Enhancing Interaction Between Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Hearing Students Through Blended Learning

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“Blended learning is both simple and complex. At its simplest, blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. There is considerable intuitive appeal to the concept of integrating the strengths of synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous (text-based Internet) learning activities. At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with the challenge of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts.”

--Randy Garrison, 2004
## Representation of a “Typical” Blended Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
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<th>Saturday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take Online Quiz On Textbook Reading</td>
<td>CAMPUS CLASS SESSION</td>
<td>CAMPUS CLASS SESSION</td>
<td>Post Comments On Class Presentations</td>
<td>Continue Working On Team Project In Your Team’s Online Work Area</td>
<td>Respond To Online Discussion Questions</td>
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“Deaf and hard-of-hearing students in mainstream classes currently use the assistance of a third party, either a sign language interpreter or a voice-to-print ‘captionist,’ to facilitate communication with hearing instructors and peers. With the advent of distance learning technology [asynchronous online discussion boards], there is now the opportunity for deaf and hard-of-hearing students to interact directly with their hearing peers and instructors without the message going through a third party.”

--Gary Long and Jim Mallory, *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Education*, 2007
What is an Asynchronous Discussion Board?

- Asynchronous mode: anytime, anywhere.
- Primarily text-based, though multimedia files can be embedded or attached.
- Leaves “permanent” textual record of all interaction.
- Bundled with all course management systems, reliable, easy-to-use, and cost-effective (about $20 per course).
What is the Nature of Classroom Communication?

- Historically related to religious ceremony, theater, and political debate.
- Synchronous mode: same time, same place, yet seemingly “unmediated.”
- Primarily verbal and oral, though visual in “body language,” ASL, instructional objects, and architecture.
- In the absence of observers and/or recording technologies, leaves no external record.
The Climate is Right for Bringing Online and Classroom Discussion Together

• Learner-centered models of teaching and learning are moving to center stage.
• Most schools and colleges have implemented institution-wide course management systems.
• Today’s students are knowledgeable about and comfortable with online communication.
• All of us are “time starved” and crave greater flexibility in scheduling our work and private lives.
Opening Exercise

1. We have 10 minutes for this exercise.
2. Gather in small groups of 2-4 people.
3. Briefly discuss if, how, and why you use discussion in your courses.
4. Identify any apprehensions you may have about using an asynchronous discussion board in your courses.
5. Conversely, identify some possible benefits of using an asynchronous discussion board in your courses.
6. Be prepared to report back to the whole group.
Some Benefits of Discussion in General

- Helps students explore a diversity of perspectives
- Enables students to recognize and investigate their assumptions
- Fosters habits of collaborative and cooperative learning
- Develops the capacity for the clear communication of ideas
Objections to Online Discussion

- Lacks the immediacy, spontaneity, and “presence” of face-to-face interaction.
- Based not on verbal and “body-language” communication, but on textual/iconographic communication
- Often too “faculty-centered” or taking too much work (faculty view)
- Often too “student-centered” or lacking in faculty control (student view)
Benefits of Online Discussion

• Flexibility of “anywhere, any time” mode.
• Discussion can be extended across days or weeks.
• Written expression of ideas.
  – Reflective and crafted versus spontaneous “Permanent” versus ephemeral
• More equal playing field (more “democratic”).
  – Students can state their views and ask questions in an environment that does not favor the most assertive or outgoing
  – Everyone encouraged or required to participate
• Stimulates small group as well as whole class discussion.
RIT’s Blended Learning Model

- Goal is to ‘blend’ best features of classroom teaching and learning with the best features of online teaching and learning to promote active independent learning.
- Two possible approaches:
  - Content online, discussion in class
  - Online discussion, content in class
- We sponsored the “online discussion” model.
  - Significant portion of the teaching and learning activity is moved online
    - Whole class online discussion
    - Online student groups
History

- Began with 5 faculty in fall 2003
- 124 faculty participated in Pilot and Program
- 187 new and unique blended courses offered
- 323 total blended sections offered
- Over 20 national presentations
- Mallory & Long research on Deaf/HH/ESL
Major Findings: Faculty

1. Faculty motivated to blend their courses in order to resolve some instructional problem
2. Each faculty member faced a unique set of problems, but one overarching instructional problem emerged as significant:
   - The problem of student participation or engagement
Major Findings: Students

- Nearly 70% of all students indicate they like blended learning and would recommend the format.
- As a subgroup, deaf and hard-or-hearing students report the most positive learning experiences.
- Course completion is excellent (95%).
- Students perceive they have both a greater amount of interaction and a greater quality of interaction with other students.
- Surveys reveal that students believe more instructional strategies are used in blended courses.

http://online.rit.edu
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**Face-to-Face Activities**
- Lectures on New Material
- Guest Lectures
- Demonstrations
- Field Trips
- Presentations
- Assessment

**Online Activities**
- Discussion
  - Whole Class
  - Small Group
- Group Work
  - Team Projects
  - Study Groups
- Presentations
- Assessment

**Courseware Management Systems**
- myCourses
  - Gradebook
  - Messages
  - Outline
  - Syllabus
- Media
  - Video
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  - Tutorials

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**Courseware Management Systems**
James Revell’s
History of Modern America

• Problem: This is a large “service course” for adults/commuters that meets one evening a week for four hours. Most students say that history is a boring subject; they’re taking the class only because it satisfies a distributional requirement.

• Blended Strategy:
  – Supplement textbook readings with paired readings from a Taking Sides book to enhance debate and discussion
  – Replace two hours of classroom seat time each week with online discussion that extends across the entire week
  – Organize the 30 students into six online discussion groups; every student will address the same weekly discussion topics.
Discussion Board Organization
Comments from Jim’s Students

- “Honestly, [what I liked best about the course] was not sitting in a chair for four hours straight.”
- “I love how you can do it [the online discussion] at your own time and pace.”
- “I felt more free to interact and voice my opinions in online discussions. I tend not to participate in class discussions because I’m shy and words don’t always come easily to me.”
- “The online portion gave me a great look at the opinions and judgment of the international students in the class who don’t openly contribute to class discussion.”
Lessons from Jim’s Course:
Organize Online Discussion According to Class Size; Online Quizzes Allow Better Use of Classroom Time

• Whole-class online discussion works best in courses with no more than 12-16 students.
• For courses with more than 16 students, create two or more small-group discussion areas.
• Decide whether you, the instructor, will respond to each student’s response individually, or to all responses in summary style.
• Short online quizzes (five-10 items) taken before class can provide invaluable information on what to stress or downplay in the classroom.
John Roche and Linda Reinfeld’s Digital & Contemporary Poetries

- Problem: This course included extensive use of outside speakers. How can you accommodate discussion before and after these speakers?
- Blended Strategy: Extend the classroom discourse to online discussion.
Syllabus - Grading

• 15% Four-to-Five Page Essay (traditional or experimental)

• 30% Final Project (eight-to-10 page essay, or creative project of equal effort, including digital or multimedia options)

• 25% Online Discussion Contributions (at least one paragraph-length message and two responses to other students’ postings per week)

• 10% In-Class Participation

• 10% Pop Quizzes

• 10% Attendance (more than four absences means failure for the course)
Lots and Lots and Lots of Dialogue!
Lessons from John and Linda’s Course:

Actively Facilitate Discussions

• Ask challenging questions.
• Offer up ideas or resources and inviting a critique of them.
• Reflect on and re-evaluate expressed opinions.
• Summarize previous contributions and asking the next question.
• Propose actions based on ideas that have been expressed.
Blended: The Best of Classroom and Online Interaction

• Balance between faculty-centered and student-centered learning models.
• Provides students with a wider range of ways in which to participate.
• Encourages students to improve their communication skills in reading and writing, as well as speaking and listening.
• Faculty and students can develop a strong sense of community both in person and online.
Questions...

Thank You!