Critical Curriculum Design for Blended Learning in Higher Education: The Strategies, Principles and Challenges of Interactive Classroom Management

Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to introduce a critical curriculum design approach for bringing curriculum change for Blended Learning in higher education. Furthermore, the strategies, principles and challenges of this approach are also presented. This paper provides a perspective on such serious concerns as whether curriculum change should start with professors, administrators, learners, education communities and/or professional reformers at local, state and national levels. Also, this paper includes treatment of the Radical Constructivists' view of blended learning with merging Media Richness Theory. The author hopes that it emphasizes the importance of considering a wide range of situations in implementing curriculum change, of matching innovation with the realities of the interactive classroom management in higher education. Besides, the author intention in this paper is to discuss the rights of learners and professors by fostering the courtesy, confidentially and human dignity of critical curriculum design for blended learning.

Introduction

Blended Learning (BL) is the integration of several approaches to educational processes which involve the deployment of a diversity of methods and resources, and to learning experiences which are obtained from more than one kind of information source. As pointed out Rossett, Douglis, and Frazee (2003), choices for blended learning go beyond the traditional classroom. These options develop knowledge societies, which are based on authentic and democratic foundations. Since an enhancing individuality, a wider multicultural diversity, a shared power and more freedom in Colleges, therefore, a blended learning approach strongly requires a critical curriculum design and a change process in higher education. It involves professors and learners in building interactive class management in higher education.

An awareness and understanding of today's major social, political, economical and cultural changes requires adoption on the part of the curriculum. A critical curriculum design is relevant to the management change. In this reality, College professors would have the opportunities to reformulate a curriculum for their classrooms. However, they are often unwilling to develop a new curriculum and put it into practice for various reasons: These professors are constrained by lack of time due to their massive teaching, research and advisor duties as well as community partnership schedules, and they perceive resistances to change from colleagues and/or learners. As noted by McNeil (1996), even if others are not actually opposed to professors implementing a new curriculum, the anticipation of resistance can be enough to exclude critical innovations. Most critical curriculum innovations might not affect a particular classroom, but an entire College and/or campus. Without the novel approaches for developing shared norms, values, ethics and goals, and being aware of biases and stereotypes, professors are more interested in planning for their own classroom rather than for entire College and/or campus. Although it is very complicated to effect a College's curriculum modifications through professor initiation, this change process has an increasingly profound impact upon power and authority in the College.

Purposes

In the traditional classrooms and rigid curriculums shaped by capitalist hegemony and their political and cultural aegis, few professor-learners experience the reality of democratic participations in their every day lives. Learning, therefore, must be a boarder concept than formal conventional education. Democratic-egalitarian essentials for democratic classrooms in higher education can be able to build formal and informal progressive knowledge networks via new communication technologies. *Blended Learning (BL)*, therefore, is a dynamic learning method to merge the gap between egalitarian values and classroom practices. BL provides professor and learners with extensive learning and communication experiences that promote the democratic way of life. This is the strong foundation of a democratic society. Dewey (1916) says that an egalitarian society "*must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder*" (p.115).

With today's prevalence of cutting-edge technologies in higher education, BL merges diverse traditional resources and e-learning with other educational resources. Furthermore, this arrangement refers especially to combine e-learning human resources with conventional ones. These technology-based collaborations help professors and learners make democratic decisions for dialogic leaderships. These engagements increase awareness of their own identities and differences, and help to define the democratic values associated with equalizing of access to human rights. These partnerships require interactive classroom managements and dialogic leaderships for democratic decisions. On the other hand, there is a need for a critical curriculum design for effective BL in higher education. To develop a common vision of social justice, this new curriculum must involve professors and learners in an egalitarian decision-making process. Within the context of these concerns, this paper focuses on the following four main issues:

1. How do professors and learners deeply engage in developing a critical curriculum design for BL in higher education? How does this new approach provide them with alternative holistic forms and scaffolding strategies of social justice? What are the philosophical foundations and backgrounds of interactive classroom management needed to accelerate democratic transformations?

2. What are the possibilities and potentials of a critical curriculum design for BL in higher education? How can these opportunities engage them in critical civic responsibilities and powerful social actions? What are the strategies, principles and challenges of interactive classroom management?

3. What are the unique and diverse perspectives, and also methodological strengths and weaknesses of BL in higher education? How does BL obtain genuine equal opportunities and democratic participations in interactive classroom management to build knowledge networks not characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition?

4. How does BL promote critical communication activities for interactive classroom management to empower authentic and high quality lifelong learning experiences? How do they fight the hegemonic power of capitalism and its unfairness structure in BL milieus?

Theoretical Background of the Study

BL is an active process to obtain, evaluate and produce knowledge. Professors should help their learners become active participants in higher education. Therefore, entire classroom management must be interactive so that learners can be able to work on complex projects, synthesize knowledge to build their own understandings, learn skills and concepts, and use them to solve real world problems. In this constructivist milieu, professors and learners can adopt innovative classroom management strategies for a critical curriculum design that higher education is going through a critical planning and management revolution process. In this case, it is very important to combine learning and communication theories together. The *Radical Constructivist Learning Theory (RCLT)* and *Media Richness Theory (MRT)* can support egalitarian and liberating curriculum activities, and also prepare professors and learners for fully democratic participation in interactive classroom management.

The Radical Constructivist Learning Theory and Media Richness Theory

RCLT is an unconventional approach to the problem of knowledge and knowing as a *theory of knowing* rather than a *theory of knowledge*. It starts from the assumption that knowledge, no matter how it is defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the basis of his or her own experience. The philosophical-epistemological background of RCLT is mainly represented by Ernst von Glasersfeld. As highlighted by Riegler (2003), von Glasersfeld points out that knowledge is not passively received, but actively built up by the cognizing subject. The function of cognition is adaptive, and serves the organization of the experiential world that RCLT particularly focused on individual self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection and abstraction (Glasersfeld, 1995). Furthermore, authentic learning depends on seeing a problem as one's own problem, as an obstacle that obstruct one's progress toward a goal. From the RCLT perspective, the cognizing subject cannot empower her/his experiences that all knowledge is constructed out of those experiences. RCLT does not suggest that there is no external reality, but strongly mentioned that learners can generate her/his reality with the limits of their experiences. Professors and learners can operate in their own private and self-constructed worlds. According to von Glasersfeld (1990), professors give to learners "*necessarily remains tentative and cannot ever approach absolute determination*" (p. 37).

MRT is based on contingency theory and information processing theory (Galbraith 1977). First proponents of the theory were made by Daft and Lengel (1984).The theory of *Media Richness* is one of the most widely used media theories. It argues that task performance is improved when task information needs are matched to a medium's richness or its "…*capacity to facilitate shared meaning* (Daft, Lengel and Trevino, 1987, p. 358)." MRT points out that media vary in certain uniqueness that affects personal ability to communicate rich information. Daft and Lengel (1986) mentioned that this theory theorizes which media should prove most effective in what situations. Based on this concern, theory does not focus on conjecturing how managers *choose* media. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), MRT explains the impact of various types of media that these are the basic foundations of interactive online communications. According to this theory, the various communications media differ in richness. Rich communications media allow the transmission of a multiplicity of cues, provide immediate feedback, allow communication with both natural language and numbers, and facilitate the personal focus of messages.

BL environments are the places, where represent the real world. To generate interactive classroom management atmosphere, a critical curriculum design must make a radical break from the generally accepted views that our knowledge of the world must lie somewhere between materialism and idealism. This design approach must take advantage of the Internet-based new technologies to generate radical revolutions in BL environments. Therefore, RCLT and MRT can support dynamic non-traditional approaches to a critical curriculum design. This allows professors and learners to be free of an ancient philosophical debate, and also to develop new models of understanding how they integrate the strategies and principles of BL to build interactive classroom managements. In this case, language and social interactions allow for interpersonal communication activities, but never allow an individual to escape from isolation as a knowing being. RCLT and MRT provide professors and learners within a framework for social interactions whereas they can be able to remain cognitively isolated. Besides, this approach can reduce ambiguity through MRT for empowering interactive classroom management in a BL setting.

Results and Conclusions

This article discusses that the evaluation process of Educational Management Systems (EMSs) profoundly engages interactive online communications. One of the most crucial aspects related to these social interactions is the types of EMSs developed based on the theory of *Media Richness* that evaluation must concentrate on investigating learner, online communication designers, and technology performances successfully. As mentioned by Irani (2005), a similarly imperative dynamic to consider is online communication potentials and the ability of the system design as well as communication milieus to enhance main educational tasks and provide adequate communication opportunities among online communication designers, learners and community.

It is apparently important to expose what is meant by the evaluation of EMSs. Online communication workers must consider about the judgments of authorities about the EMSs, the opinions of program development staff, and comparisons executed programs with its communicational design. To employ diverse and multicultural principles under the Evaluation Model, online communication designers must consider the development and implement stages of program evaluation to decide whether EMSs must be continued or terminated. This must be based on the value of the products and outcomes of EMSs, the success of its development operations and process achievements, the availability of appropriate resources and also the technological adequacy of the collection and interpretation of EMSs-based data. The evaluation model of EMSs must help online communication designers establish democratic and multicultural standards that aim at philosophically involving in Media Richness Theory.

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Communication / Learning		Media Richness Theory						
Radical Constructivist Learning Theory	**Foundations**	**Clarity**	**Completeness**	**Contextually**	**Truthfulness**	**Diversity**	**Flexibility**	**Accountability**
	Social					Consider the social and cultural backgrounds, knowledge and skills of learners by altering variables, such as disabilities, learners at risk, etc.		Be carefully controlled in order to gain useful information in democratic manners
	Management	Use clear language that affect attitudes and regulate online activities						
	Technological		Focus on learners' technology skills at online communications to indicate their interaction progressing					
	Pedagogical			Realize the imperatives of online contents and structures on meaning that influence online communication quality				
	Communicational				Judge the difficulties of online communications by taking learner responds, feelings and recommendations		Allow learners to allocate needed concentration to the decision making stages of online communications	

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