**Critical Curriculum Design for Blended Learning in Higher Education: The**

**Strategies, Principles and Challenges of Interactive Classroom Management**

**Abstract**

The main purpose of this article is to introduce a critical curriculum design approach

for bringing curriculum change for Blended Learning in higher education.

Furthermore, the strategies, principles and challenges of this approach are also

presented. This paper provides a perspective on such serious concerns as whether

curriculum change should start with professors, administrators, learners, education

communities and/or professional reformers at local, state and national levels. Also,

this paper includes treatment of the Radical Constructivists’ view of blended learning

with merging Media Richness Theory. The author hopes that it emphasizes the

importance of considering a wide range of situations in implementing curriculum

change, of matching innovation with the realities of the interactive classroom

management in higher education. Besides, the author intention in this paper is to

discuss the rights of learners and professors by fostering the courtesy, confidentially

and human dignity of critical curriculum design for blended learning.

**Introduction**

*Blended Learning (BL)* is the integration of several approaches to educational

processes which involve the deployment of a diversity of methods and resources,

and to learning experiences which are obtained from more than one kind of

information source. As pointed out Rossett, Douglis, and Frazee (2003), choices for

blended learning go beyond the traditional classroom. These options develop

knowledge societies, which are based on authentic and democratic foundations.

Since an enhancing individuality, a wider multicultural diversity, a shared power and

more freedom in Colleges, therefore, a blended learning approach strongly requires a

critical curriculum design and a change process in higher education. It involves

professors and learners in building interactive class management in higher

education.

An awareness and understanding of today’s major social, political, economical and

cultural changes requires adoption on the part of the curriculum. A critical curriculum

design is relevant to the management change. In this reality, College professors

would have the opportunities to reformulate a curriculum for their classrooms.

However, they are often unwilling to develop a new curriculum and put it into practice

for various reasons: These professors are constrained by lack of time due to their

massive teaching, research and advisor duties as well as community partnership

schedules, and they perceive resistances to change from colleagues and/or learners.

As noted by McNeil (1996), even if others are not actually opposed to professors

implementing a new curriculum, the anticipation of resistance can be enough to

exclude critical innovations. Most critical curriculum innovations might not affect a

particular classroom, but an entire College and/or campus. Without the novel

approaches for developing shared norms, values, ethics and goals, and being aware

of biases and stereotypes, professors are more interested in planning for their own

classroom rather than for entire College and/or campus. Although it is very

complicated to effect a College’s curriculum modifications through professor initiation,

this change process has an increasingly profound impact upon power and authority

in the College.

**Purposes**

In the traditional classrooms and rigid curriculums shaped by capitalist hegemony

and their political and cultural aegis, few professor-learners experience the reality of

democratic participations in their every day lives. Learning, therefore, must be a

boarder concept than formal conventional education. Democratic-egalitarian

essentials for democratic classrooms in higher education can be able to build formal

and informal progressive knowledge networks via new communication technologies.

*Blended Learning (BL)*, therefore, is a dynamic learning method to merge the gap

between egalitarian values and classroom practices. BL provides professor and

learners with extensive learning and communication experiences that promote the

democratic way of life. This is the strong foundation of a democratic society. Dewey

(1916) says that an egalitarian society “*must have a type of education which gives*

*individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of*

*mind which secure social change without introducing disorder*” (p.115).

With today's prevalence of cutting-edge technologies in higher education, BL merges

diverse traditional resources and e-learning with other educational resources.

Furthermore, this arrangement refers especially to combine e-learning human

resources with conventional ones. These technology-based collaborations help

professors and learners make democratic decisions for dialogic leaderships. These

engagements increase awareness of their own identities and differences, and help to

define the democratic values associated with equalizing of access to human rights.

These partnerships require interactive classroom managements and dialogic

leaderships for democratic decisions. On the other hand, there is a need for a critical

curriculum design for effective BL in higher education. To develop a common vision

of social justice, this new curriculum must involve professors and learners in an

egalitarian decision-making process. Within the context of these concerns, this paper

focuses on the following four main issues:

1. How do professors and learners deeply engage in developing a critical

curriculum design for BL in higher education? How does this new approach

provide them with alternative holistic forms and scaffolding strategies of social

justice? What are the philosophical foundations and backgrounds of

interactive classroom management needed to accelerate democratic

transformations?

2. What are the possibilities and potentials of a critical curriculum design for BL

in higher education? How can these opportunities engage them in critical civic

responsibilities and powerful social actions? What are the strategies,

principles and challenges of interactive classroom management?

3. What are the unique and diverse perspectives, and also methodological

strengths and weaknesses of BL in higher education? How does BL obtain

genuine equal opportunities and democratic participations in interactive

classroom management to build knowledge networks not characterized by

power, dominance, hierarchy and competition?

4. How does BL promote critical communication activities for interactive

classroom management to empower authentic and high quality lifelong

learning experiences? How do they fight the hegemonic power of capitalism

and its unfairness structure in BL milieus?

**Theoretical Background of the Study**

BL is an active process to obtain, evaluate and produce knowledge. Professors

should help their learners become active participants in higher education. Therefore,

entire classroom management must be interactive so that learners can be able to

work on complex projects, synthesize knowledge to build their own understandings,

learn skills and concepts, and use them to solve real world problems. In this

constructivist milieu, professors and learners can adopt innovative classroom

management strategies for a critical curriculum design that higher education is going

through a critical planning and management revolution process. In this case, it is very

important to combine learning and communication theories together. The *Radical*

*Constructivist Learning Theory (RCLT)* and *Media Richness Theory (MRT)* can

support egalitarian and liberating curriculum activities, and also prepare professors

and learners for fully democratic participation in interactive classroom management.

**The Radical Constructivist Learning Theory and Media Richness Theory**

RCLT is an unconventional approach to the problem of knowledge and knowing as a

*theory of knowing* rather than a *theory of knowledge*. It starts from the assumption

that knowledge, no matter how it is defined, is in the heads of persons, and that the

thinking subject has no alternative but to construct what he or she knows on the

basis of his or her own experience. The philosophical-epistemological background of

RCLT is mainly represented by Ernst von Glasersfeld. As highlighted by Riegler

(2003), von Glasersfeld points out that knowledge is not passively received, but

actively built up by the cognizing subject. The function of cognition is adaptive, and

serves the organization of the experiential world that RCLT particularly focused on

individual self-regulation and the building of conceptual structures through reflection

and abstraction (Glasersfeld, 1995). Furthermore, authentic learning depends on

seeing a problem as one’s own problem, as an obstacle that obstruct one’s progress

toward a goal. From the RCLT perspective, the cognizing subject cannot empower

her/his experiences that all knowledge is constructed out of those experiences.

RCLT does not suggest that there is no external reality, but strongly mentioned that

learners can generate her/his reality with the limits of their experiences. Professors

and learners can operate in their own private and self-constructed worlds. According

to von Glasersfeld (1990), professors give to learners "*necessarily remains tentative*

*and cannot ever approach absolute determination*" (p. 37).

MRT is based on contingency theory and information processing theory (Galbraith

1977). First proponents of the theory were made by Daft and Lengel (1984).The

theory of *Media Richness* is one of the most widely used media theories. It argues

that task performance is improved when task information needs are matched to a

medium's richness or its “…*capacity to facilitate shared meaning* (Daft, Lengel and

Trevino, 1987, p. 358).” MRT points out that media vary in certain uniqueness that

affects personal ability to communicate rich information. Daft and Lengel (1986)

mentioned that this theory theorizes which media should prove most effective in

what situations. Based on this concern, theory does not focus on conjecturing how

managers *choose* media. According to Daft and Lengel (1986), MRT explains the

impact of various types of media that these are the basic foundations of interactive

online communications. According to this theory, the various communications media

differ in richness. Rich communications media allow the transmission of a multiplicity

of cues, provide immediate feedback, allow communication with both natural

language and numbers, and facilitate the personal focus of messages.

BL environments are the places, where represent the real world. To generate

interactive classroom management atmosphere, a critical curriculum design must

make a radical break from the generally accepted views that our knowledge of the

world must lie somewhere between materialism and idealism. This design approach

must take advantage of the Internet-based new technologies to generate radical

revolutions in BL environments. Therefore, RCLT and MRT can support dynamic

non-traditional approaches to a critical curriculum design. This allows professors and

learners to be free of an ancient philosophical debate, and also to develop new

models of understanding how they integrate the strategies and principles of BL to

build interactive classroom managements. In this case, language and social

interactions allow for interpersonal communication activities, but never allow an

individual to escape from isolation as a knowing being. RCLT and MRT provide

professors and learners within a framework for social interactions whereas they can

be able to remain cognitively isolated. Besides, this approach can reduce ambiguity

through MRT for empowering interactive classroom management in a BL setting.

**Results and Conclusions**

This article discusses that the evaluation process of Educational Management

Systems (EMSs) profoundly engages interactive online communications. One of the

most crucial aspects related to these social interactions is the types of EMSs

developed based on the theory of *Media Richness* that evaluation must concentrate

on investigating learner, online communication designers, and technology

performances successfully. As mentioned by Irani (2005), a similarly imperative

dynamic to consider is online communication potentials and the ability of the system

design as well as communication milieus to enhance main educational tasks and

provide adequate communication opportunities among online communication

designers, learners and community.

It is apparently important to expose what is meant by the evaluation of EMSs. Online

communication workers must consider about the judgments of authorities about the

EMSs, the opinions of program development staff, and comparisons executed

programs with its communicational design. To employ diverse and multicultural

principles under the Evaluation Model, online communication designers must

consider the development and implement stages of program evaluation to decide

whether EMSs must be continued or terminated. This must be based on the value of

the products and outcomes of EMSs, the success of its development operations and

process achievements, the availability of appropriate resources and also the

technological adequacy of the collection and interpretation of EMSs-based data. The

evaluation model of EMSs must help online communication designers establish

democratic and multicultural standards that aim at philosophically involving in Media

Richness Theory.