Reflective practice involves problem raising and problem solving. Reflective practice is being widely accepted as a new pedagogical practice, and blended learning can be incorporated as a technique for the promotion of reflective practices in education. By the use of blended learning the transformation of teaching-learning especially in higher education becomes inevitable. This paper represents about Reflective Teaching Practice, Blended learning-definition, characteristics, models, merits and limitations.

1. Introduction

Reflective practice involves problem raising and problem solving. Instruction begins with problematic situation. The problem must be so realistic that students should get motivated to solve them. Such a problem creates an urge to analyze and encounter obstacles are removed by a process called to solve difficulties. Thus it involves formulating hypotheses and structuring situations to test the hypotheses. Reflective thinking is based on the existing idea or knowledge that is taken as dependable. It follows careful, critical examination of an idea in the light of empirical or testable evidence. Reflective thinking is related to cognitive–field psychology. It is however different from pure reasoning or rational thinking. It is conclusion drawn from evidence. It is nothing but modern scientific thinking. (Ragahvachar, 1993)

Reflective learning is application of cognitive–field psychology to gain new insights and change old ones through exploratory experimental process. Several course of action may be tried by an individual to come to a definite process of getting solution discards the unsuitable and reaches the goal through one which helps in reaching the goal. This is based on Kurt Lewins theory, a successful process is one which strengthens the understanding. Thus reflective learning is goal directed or oriented learning. Thus it is also a teacher problem solving process.

According to Bigge “instead of motivating students to try all type of problems, the teacher should motivate student-teachers to solve the problem of teaching, in the light of clear understanding of the learning process (Bigge, 1982). They should learn to solve their teaching problems. It is real problems encountered to learn problem solving. Thus it is clear that those teachers who are entering the profession should learn to solve problems of teaching rather than artificially learning problem solving which are not related to teaching and learning.
Reflective practice can be promoted during classroom instruction using several teaching-learning strategies and practices. Among the many strategies used, blended learning is one such practice, the application of which promotes reflective thinking and reflective learning.

The term “blended learning” is being used with increased frequency in both academic and corporate circles. In 2003, the American Society for Training and Development identified blended learning as one of the top ten trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry (cited by Rooney, 2003). In 2002, The Chronicle of Higher Education quoted the president of Pennsylvania State University as saying that the convergence between online and residential instruction was “the single-greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today” (Young, 2002, p. A33). Also quoted in that article was the editor of The Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks who predicted a dramatic increase in the number of hybrid (i.e., blended) courses in higher education, possibly to include as many as 80-90% of all courses (Young, 2002).

Blended learning is not new. However, in the past, blended learning was comprised of physical classroom formats, such as lectures, labs, books, or hand-outs. Today, organizations have a myriad of learning approaches and choices. The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event—learning is a continuous process. Blending provides various benefits over using any single learning delivery medium alone.

2. The Meaning of Blended Learning

The development and spread of Internet technologies contributed to the quality of education to a great extent, and in recent years, with the increasing number of schools and institutions giving education via internet, the concept of e-learning has entered in our lives. Despite all these rapid developments, face to face instruction has never lost its popularity. In addition, distance education and e-learning methods have taken the place of face-to-face instruction cannot be achieved in distance education or in e-learning applications. Such an interaction seems to be a must for permanent learning and for the teacher’s control over this activity.

Blended learning, which is relatively new learning approach, has the quality to have an influence on teachers, students and instruction activities. In the web-based communication established between students and the teacher, the teacher’s reassuring informal approach and his technical support can be provided by a high level of interaction. Students and teachers are separated from each other in the terms of place; and learning is realized non-simultaneously (Cornell & Martin, 1997). Blended (Hybrid) learning is one of the approaches that is utilized to help students for meaningful learning via information and communication technologies in educational settings (Aynur Gecer & Funda Daga, 2012).

3. The Concept Of Blended Learning

Blended Learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through delivery of content and instruction via digital and online media with some element of student control over time, place, path, or place. Blended learning emerges from an understanding of the relative strengths of face-to-face learning with appropriate online learning. This opens a wide range of possibilities for redesign that goes beyond enhancing the traditional classroom lecture. Blended learning represents a new approach and mix of classroom and online activities consistent with the goals of specific courses or programs.

Blended learning means combining the strong and advantageous aspects of web based learning with those of face-to-face learning (Horton, 2002; Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003). Graham and Kaleta
Lakshmi K. Swamy:: Blended Learning As A Reflective Practice

(2002) identified blended learning or hybrid courses as joining the best features of in-class teaching with the best features of online learning to promote active independent learning and reduce class seat time. Driscoll (2002) referred to four different concepts:

- To combine or mix modes of web-based technology (e.g., live virtual classroom, self-paced instruction, collaborative learning, streaming video, audio, and text) to accomplish an educational goal.
- To combine various pedagogical approaches (e.g., constructivism, behaviourism, cognitivism) to produce an optimal learning outcome with or without instructional technology.
- To combine any form of instructional technology (e.g., videotape, CDROM, web-based training, film) with face-to-face instructor-led training.
- To mix or combine instructional technology with actual job tasks in order to create a harmonious effect of learning and working.

3.1 Characteristics Of Blended Learning

- Active learning and a reduction of classroom time, is based on the concept of hybridization, the bringing together of two dissimilar parts to produce a third result.
- Blended course combines face-to-face and computer based learning opportunities, teachers are able to use a variety of instructional techniques.
- Engaging students in online learning activities also changes the nature of the in-class sessions
- Learning shifts from lecture to student–centered instruction.
- A balance between flexible learning options and knowledge access.

3.2 Ingredients of Blended Learning

- **Live Events** – Synchronous, teacher-led learning environment in which all learners participate at the same time. It can be in real class room or can be virtual classroom.
- **Self-paced Learning** – Recorded live events, internet based or CDROM based, which helps the learner to learn at his own pace.
- **Collaboration** – It implies a more dynamic communication and interaction among many learners that brings about knowledge sharing.
- **Assessment** – It is both live and online measure of learner’s knowledge to determine prior knowledge as well to measure learning transfer.
- **Performance Support** – These are reference materials that enhance learning retention and transfer. It may be printable reference, download multimedia objects, documentation etc.

3.3 Dimensions Of Blended Learning

The original use of the phrase “blended learning” was often associated with simply linking traditional classroom training to e-learning activities, such as asynchronous work (typically accessed by learners outside the class at their own time and pace). However, the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning strategies or “dimensions.” Today a blended learning program may combine one or more of the following dimensions, although many of these have overlapping attributes.

- Blending Offline and Online Learning
• Blending Self-Paced and Live, Collaborative Learning
• Blending Structured and Unstructured Learning
• Blending Custom Content with Off-the-Shelf Content
• Blending Learning, Practice, and Performance Support

3.4 Principles of Blended Learning
The following are the principles of Blended Learning:
(1) At least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace;
(2) At least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home;
(3) And the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience.

4. Blended Learning Models
The majority of blended-learning programs resemble one of four models: Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual.
The Rotation model includes four sub-models: Station Rotation, Lab Rotation, Flipped Classroom, and Individual Rotation.

1. Rotation model — a course or subject in which students rotate on a fixed schedule or at the teacher’s discretion between learning modalities, at least one of which is online learning. Other modalities might include activities such as small-group or full-class instruction, group projects, individual tutoring, and pencil-and-paper assignments. The students learn mostly on the brick-and-mortar campus, except for any homework assignments.
   a. Station Rotation — a course or subject in which students experience the Rotation model within a contained classroom or group of classrooms. The Station Rotation model differs from the Individual Rotation model because students rotate through all of the stations, not only those on their custom schedules.
   b. Lab Rotation – a course or subject in which students rotate to a computer lab for the online-learning station.
   c. Flipped Classroom – a course or subject in which students participate in online learning off-site in place of traditional homework and then attend the brick-and-mortar school for face-to-face, teacher-guided practice or projects. The primary delivery of content and instruction is online, which differentiates a Flipped Classroom from students who are merely doing homework practice online at night.
   d. Individual Rotation – a course or subject in which each student has an individualized playlist and does not necessarily rotate to each available station or modality. An algorithm or teacher(s) sets individual student schedules.

2. Flex model — a course or subject in which online learning is the backbone of student learning, even if it directs students to offline activities at times. Students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among learning modalities. The teacher of record is on-site, and students learn mostly on the brick-and-mortar campus, except for any homework assignments. The teacher of record or other adults provide face-to-face support on a flexible and adaptive as-needed basis through activities such as small-group instruction, group projects, and individual tutoring. Some implementations have substantial face-to-face support, whereas others have minimal support. For example, some Flex models may have face-to-face certified teachers who supplement the online
learning on a daily basis, whereas others may provide little face-to-face enrichment. Still others may have different staffing combinations. These variations are useful modifiers to describe a particular Flex model.

3. **A La Carte model** — a course that a student takes entirely online to accompany other experiences that the student is having at a brick-and-mortar school or learning center. The teacher of record for the A La Carte course is the online teacher. Students may take the A La Carte course either on the brick-and-mortar campus or on-site. This differs from full-time online learning because it is not a whole-school experience. Students take some courses A La Carte and others face-to-face at a brick-and-mortar campus.

4. **Enriched Virtual model** — a course or subject in which students have required face-to-face learning sessions with their teacher of record and then are free to complete their remaining coursework remote from the face-to-face teacher. Online learning is the backbone of student learning when the students are located remotely. The same person generally serves as both the online and face-to-face teacher. Many Enriched Virtual programs began as full-time online schools and then developed blended programs to provide students with brick-and-mortar school experiences. The Enriched Virtual model differs from the Flipped Classroom because in Enriched Virtual programs, students seldom meet face-to-face with their teachers every weekday. It differs from a fully online course because face-to-face learning sessions are more than optional office hours or social events; they are required.

Ironically though the concept is very good but it is not bearing fruits as the teachers are not technology literate hence it limits their efforts so the teachers must be trained. Teachers use varieties of methods but without technology students are being cheated. A more focused effort on training the teachers to achieve this objective to the optimum level is the need of the hour.

5. **Merits of Blended Learning in Higher Education Students**
   - Students are likely to interact more with the instructor and fellow students since there are numerous opportunities to do so both in class and online.
   - Students have access to unlimited up-to-date resources available via the web.
   - Students often develop or enhance skills in time management, critical thinking, and problem solving.
   - Students enjoy increased success as measured by fewer course withdrawals and somewhat higher grades.
   - Students can participate more in class discussions since they can environment – online or face-to-face – in which they feel more comfortable.
   - Students have more time to reflect and refer to relevant course and other research materials when working and writing online than when responding in class.
   - Students typically have 24/7 access to online course materials.
   - Students usually receive more feedback, and more frequent feedback, from their instructors.
   - Students can acquire useful skills from using the internet and computer technology.

6. **Limitations of Blended Learning**
   There are six major issues that are relevant to designing blended learning systems:
   - How to create interactive blending environment and assign the roles of live interaction, so as to have interactive learning process to achieve learner satisfaction with the process.
Lakshmi K. Swamy:: Blended Learning As A Reflective Practice

- The role of learner choice and self-regulation mainly focuses on how different blends might affect student’s learning experience.
- How to propose a common hybrid model that support and training so as to get successful blended approach to learning from the technological as well as infrastructure/organizational perspective.
- Finding balance between innovation and production, Designing blended learning systems is challenging since, technology is relatively changing, and finding an appropriate balance between innovation and production is difficult.
- Cultural adaption, and dealing with the digital divide.

7. Conclusion
Blended learning emerges from an understanding of the strengths of face-to-face and online learning with the perception of the learner and his requirements. This opens a wide range of possibilities for redesign which goes beyond traditional classrooms. The typical characteristic of a reflective classroom is in breaking the routine of traditional teaching, facilitating the use of learner oriented techniques, and providing learning experiences for effectively enhanced and extended learning, all of which can be effortlessly achieved through blended learning.
Blended learning must be approached with the awareness of broad range of flexibility on the part of the facilitator which again is a chief characteristic of a reflective practitioner. Blended learning necessitates that educators to question what is important, decide where to use the online, collaborative or unstructured learning, make critical analysis and reflect upon their experiences in action and on action. The blending of learning, practice, and performance support is vital for a reflective practitioner as the primary principle of reflection stresses on the aspect of regular and need based change during the teaching-learning process almost on daily basis. Further it helps the students also to think reflectively about their learning through Blending Self-Paced and Collaborative Learning. This happens when the individual learner attempts to learns at his own pace first and later interacts with the other learners online, so that there is a chance to visualize where he stands and also provides an opportunity to the learner to go back to the self-learning mode when necessary.
The field on education is marked by the juxtaposition of new technology and old pedagogy. Serving students better from a learning perspective would necessitate the adoption of new pedagogy. Reflective teaching practice is being widely accepted as a new pedagogical practice, and blended learning can be incorporated as a technique for the promotion of reflective practices in education. By the use of blended learning the transformation of teaching-learning especially in higher education becomes inevitable. This represents a means to address the challenges associated with providing for reflective learning and quality education.

8. References