BLENDING IN:
exploring blended approaches to student engagement

A plenary presentation to

INTED 2011: Valencia

By

Associate Professor Gordon Suddaby

Massey University

New Zealand

g.t.suddaby@massey.ac.nz

Project team:

Massey University: Associate Professor Lynn Jeffrey, Associate Professor Gordon Suddaby, John Milne,

AUT University: Dr Andrew Higgins,

University of Canterbury: Dr Keith Comer,

Lincoln University: Dr Helen Gilmore,

And

The late Associate Professor Mark Laws of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi

About the project

Project Title: Help or Hindrance - Blended Approaches and Learner Engagement

Project Aim: to identify effective student learning strategies in a blended environment.

Funded: Through the national project fund, 2010 of Ako Aotearoa, NZ's National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence - (www.akoaotearoa.ac.nz)

AKO AOTEAROA
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TERTIARY TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Project Outcomes:

- Strategies to be tested in four organisations
- Case studies for each participating institution
- Briefing papers relevant to each institution and the wider sector.

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

AUT
AUCKLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O AWANUIĀRANGI

UC
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Project focus

To:

- Identify student learning strategies in a blended environment
- Identify factors that enhance student and staff engagement in a blended context
- Develop strategies enabling teachers and institutions to give pedagogical support to enhance learner engagement and achievement.
- Develop and test a toolkit of engagement strategies,
- Refine the toolkit to facilitate student engagement (and re-engagement)
- Describe engagement strategies in terms of teacher intention and student response

Key project outcome

In developing a toolkit to facilitate student engagement through effective blended approaches to teaching and learning it is intended that the toolkit will include strategies that:

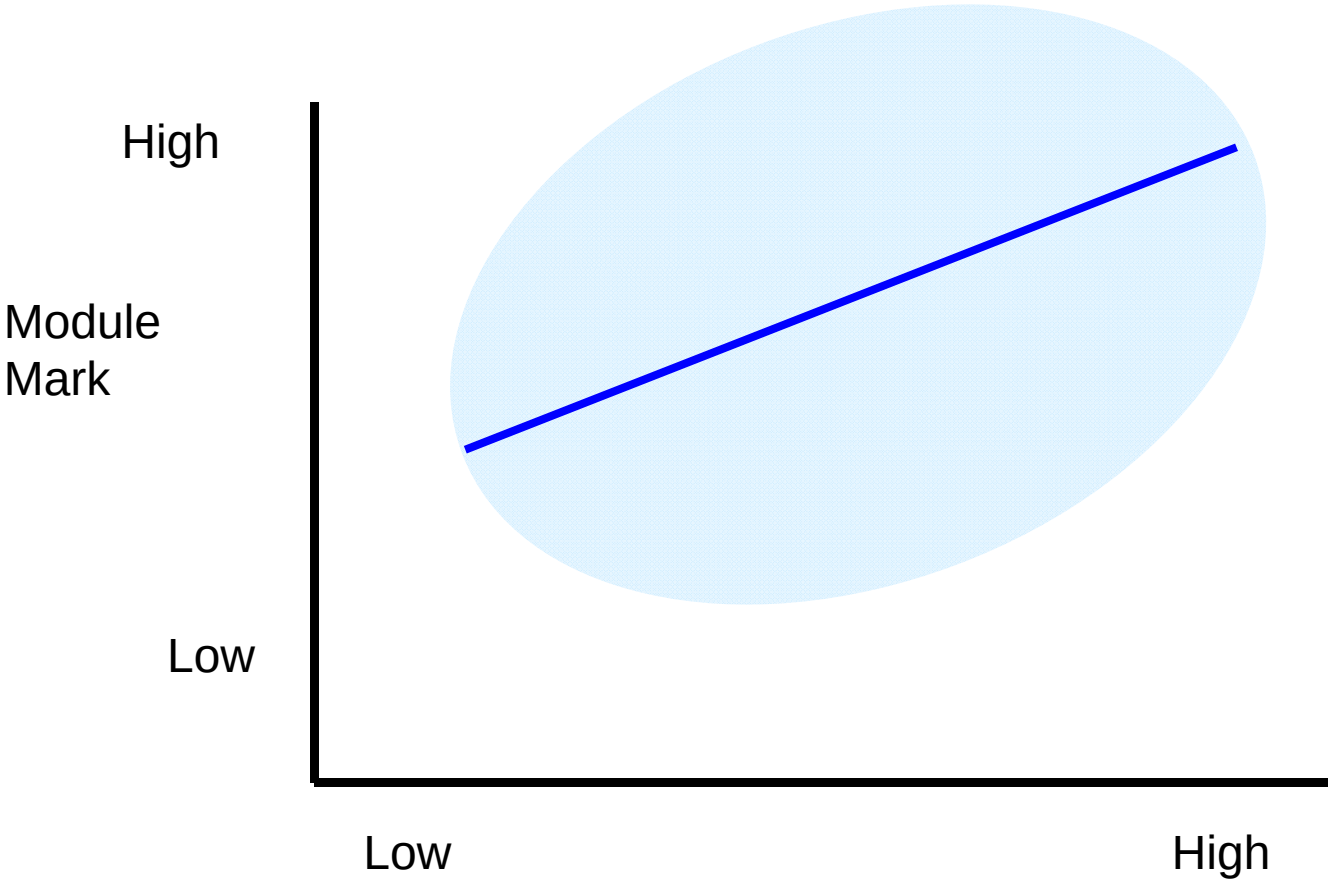
- minimise barriers to engagement in a blended context
- enhance the quality of the engaged experience in a blended context
- Support the engagement/re-engagement of students in a blended context who have either;
  - never engaged
    or
  - have become disengaged.

Underlying premise

- *“the promises (and hopefully, the benefits) of blended learning are extensive”.* Bonk, Kim, & Zeng,(2009).

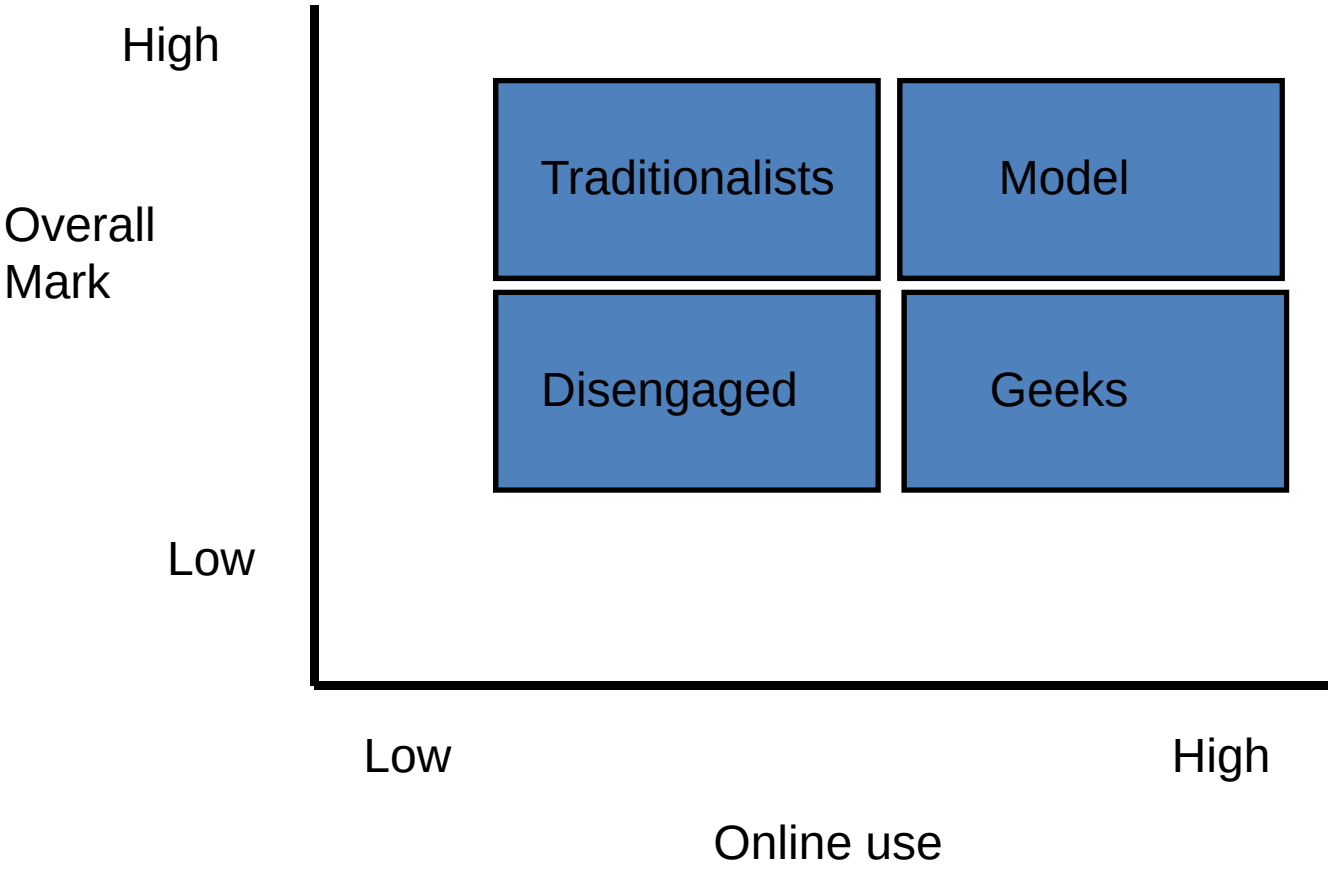
- So, what do we mean by ‘Blended learning”?

Online behaviour and assessment



Maltby and Mackie, 2009

Model of learner engagement



Maltby and Mackie, 2009

Defining blended learning?

At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to face learning experiences with on-line experiences.

Garrison and Kanuka (2004)

BUT...

- Blended learning is becoming an almost ubiquitous notion! So, what do we understand by the term 'blended learning?'

A moment to reflect...

- *What is your understanding of the term 'blended learning'?*

Some ways of defining blended learning ?

- *...blended learning environments combine face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction*

  Graham, 2006

- *Blended learning describes learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources*

  Harris, Connolly and Feeney, 2009

- *In the cybercampus, students never meet ...it is completely asynchronous. ...course are of a blended modality:*

  Fulkerth, 2010

- *...where course content and participant interaction is conducted at least partially online...*

  Arbaugh et al, 2009

So what do we mean by ‘blended learning?

- Our team’s initial working (and evolving) definition of blended learning separates the intentionality of teaching from the impact of that intentionality on the learners by talking about Blended Teaching and Blended learning. We still have some work to do around this, but at this stage ...

- **Blended teaching** is a formal adoption of a range of teaching strategies involving pedagogy and technology aimed at developing intended learning outcomes in students. It is generally conducted by and controlled in institutions and characterized by approved methods using agreed technologies. Those engaged in blended teaching may have received instruction or help to develop their teaching strategies.
- **Blended learning** is a purposive but usually informal activity undertaken by a student who engages a range of learning techniques and strategies aimed at acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes of relevance to them. Some of the learning may be formal and some informal. The learning strategies may be influenced by teaching approaches but are not determined by them, nor are the learning strategies under the control of an institution.

Our project challenge

- To develop approaches which better align the actions and intentions of the teachers and their institutions to the expectations, activities, actions, contexts, skills and outcomes of the learners *in the blended environment!!!*

What we are actually doing

- Focussing on second year business courses (looking for a degree of homogeneity amongst the institutional cohorts!)
- Inviting teachers interested in blended learning to participate
- Seeking to understand teachers' engagement strategies through a series of personal interviews
- Surveying student perceptions and understandings re blended learning through online questionnaires and focus group interviews
- Measuring student engagement, perseverance, outcomes and success
- Developing the Toolkit
- Comparing teachers intentions with student perceptions in the analytical phase

Another challenge

Developing a shared understanding among staff and engaging them in the implementing a ‘blended approach’.

- The project is looking to contribute to such a shared understanding and then to make available a ‘blended learning toolkit’ for staff to use.
- The project is also looking to embed the need and support for a toolkit within institutional practice

What is the Blended Learning Toolkit?

The Toolkit is for teachers

-It aims to minimise barriers to engagement, enhance quality, enthuse the disengaged

-It will have both an institutional and individual application

Toolkit Components

1) Needs Assessment:

-Course characteristics, Nature of content, learner characteristics

2) Course Planning Tools

-Based on input from Needs Assessment

-Planning rubric

3) Developmental Tools

-Designing content, Communication & interaction strategies

-Student support, Reflective activities, Diagnostic & formative activities

4) Evaluation and reflective tools (for teachers)

Some individual tools supported by institutions...

- "Traditional tools" (Fulkerth, 2010);
  - *Email*
  - *The web*
  - *Podcasts*
  - *Powerpoint*
  - *Web-conferencing*
  - *Social networking etc*
  - *...*
- But!

Some Institutional “tools” at an organisational level

- Release time for training
- Technology mentors
- Supplemental pay and awards
- Access to real-time support staff
- Faculty input into software selection
- User-based technology assessment techniques
- Departmental forums and support
- Professional development programmes and staff
- …

Georgina and Olson (2008)

There are also Pedagogical tools at an institutional level

- Course design templates
- Lesson plans (Littlejohn and Pegler, 2007)
- Reusable objects (McAndrew, 2005)
- Frameworks (Garrison and Vaughn, 2008)
- Rubrics (Example included)
- ...

Tools for measuring and enhancing student engagement and support

We are developing a suite of these for the toolkit.

Measuring engagement through:

- Usage of online learning tools (VLE analytics)
- Assessment (formative and summative)
- Student perceptions (survey and interviews)

Also:

Engagement strategies...

Engagement strategies

1. **Curiosity:** -Transitioning - make learners feel a part of the class AND the discipline,
2. **Removing technical obstacles** - Using checklists and help desks
3. **Address student obstacles** -e.g. Procrastination, Time poorness, Anxiety,
4. **Social presence** Teacher immediacy - visible and useful teacher participation, accessibility, web 2???
5. **Feedback** -Teacher, transparent and timely processes

   - Student feedback, advice, help, self-monitoring tools -
6. **Learning Activities, e.g.** online quizzes, challenge, problem solving, real world.
7. **Content,** Tools for designing lessons, structuring courses, Rules/guidance for writing
8. **Personal contact,** Strategies for early detection
9. **Support,** Direct student to other support staff –contact details on the website
10. **Negotiated study,** allowances to help students get back on board e.g. extensions.

And in more detail...

- A blended learning course review rubric E.G. developing a VLE site based on an approach used by Lincoln University (NZ)...

Blended Learning Course Review Rubric (draft)

Site Content	Baseline	Effective	Exemplary
12	Welcome letter containing a brief introduction to the course and its content	Short video of a member of the teaching staff introducing him/herself and the course	Series of videos containing updates, important points, links to real world events etc.
13	Course outline (LU minimum content) in approved LU format	Course content displayed as a course map	Links from assessments to relevant sections in course outline
14	Topics have descriptive headings reflected in menu block . Course content structured as modules with topics within (not weeks)	Consistent use of module and topic headings through the site and are linked via the course map	
15	Learning objectives at module and topic levels	Explanation of how each topic contributes to the acquisition of Graduate Profile attributes	Explanation of how each topic's learning objectives and Graduate Profile attributes contribute to career

Finally…

Kanuka 2009 describes blended learning as

"… an option to remove time, place and situational barriers – while retaining the ability to provide high quality interactions between peers and instructors"

No doubt many of your institutions have such tools in operation. We would certainly be interested in hearing from those willing to share and contribute to the work.

Contact details

Lynn Jeffrey
Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand
l.m.jeffrey@massey.ac.nz

Gordon Suddaby
Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
g.t.suddaby@massey.ac.nz

Keith Comer
Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand
Keith.comer@canterbury.ac.nz

Andrew Higgins
AUT University, Auckland, New Zealand
andrew.higgins@aut.ac.nz

Helen Gilmore
Lincoln University, Christchurch, New Zealand
helen.gilmore@Lincoln.ac.nz

John Milne
Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand
j.d.milne@massey.ac.nz,