faculty members have traditionally focused on delivering content to learners. While content is important, faculty need to question the content found in their courses and its purpose. Faculty members should not teach content in a new technological format just to make the course appear updated. Also, Verkroost et al. (2008) cautioned faculty against simply substituting a traditional classroom activity for an online activity. If there is no sound pedagogical reason for using a particular teaching method to reach a course outcome, it should not be used (Picciano, 2009). Blended courses should not be developed if there is no pedagogical purpose behind their creation (Picciano, 2009). When designing blended courses, Kaleta, Garnham, and Aycock (2005) also urged faculty members not to add unnecessary content or technological activities to the course. More content does not mean quality.

The next spoke of the LDL model is collaboration. Collaboration often occurs in group discussions or learning communities. Learning communities are used in online classrooms to support learners socially and emotionally. To properly use online discussion boards, faculty members are encouraged to ask the class complex or open-ended questions to promote cognitive growth in learners. When learning communities are successful, learners feel they are needed by the group, have a purpose/reason to interact, and feel the learning environment is a safe/exclusive place to interact (Heimlich & Norland, 1994; Palloff & Pratt, 1999). Faculty members need to properly plan learning communities and collaborative activities. For example, Verkroost et al.'s (2008) study discovered learners divided up group work; and rather than working collaboratively, they worked on the project individually. Learning communities should not be designed to

decrease faculty member's workload, but be designed with pedagogical purpose (Verkroost et al., 2008).

Synthesis/evaluation is the last spoke to be discussed. Faculty members must decide how they will assess each student's ability to master the established course outcomes. It is important for faculty to match assessment tools to the established outcomes for the course. Higher level thinking skills and learner-driven learning courses demand quality assessment tools. For example, tests are faculty-driven assessment tools and are not learner-driven. With learner-driven learning experiences, assessment tools like e-portfolios, wikis, Power Point presentations, blogs, webinars, and videos are legitimate ways to evaluate learning. Using a portfolio or rubric can guide students in creating learning objects that document a clear picture of their learning and how they can improve it.



The Learner-Driven Learning (LDL) Model (Rust, 2010).

Conclusion

Student and corporate demands, along with funding concerns, have caused higher education institutions to examine how they conduct the business of education. Moore and Kearsley (2005) noted the field of education is in a “Copernican revolution” where teaching supports and responds to its environment and its learners (p. 20). To create transformation in higher education, faculty-driven pedagogical frameworks need to switch to learner-driven frameworks. Faculty members need to become facilitators who support experiential, collaborative, and problem-based learning experiences. The LDL model (Rust, 2010) serves as a tool for assisting faculty members in the transformation process, and provides them the pedagogical framework for producing quality learning experiences for adult learners.

Learner-driven courses will assist colleges in their ability to manage and maintain course offerings. Content and technology tools are continually evolving; and this makes developing faculty-driven courses more labor intensive and cost prohibitive. Faculty-driven blended courses are customized to the teaching styles of each faculty member. The lack of standardization among course sections causes unequal learning experiences, and results in higher course development and maintenance costs. In learner-driven blended courses, the faculty members serve as facilitators; and the course content and related activities remain structurally consistent, while offering customized learning opportunities for adult learners.

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