

## 15. Symposium: Blended Learning and its Evaluation

We will have to value the work of community building and make sure that participants have access to the resources necessary to learn what they need to learn in order to take actions and make decisions that fully engage their own knowledgeability. (Wenger, 1998, p. 10).

When I have been able to transform a group into a community of learners, then the excitement has been almost beyond belief. To free curiosity; to permit individuals to go charging off in new directions dictated by their own interests; to unleash the sense of inquiry; to open everything to questioning and exploration; to recognize that everything is in process of change – here is an experience I can never forget. (The Carl Rogers Reader; Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 2002, p. 304).

Significant learning [...] is learning that makes a difference – in the individual's behavior, in the course of action he chooses for the future, in his attitudes and in his personality. (Rogers, 1961, p. 280)

### INTRODUCTION

While much research has been devoted to pure e-learning, relatively little systematic research has gone into blended learning. In particular, the parameters that influence the success of merging face-to-face with online education have not yet been explored in a way that surpasses individual case studies. In traditional universities, however, innovations tend to be slow and evolutionary. Elements of e-learning are being gradually integrated into academic courses such that blended learning is on the way to becoming the main focus in practice.

While all three authors in this symposium agree that nothing is as practical as a good theory, we come to realize that a theory for blended learning does not exist yet. We further agree that such a theory will spring from experience. Hence, at the University of Vienna, we are experimenting with optimizing learning processes by blending face-to-face meetings with support provided by an advanced e-learning platform. We usually deal with quite a high number of students and hence consider e-learning as an essential tool of knowledge management. Furthermore, it offers an opportunity to enhance learning processes by allowing students to acquire theoretical knowledge in a self-organized, self-paced and problem-driven way. In face-to-face meetings our focus is on providing a constructive learning atmosphere in which the direct interaction with colleagues fosters the exchange of ideas, perspectives, meanings and intuitive, spontaneous action to solve real problems. We hypothesize that thoughtful integration of e-learning with face-to-face encounters will allow one to combine the benefits of both and lead to synergetic effects in cooperative learning. What we are most interested in is to find learning designs that add value to both sole face-to-face and sole online learning by exploiting the synergetic effects of presence and distance, of spontaneous expression and deliberate action, of the “here and now” and the persistence that encompasses the past and reaches into the future.

The papers describe our experiences in the blended learning courses we conduct, the theories we relate to, the designs we employ, and the evaluations we perform. Interestingly, although our theories stem from different areas such as action theory and the person-centered approach, the actual course designs are fairly coherent. We empirically evaluate the courses as well as the individual, platform-supported scenarios in order to systematically research into blended learning and allow for the transfer of our findings to a broader, international audience. The paper by Ilse Schrittmesser focuses on evaluating the interchange of e-learning with face-to-face learning sessions and on assessing the respective potential of both approaches in the development of professional action for educators. Derntl and Motschnig-Pitrik describe their pattern approach and the way the pattern knowledge base grows in each cycle of action research. Motschnig-Pitrik finally focuses on the empirical and qualitative evaluation of blended learning courses and on the effects of the results on staff development.

**Organised By: Renate Motschnig-Pitrik**