Studio TECHnique: Blended Curriculum Design and Implementation in Art Foundations

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Introduction

This presentation consists of initial yet ongoing research about blended learning in art foundations as a dissertation topic for the completion of Ed.D. in Higher and Postsecondary Education at Argosy University. Some questions considered for this research are:

- How does a blended learning model in a university-level studio art curriculum impact student learning outcomes?
- How do the deep roots of art education influence the adoption of technology in contemporary university curricula?
- How do students and faculty respond to blended learning in studio art courses?
- Does blended learning offer expanded opportunity for students to increase visual literacy and cultural relevance versus a traditional curriculum?

The Impact of Technology & Globalization in Higher Education

With current advances in technology and globalization deeply affecting delivery methods in higher education (Deutsch, 2010; Jones, 2011; Moukali, 2012; Nguyen, 2011) and growing popularity of online delivery methods, it is important to question how these changes will affect long-standing and traditional curricula in the field of studio art.

Researcher Note: For the purpose of this presentation, we don't need endless stats to tell us that times are changing. We can see this in available grant funding, institutional strategy, and a constant push to integrate technology in higher ed.

A Gap in Existing Literature

Conceptual frameworks for blended instruction are established but still relatively new in the research as the digital age aligns with traditional instruction (Parke, 2008). In addition, subject-specific considerations come to light, with a focus on contemporary concerns in art education regarding arts integration, constructivist theory and the evolution of studio practice (Saghafi et al., 2012). Few studies discuss the implementation of blended studio courses, but existing research shows promise and prompts further investigation.

Researcher Note: Here we will be discussing the most typical definition of blended learning, also known as hybrid instruction, with 30-79% of a course being delivered via online Learning Management System (LMS).

Traditional Studio Art Education

Elements including studio instruction, student-to-instructor ratio and critique dynamic have remained virtually the same since they were established in Beaux-Arts traditions (Bender & Vredevoogd, 2006). The facets of student experience that are specific to a studio art environment including culture, community and spaces arguably become more relevant when creativity and inspiration are vital to academic success (Saghafi et al., 2012).

Researcher Note: Shouldn't alignment with the Digital Age and implementation of technology remain in the hands of those who understand the rich history behind studio art education?

The "Best of Both Worlds"

Blended learning is commonly called the "best of both worlds" approach, allowing a course to utilize the most useful elements of online learning while keeping the benefits of face-to-face instruction (Cheung & Hew 2012, Deutsch 2010, Moukali 2012). The capability for a multi-sensory experience in the form of audio-visual, image-based, animated and interactive content means that some material may be able to be conveyed more effectively in a web-based module (Bender & Vredevoogd 2008, Saghafi et al. 2012). Moukali (2012) argued that the shift towards student-centered, technology-based education "aims to improve education and its strategies to raise learning efficiency" (p. 1).

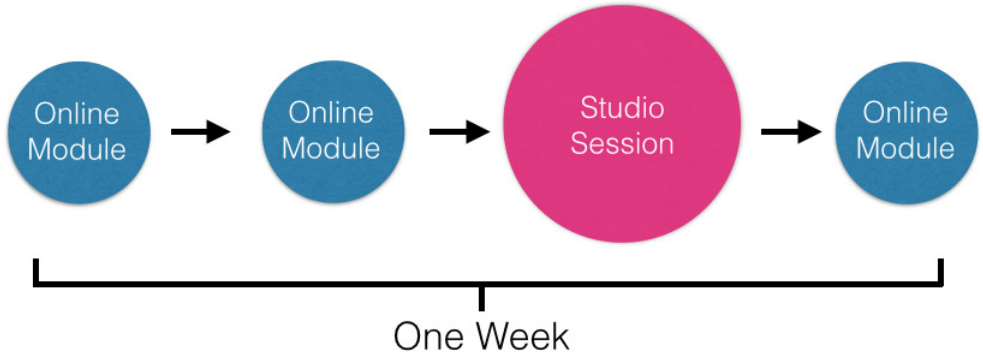
Researcher Note: Based on personal experience, my colleagues agree with me- traditional thinking may see web-based teaching for visual arts as a compromise but sometimes it just works better. Let's all consider how innovative modes of instruction can support learning theory and therefore better support our students.

A Note about Student Demographic: Why Art Foundations?

Researcher Note: This research is not meant to imply that blended instruction is inappropriate for more advanced students. For example, many graduate programs are following a low-residency model supplemented by forms of distance learning. My interest simply lies in the connection between a blended model and learning theory and the idea that intro-level students and the community college demographic can most benefit from a learner-centered approach. As we work with students with diverse goals, backgrounds and educational experience, we are both teaching the material and teaching students how to learn simultaneously.

Curriculum Conversion

When implementing online components in a studio course, it is important to consider the project-based work involving physical, manual skills versus more conceptual elements. In a blended environment, a variety of delivery methods are considered to best encourage student engagement and successful learning outcomes.



Researcher Note: Although a variety of blended models may work for visual arts, let's review "a week in the life" of a blended classroom to offer some concrete ideas for blended implementation and show how they support contemporary learning theory. This sample week would be 50% online and 50% in-studio, with a once-per-week studio session as opposed to the typical two.

Online Module #1

Interactive Lecture
- Learning Outcome-based
- Caters to different learning styles
- Audio-visual

Personal Investigation
- Encourage self-discovery
- Create relevancy

Discussion Forum
- Tie lecture to experience
- Peer interaction
- Challenges for advanced students

Online Module #2

Video Demonstration
- Paced, accessible
- Technique-based
- Reusable

Studio Prep Activity
- Link to extra help

Asynchronous Feedback
- Concrete
- Immediate
- Allows for revision before taking work into the studio

Studio Session

- **Tactile, Dimensional**
- **Community Engagement**
- **Focused Work Time**
- **Hands-On Instruction**
- **Creative Collaboration**
- **Dynamic Critique**

Online Module #3

Critical Reflection
- Informal (i.e. reflective journaling)
- Formal (i.e. written peer critique)

Additional Resources
- Linked content provides opportunities for expanded learning and investigation.
- Art-historical/contemporary context

Helpful Resources

Free Websites and Learning Management Systems
- *Google Sites*
- *Weebly*
- *Open Class by Pearson*

Screen Capture & Recording
- *Snagit by TechSmith*
- *Camtasia by TechSmith*
- *Quicktime*
- *Screencast-o-Matic*
- *VoiceThread*

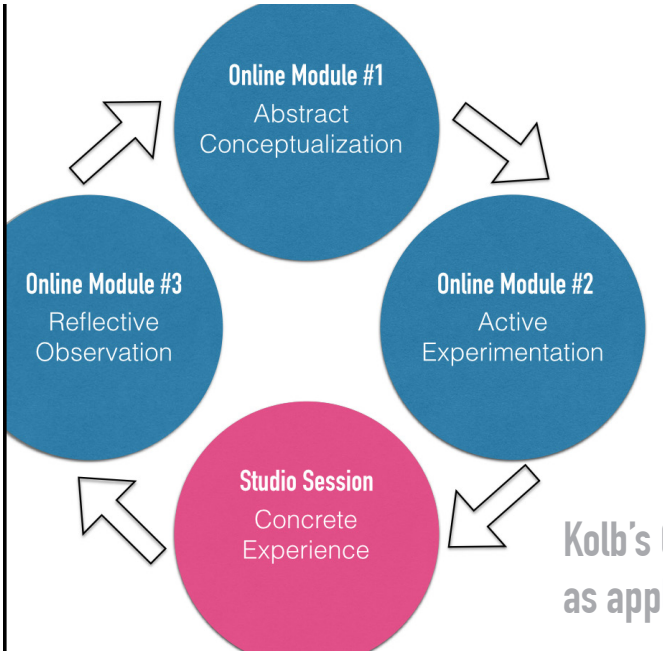
Video Upload & Hosting
- *YouTube*
- *Screencast by TechSmith*

Live Office Hours/Meetings
- *GoToMeeting*
- *Join.Me*

Helpful Tools
- *Headset with Microphone*
- *Digital Tablet (Example: Wacom)*
- *Appropriate software for markup (Example: Adobe Photoshop)*
- *Camera/Tripod setup for live demonstration*

Theoretical Frameworks

The sample schedule provided can easily be aligned with Kolb's Theory of Experiential Learning, which consists of a cycle of abstract conceptualization, active experimentation, concrete experience, and reflective observation (Kolb, 1984). Kolb's theory suggests that one can enter the cycle at any point, but would continue to cycle through each step as learning grows. It is also worth noting that more than one cycle may be taking place simultaneously and at different time intervals. For example, the week may follow the cycle while an individual activity also supports a smaller version of the cycle. Much of the literature ties experiential learning to both visual arts education and the concept of blended learning. Visual arts education naturally supports experiential learning and a constructivist approach as the studio environment in and of itself is about learning by doing. Deutsch, Nguyen (2011), Moukali (2012), and Parke (2008) also point out that use of web-based Learning Management Systems (LMS) can directly support the constructivist tenets of collaborative, social and experiential learning through authentic, meaningful and relevant real-life situations without constraints of time or space.



Kolb's Cycle of Experiential Learning as applied to blended curriculum

Other theoretical frameworks supported by the blended model include:

Andragogy (Knowles) Adults are independent and self-directed. They need to know why they should learn and learn best when the value of the topic is immediately apparent. Adult learning works best when instruction is task-oriented and problem solving is emphasized. Andragogy imparts the following assumptions about adult learners: (1) They need to know why they need to learn something (2) They best learn experientially, (3) They consider learning a form of problem-solving, and (4) They learn best when they see the topic's immediate value.

Self-Directed Learning (Brookfield) To a greater or lesser extent, depending on experience and personality, adults will learn well if they set their own learning goals, discover needed resources on their own, choose the methods by which they learn, and evaluate their own progress. The teacher role becomes that of a facilitator.

Transformational Learning and Critical Reflection (Mezirow) Adults can learn by examining previously unchallenged assumptions, working through previously unconsidered perspectives, and revising the way in which they construct experiences. Critical reflection may lead to a transformation in thinking.

Characteristics of Effective Adult Learning Programs (Billington) Safe and supportive environment • Encouragement of experimentation and creativity • Treatment of adult learners as respected peers • Self-directed learning • Optimal pacing (challenging just beyond current abilities) • Active learning, interaction, and dialogue • Regular student-to-faculty feedback mechanisms

Source: http://www.bishop.edu/ctle/pdfs/CLT_AdultLearningTheory.pdf

The Blended Experience

Faculty Perceptions

Moukali (2012) used the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a theoretical framework to gauge faculty response to blended instruction, evaluating perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. Moukali found that overall faculty perceptions of blended instruction were confident, seeing it as a method to improve instruction, and Parke (2008) pointed out that faculty narratives about their blended experience were varied but positive.

Faculty Workload

Ninety-five percent of faculty respondents in one study identified teaching and learning with technology in blended learning as "time-consuming" and the same percent of the faculty population also stated that they received little to no institutional support (Deutsch 2010, p. 104). A blended approach does require that instructors prepare for both asynchronous and in-person events, and also requires an understanding of student-centered learning as a broader concept. However, it is worth noting that many web-based components can be reused, and so the workload will be much heavier during the initial stages of implementation (Moukali 2012). Studies do suggest that despite additional workload, faculty appreciate the blended model and would actively choose to teach it in future courses (Parke 2008).

Researcher Note: I was very happy to see that research supports what I knew through experience- teaching online modules does NOT support increased course enrollment. Although it can create efficiency in some areas, it adds work in others, which evens itself out. The reasons to add online components to studio curricula are more student-centered, whereas online programs for lecture curricula can support financial motives like doubled course enrollment. However, blended learning for studio courses can lower strain on physical facilities by condensing in-studio needs.

Faculty Training

Administrators may not fully understand faculty attitudes about technology implementation and often expect instructors to facilitate blended courses without any training (Deutsch 2010). It is certainly considered an adjustment for faculty to move from traditional instruction to a blended model, and faculty must dedicate effort to learning required skills for online instruction (Bender & Vredevoogd 2007, Bleffert-Schmidt 2011). A study by Moukali (2012) showed that faculty self-reported lack of training in regards to blended instruction, but willingness to learn and a positive outlook about its benefits.

Student Experience

An objective for transforming a traditional course to a blended one is the improvement of student experience. The literature shows that catering to students is a primary reason for implementing blended courses into the curriculum to add flexibility for students and eliminate some stress (Deutsch 2010, Moukali 2012). However, it is worth mentioning that some disadvantages will affect student experience, including lack of technological knowledge, limited physical interaction, inapplicability to specific learning styles, software requirements, and design limitations (Moukali 2012).

Student Performance and Assessment

A blended curriculum helps target specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria following national trends towards more rigorous student assessment (Prelip 2011). Although faculty are sometimes skeptical about student performance in technology-based curricula, Shannon et al. (2013) and Prelip (2011) showed that student performance was not at all hindered by the shift towards a blended learning model as long as students met engagement criteria with the online components. A 2011 analysis of face-to-face, blended and fully online courses at a community college showed little difference in success rates between face-to-face and blended courses (Bleffert-Schmidt 2011), and other studies showed higher success rates for the blended learner versus traditional (Nuyen 2011). A study in Granada correlated higher exam scores and lower dropout rates with the use of blended learning (Nguyen 2011).

Student Perceptions

Current studies show a wide range of student perceptions about blended learning. Saghafi et al. (2012) feels that easy navigation and access to technology-savvy tutors heavily impact student satisfaction. Students responding to a review of their blended Architecture Design class felt that the online components gave them a stronger understanding of underlying concepts that translated effectively into finished studio compositions. Over ninety percent of students implied that they were satisfied with the online resources (Shannon et al. 2013, pp. 136-139). After interviewing a number of community college students, Bleffert-Schmidt (2011) and Deutsch (2010) point out that most students correlate their success in class directly with the quality of instruction as a whole, not the delivery method.

Implementing Change

Available Technology

Implementing technology implies that available technological resources will be analyzed. In the case of Cheung and Hew (2012), for example, an institutional standard for an LMS was already established, and so the new curriculum followed suit. However, some institutions may have the choice to select a specific LMS suited to their needs, or at least consider other technological resources for synchronous or asynchronous supplemental materials such as screen-capturing, communications, discussions, video sharing and collaboration. Saghafi et al. (2012) states, "In terms of technology, what emerged was the need for platforms to be appropriate for the information they are delivering or the interaction they are supporting" (p. 17).

Administrative Support

Just as LMS selection might fall into the hands of administration, other aspects of implementing change with technology will need to align with an institutional strategic plan or established guidelines. Blended learning carries the power to transform but also permeates an entire institution from student to administration, and different stakeholders will be involved depending on which level- institutional, program, course or activity- is affected (Moukali 2012). Implementation will often require approval from designated committees, resource allocation or research grant funding, and creating prototypes will help pitch new technologies and get backing from administration (Cheung & Hew 2012). Implementing change will often be unsuccessful or extremely slow without full support of administration (Deutsch 2010, Moukali 2012). On the other hand, Bleffert-Schmidt (2011) noted that administrators do tend to recognize the benefits of blended instruction, especially to provide flexibility for the student body or to use funding more efficiently.

Student Readiness

Student readiness is relevant to technology implementation because students will need access to and understanding of specific applications. Cheung and Hew (2012) observed student use of applications to determine readiness and offer supplemental tutorials to battle common issues with great success. Interviewed faculty mirrored these concerns, noting the importance of student training within the specific technological platforms utilized. Deutsch (2010) argues that change agents and administration in higher education should investigate student and faculty experiences in order to fully understand the process of implementing technology-based learning into traditional programs.

Researcher Note: If you don't have administrative support, available institutional technology, or student readiness, a good solution might be a traditional classroom with supplemental web-based content and activities using free or low-cost resources.

Researcher Note and Conclusion:

Here I presented blended learning as a way to innovate in a studio classroom, integrate theory into practice, and keep up with technological advances without losing the tactile, hands-on aspects of the visual arts. The definition of blended learning leaves a lot open to interpretation, including how much is online, what is online, and how both students and faculty engage in the process. This openness is a huge advantage, as a program can specifically cater to a student demographic, targeted learning outcomes, and the faculty member's teaching style. Although you are left to interpret what this means for you, I hope it is now clear that online modules combined with studio instruction are worth exploring as a tool to continue the evolution of studio art education.

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