Reviews / Comptes rendus

Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy

by Francine S. Glazer
(Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC., 2012, 138 pages)

A book's title should pull readers in, entice them to visualize its content, and make them want to open the book and flip through its pages. Francine Glazer's *Blended Learning* does just that. Any instructor who makes his or her living teaching online should welcome a book on blended learning. But don't make the same mistake I did: I didn't read the sub-title, "Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy." I assumed that a book with the words "blended learning" in the title was going to be chock-a-block with facts, with tips and tricks on how to design and deliver blended learning. I was disappointed. Paraphrasing Glazer's words, this book consists of five accomplished academics having frank discussions of pedagogy and the challenges they experienced when transforming their courses from face-to-face to online. It provides a clear appreciation of how these transitions were fraught with multiple challenges in the face of administrative skepticism that could have deterred the most determined instructor from trying new instructional methods.

Still, Glazer's 12-page introduction is a *must* read. It is a superb, concise summation of blended learning and why instructors must pay close attention to how they structure blended courses. These 12 pages provide an explanation of the pedagogical approaches to blended learning that is grounded in the literature. Drawing from the works of over 21 authors, including Randy Garrison, Glazer presents a clear rationale on how well-structured blended courses channel students to be better online learners. If you're looking for a book that details the pedagogy of blended learning, read Glazer's introduction to *Blended learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy*. If you're looking for a book that tells the story of five academics and their journey to transform face-to-face courses to a blended environment, this may be the book for you.

Although Glazer's book is not a just-in-time reference guide for instructing blended courses, each academic's story of transition contains important insights into online pedagogy that inform the novice and expert instructor alike, albeit in a rather circuitous fashion. Contributors use the art of storytelling to explain their experiences of moving to and instructing in a blended environment. While the stories are entertaining, the description of blended learning is thin. This may explain why, in his foreword to the book, James Rhem focuses on the need for

higher education practitioners to be open to new ways of teaching, while steering clear of highlighting Glazer's contribution to the pedagogy of blended learning.

A closer look at the first story told by Carl Behnke of moving to a blended-learning format reveals three themes. The first two themes relate to being a new teacher and to student engagement. Blended learning, the third theme, takes a backseat to the telling of the trials and tribulations faced by instructors as they relinquish perfected competencies and acquire new knowledge and skills.

Glazer opens her own chapter by directly stating that her contribution exposes the thought process of developing an online unit and overcoming implementation hurdles of moving to the blended format. With a little tweaking, such as moving the conclusion to the paper's beginning, Glazer's chapter could attract those readers searching for tips on structuring and teaching blended coursers.

With attentive reading, however, one can find the design and instructional gems hidden in each chapter. For example, even though Aycock's chapter is overrun with descriptions of how an original face-to-face course was developed, informative frank discussions about online assessments are therein interspersed. Although the authors of each chapter have taken care to cite credible sources on face-to-face teaching, a majority of tips provided on blended learning are based on the tacit knowledge gained from the author's experience of transforming courses to a blended format. In Chapter Four, Tracey Gau describes how transforming a literature course to the blended learning environment was conducive to increasing the interactions and contact time between students and teachers, ensuring students received more instructional support. Key contributions of this chapter are discussion forum rubrics and discussion forum question design. Robert Hartwell and Elizabeth Bakley's Chapter Five is a delight. In the opinion of this reviewer, it should be repositioned to the beginning of the book. Not only does their chapter provide the storyline that fleshes out Glazer's superb introduction, but it also supplies the reader with solid tips and tricks for teaching in a blended environment.

Although I would not purchase *Blended Learning: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy*, I would curl up in an armchair or sit in a quiet place among the library stacks and read the introduction. This is worth the time and effort for those who seek to learn about blended learning. Readers looking for a bit of both worlds—what is done in the classroom and what was done to transform the classroom to blended learning—will find the two themes of each academic story satisfying.

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