Cultural Foundations of Education:  
A Triology of Blended Learning Venues  

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Abstract:  
Cultural Foundations in Education is a required course for a doctorate with a specialization in educational administration. It is designed to provide educational leaders with knowledge essential to making decisions about teaching and learning in a cultural context. Through an examination of research, theory and practice this course facilitates thoughtful crucial conversations about educating a diverse student population. Instruction is facilitated through a triology of instructional venues; face-to-face, Blackboard, and Wimba’s Live Classroom. This session is a demonstration of the integration of traditional face to face class sessions with engaging e learning environments that require student interaction, small-group work, and peer knowledge sharing.

Key words: e-learning, Blackboard, Wimba Live Classroom

Introduction

The advent of the information and technology era within the last two decades has transformed the way instruction in higher education is designed and delivered thus transforming the way university professors teach and students learn (Fillion, G., Limayem, M., Laferriere, T. Mantha, R., 2009). Consistent with these changes is the change in the makeup of university student populations. Traditionally students of institutions of higher education right after graduation from high school, live in institutional housing, attend classes full-time and then graduate four years later (Williamson, J., 2009). The demographics of higher education students today is very different.

Currently, “nontraditional students are rapidly becoming the majority group on campuses across America” Blankson, J. & Kyei-Blankson, L., 2008, p. 421. A 2002 report by the National Center for Education Statistices (2002) defined non-traditional students as having one or more of the following characteristics:

- does not enter postsecondary enrollment in the same year that he or she completed high school, attends part-time for at least part of the academic year, works full time, is considered financially independent from a legal guardian, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, does not have a high school diploma but a General Educational Development (GED) test.
NCES (2002) went on to conclude that given these demographics, it is imperative that colleges and universities recognize that nontraditional students who are pressed for time and who have multiple competing responsibilities outside the classroom need alternative nontraditional course options.

Williamson (2009) writes that

“the approximately 12 million nontraditional students enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities are changing the face of education. They are
• Demanding-and getting-flexibility
• Getting schools to accommodate their lives
• Driving an expansion in online degree programs
• Increasing employer acceptance of online degrees and
• Showing that diversity comes in many forms” p. 1.

Institutions of higher education have responded by embracing various technological venues for delivery methods and formats. Some popular formats include weekend, evening, and online programs. Forward looking professors and institutions are increasingly using a combination of venues which include the traditional face to face setting. This combination is often referred to as blended. Rooney (2003) cited blended learning as one of the leading trends to emerge in the knowledge deliver industry. What is blended learning?

Blended learning offers a mix of learning environments that include pedagogical methods utilizing instructional strategies with and without the use of technology. The mix often includes face to face classroom sessions, synchronous and asynchronous activities as well as live elearning (Verkoost, M. Et al, 2008). One professor within the education administration program at the University of North Texas is utilizing this approach for a cohort of students required to take Cultural Foundations of Education. Students within the cohort mirror the demographics of nontraditional students. The majority are full time employed, over 30 years of age and married with children. In addition, many live approximately an hour from the campus. The course was designed to enable accessibility and flexibility.

Cultural Foundations in Education is a doctoral level course. It is designed to provide educational leaders with knowledge essential to making decisions about teaching and learning in a cultural context. Through an examination of research, theory and practice this course facilitates thoughtful crucial conversations about educating a diverse student population. Instruction is facilitated through a triology of instructional venues; face-to-face, Blackboard, and Wimba’s Live Classroom. This session is a demonstration of the integration of traditional face to face class sessions with engaging e learning environments that require student interaction, small-group work, and peer knowledge sharing. The presenter will provide and showcase via the internet a description of each venue and the instructional activities that occur within each.

**Venue One Face-to-Face**

The entire course lasts for approximately 16 weeks. Each class session lasts 2 hours and 50 minutes. The traditional face-to-face aspect of this course encompasses three class sessions. The first half of the first session is an orientation to the course that includes the establishment of course expectations and requirements. An introduction to and demonstration of Blackboard and Live Classroom are also provided. The 2nd half of the first session is a lecture on the initial content of the course. Midway through the course and for the final session students will
return to the traditional classroom to complete their course exams. The exams simulate the qualifying examinations that students must successfully write at the completion of their doctoral course work.

**Venue Two Blackboard**

The Blackboard Learning System is a software application dedicated to teaching and learning. The System is used to create and deliver learning content. Web-based tools allow instructors to build and manage learning content and provide an engaging environment for students. The Blackboard System also facilitates student participation, communication, and collaboration. A suite of synchronous and asynchronous tools encourage student interaction, small-group work, and peer knowledge sharing. The system also includes methods to assess and evaluate student performance such as tests, quizzes and assignments.

Blackboard is used in this course for self-paced individual work, asynchronous discussions and student shared learning via synchronized chatrooms. The homepage includes a copy of the syllabus, a link to assignments, weekly supplemental materials, learning modules for individual research based work, UNT library resources for distributed learning, students resources for training and technical support, and the forms for instructor and course evaluations.

**Venue Three Wimba’s Live Classroom**

Wimba Classroom 6.0, is a live, virtual classroom environment with features that include audio, video, application sharing and content display, and MP4 capabilities. Its pedagogical design ensures that educators and students engage as if they were meeting face-to-face. Advanced features such as polling, whiteboarding, presenter on-the-fly, resizable chat areas and participant lists, usage analytics tools, and MP3 or MP4 downloads enable further dynamic interaction between students and educators.

Wimba’s Live Classroom is used in this course to replace traditional face-to-face class sessions. The use of this venue permits students the opportunity to work from home at their personal computers. Sessions are archived. While weekly class attendance is required students who experience work related conflicts or emergencies can view the archived session at their convenience. Students are required to purchase a webcam and headset with a microphone. These items are approximately $15.00 dollars each. Through Live classroom there are instructor lectures, instructor led discussions, small group discussions and student presentations. Instructor and student presentations using Microsoft PowerPoint can be displayed through Live Classroom. Live Classroom is also designed to enable small group work with the ability to place students in break out rooms.

**Summary**

This session is a demonstration of a model of blended learning that is provided for a doctoral level course in education administration. The instructor uses a triology of venues which include traditional face-to-face class sessions, Blackboard and Wimba’s Live Classroom. The students within the doctoral cohorts are nontraditional students who have multiple competing priorities. This blended learning model makes the pursuit of a doctorate more accessible and
flexible. It also provides the same opportunities for engagement with the instructor and classmates as 100% traditional face-to-face classes.

References


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