# Good Practice Principles in an Undergraduate Blended Course Design

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*Abstract*

This study examines students' perceptions of a blended course which uses the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. A blended teacher education course was designed with teaching and learning activities to introduce the Seven Principles for Good Practice. The participants included 47 pre-service teachers in an undergraduate teacher education program in Turkey. Data were collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including a questionnaire, student interviews, and discussion forum transcripts. The results indicate that the students' perceptions of the blended course were mostly positive; the students felt that the blended environment was very useful. The participants perceived six of the seven principles to be helpful, including student-faculty contact, cooperation, time on task, diversity of ways to learn, feedback, and active learning. However, the students also thought that the seventh "expectations" principle needed to be improved.

*Keywords:* Blended learning environments, Good practice principles, Undergraduate education, Course design

## Introduction

The integration of new technologies in the field of education has generated several new concepts, such as online learning, open learning, blended learning, distributed learning, and e-learning. The Internet is a powerful tool which can be used to support student-centered instruction because it facilitates methods that focus on constructivism, active learning, collaborative learning, and individualized learning. In these methods, the student is considered the most important element in the educational process (Tait, 1997). Online instruction is considered a recent revolutionary version of distance learning that uses the benefits of Internet technology to broaden and deepen the learning experience. Rosenberg (2001) stated, "In the future, changes in society, business, and technology will limit the impact of traditional learning" (p. 7). There are a number of studies which examine the comparable qualities of traditional face-to-face education and online learning environments. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Combining these two approaches can produce even greater educational benefits for students.

Blended learning, which is frequently regarded as the future of online learning, is mainly defined as a combination of face-to-face classroom instruction with online methods, incorporating the advantages of both (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Riffell & Sibley, 2004; Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). One example of a benefit from this combination could be the option of independent time and place selection for instruction, to better fit learning times into working people's personal schedules. However, it is important to ensure that online instruction will not eliminate the advantages of face-to-face instruction. As was indicated by Bleed (2001), blended learning can be a valuable way to redesign courses to combine physical as well as virtual instruction in a way that merges "bricks and clicks" (p. 18). Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the critical role of social interactions in influencing how students focus their attention when learning. By the integration of Web technologies with face-to-face

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environments students' will have more opportunity of working together and social interaction will be improved. Online activities may be used to enhance face-to-face interactions and socializations, which are important ingredients for successful learning.

In blended courses, it is not sufficient to simply combine online and face-to-face environments. To create successful educational experiences, one must ensure that the selected technology works well with the intended pedagogical approach. A blended design can certainly enhance a traditional environment, but effective instruction should emphasize the pedagogy rather than merely random types of new technology (Dziuban & Moscal, 2001). The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education developed by Chickering and Gamson (1987) help to improve the quality of learning experiences for students in all types of institutions. These principles can readily be incorporated into blended courses.

The increasing popularity and use of technology-mediated learning in higher education has encouraged organizations to develop principles, guidelines, and benchmarks to ensure quality Web-based instruction. In 1987, Chickering and Gamson developed a conceptual model for planning and assessing education. After assembling findings from other studies on the undergraduate experience, they published their Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. Although these principles were created for traditional learning environments, due to the rapid expansion of innovative technologies which can be applied to the field of education, the original principles were modified by Chickering and Ehrmann in 2001. These principles have also served as the basis for a large number of subsequent research studies (Alvarez, 2005; Batts, 2005; Braxton, Olsen, & Simmons, 1998; Buckley, 2003; Graham, Cagiltay, Craner, Lim, & Duffy, 2000; Goktas, 2009, Mukawa, 2006; Stoudt, 2006; Taylor, 2002). A general overview of these principles is provided in Figure 1.

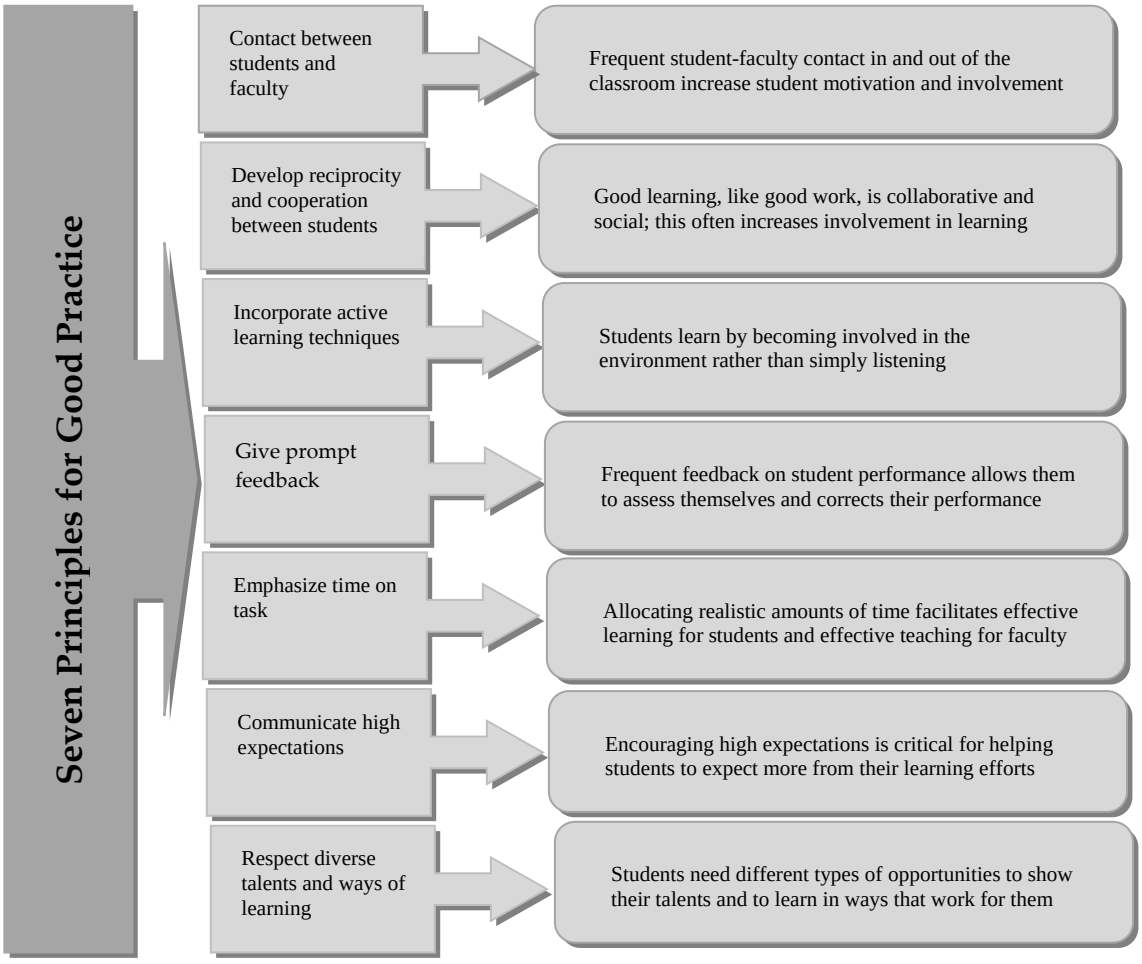


*Figure 1:* The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Adapted from Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996)

These principles have become established standards in undergraduate instruction and are widely used to enhance the quality of teaching in traditional face-to-face classrooms. With the increase in offerings for online education, more recently they have been combined with uses of new technology in online courses. The literature currently includes studies on Good Practice Principles (GPP) in traditional face-to-face or in fully-online learning environments (Alvarez, 2005; Batts, 2005; Chickering & Ehrmann, 1996; Chizmar & Walbert, 1999; Graham et al., 2000; Parker & Hankins, 2002; Ritter & Lemke, 2000; Taylor, 2002). However, though the use of blended instruction in higher education has also increased, to date, few studies have focused on the practical implementation and contributions of the GPP in blended courses. One study that did examine a blended course with the GPP was conducted by Martyn (2003) at a small college in Ohio, USA; that institution integrated the GPP with the best features of online and face-to-face instruction.

In this study, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice were used to design a blended teacher education course, in which the student-centered learning environment encompassed both face-to-face meetings and online activities. The study is valuable because it focuses on the practical implementation of the GPP in a blended environment specifically in Turkey. The purpose was to investigate the students' perceptions of the blended course in relation to the incorporation of the GPP.

## Methodology

*The Participants*

The participants were 47 pre-service teachers, who were enrolled in an undergraduate teacher education course titled "School Experience." The students were Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT) specialists at a large public university in Turkey. The majority age was 20 years old. Thirty students were males; seventeen were females.

*The Course Context*

This is a required course for the teaching credential and is offered to undergraduates in all Education programs in Turkey. The typical course schedule consists of one hour of lecture (with a theoretical-conceptual focus) and four hours of observations (this is a practicum in a real school, K-12 milieu) per week. The class work includes making observations, sharing knowledge and experiences, engaging in discussions, and finding solutions to special cases that occur in real-life school settings.

In the face-to-face format, the students and instructors met once a week for one hour of lecture, and in other flexible hours, the students traveled to K-12 schools for real practice. A preliminary study revealed that the students and the instructors needed a new course design that would allow course content delivery with limited face-to-face contact between the instructors and the K-12 teachers, more peer interaction, easy document sharing, extended activity time instead of the scheduled lecture hours, and discussions that were not limited by time. The undergraduate course was re-designed into a blended format, based on Chickering and Gamson's seven principles, and was scheduled for an upcoming semester. These principles cover many suggestions in the literature to place the students at the center of the design, such as by including active learning, cooperation, and contact between students and instructors. Throughout the course, online discussions were a requirement. In order to support the course with web applications, a learning management system was used, and the threaded discussions in the asynchronous forums occurred within this system. The local learning management system was developed by the departmental staff. The asynchronous discussions took place by loosely-structured scenarios designed by the course instructor.

The emphasis in the blended course was on creating a more efficient, flexible, practical, and student-centered environment that enables more interaction between the students. The design and development of blended learning solutions should be based on sound pedagogical principles. The Seven Principles for Good Practice as applied to the activities of this course are described below:

Principle 1. Student-Faculty Contact. The instructor designed a flexible schedule for both the online and face-to-face sessions. E-mail and forums were the two main tools used to communicate while outside of the classroom with the instructor, assistants, and mentor teachers. The instructor also used e-mail to contact students who were not active in the online or face-to-face discussions, or were not attending the course, or who had changed their behavior significantly during the course. Forum discussions during the weekly assigned scenarios were used to ensure continuous participation in the course throughout each week. Student-instructor interaction was also supported by using the One-Minute Paper (OMP) approach (Chizmar & Ostrosky, 1998; Cross & Angelo, 1988, Kocaman, 1997), in which the instructor plans merging asynchronous online discussion activities that are followed by face-to-face discussions. By this way students had the opportunity to evaluate the weekly course and this helped to improve contact between students and the instructor. Inviting guests during lectures and having discussions about academic goals were other methods used by the instructor to support student-instructor contact.

Principle 2. Cooperation. The instructor enriched both face-to-face and the online sessions by assigning cooperative activities. The students were encouraged to work in pairs or in small groups on pre-determined topics in face-to-face sessions. The face-to-face group members were selected purposefully to ensure that they had different backgrounds. For the forum discussions, mostly large or sometimes small discussion groups were created and focused on the weekly topics and scenarios. Practicum hour activities were designed to force the students to work in pairs or in small groups in cooperative activities and for information sharing.

Principle 3. Active Learning. Throughout the course, the students engaged in real-life experiences by practicum schools to apply what they were learning in their daily lives. They were encouraged to communicate with the K-12 teachers. To create an active learning environment in the online sessions, the instructor designed the weekly forum discussions around real-based ill-structured scenarios written by the course instructor and the K-12 teachers. These scenarios directly related to their own experiences. The students engaged in these authentic scenarios to analyze real-life situations and to consequently construct their own ideas. The selected activities were relevant to the students' educational backgrounds, experiences, and future expectations. Forum discussion topics and ill-structured scenarios were introduced during the face-to-face lectures, and the online forums continued throughout each week to keep the students active outside of their face-to-face lecture hours. The course instructor and course assistants also informed the students about and encouraged them to attend, professional meetings and events.

Principle 4. Prompt Feedback. The instructor used the online technology to provide quick feedback in the blended course. E-mail was used to provide individual feedback about the assignments. The instructor also provided feedback in the forum discussions, so that all of the students could benefit from the commentary. The instructor additionally encouraged the students to provide their own peer feedback especially for forum comments. OMPs were applied in face-to-face sessions to obtain feedback relating to the discussion topics in the forums.

Principle 5. Time on Task. Throughout the course, technology was used to extend the learning-time beyond classroom hours. Documents were shared on the course website, and discussions continued all week in the forums, allowing open-schedule participation. Anytime, anywhere access was available for the course website. The students were frequently reminded to finish their work on time. The instructor used e-mail and designed a bulletin board to remind the students about new assignments, deadlines, or important events. The instructor's announcements were intended to decrease concerns about the course schedule. Also, the instructor informed the students about her expectations for the course and elicited the students' expectations. Authentic assignments were provided to make the students eager to finish them on time.

Principle 6: Communicates High Expectations. At the beginning of the semester the instructor talked about the course expectations and instructed the students to observe the assigned deadlines for assignments and homework. A detailed course syllabus was prepared and uploaded to the course website. The syllabus answered potential questions about the course requirements. Students were also asked to consider their own goals and expectations. Well done projects and successfully completed student assignments were published on the course website to inspire and motivate other students. The instructor addressed the students by name in the face-to-face lectures and in the forums, so that they would feel that they were known by the instructor. The intent was to encourage the students to strive to do better in the course.

Principle 7: Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning. The instructor designed different assignments to fit different student needs. Individualized activities were assigned so that students could complete tasks at their own pace, using their own preferred methods. Cooperative activities were assigned as well, to encourage unity. With the addition of new technologies, the students could access timely applications. By thinking students that have different ways of learning both online and face-to-face discussions were planned. Weekly continued asynchronous online discussions were intended to help shy students or those who could express themselves better by writing. Authentic ill-structured scenarios were created for the students to utilize their higher-order thinking abilities.

*Data Collection and Analysis*

A mixed method approach was employed, involving qualitative and quantitative components. Questionnaires, interviews, and discussion forum transcripts were the main data sources. The perception instrument used in this study was the "Principles and Inventories of Effective Online Teaching Questionnaire," which was originally developed by the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE). This instrument with GPP related questions, has been widely used in studies conducted in the United States and Canada. In 2003, Buckley revised the original instrument for his thesis study and developed it to include student perceptions. The present study utilized that revised instrument with some revisions to address culture specific issues and related group characteristics. The questionnaire was checked by five Ph.D.-level students and three experts for the clarity of its question items. Any unclear items or words were revised and checked again. Then the instrument was pilot tested with 30 students in the CEIT Department. The reliability of the instrument was found to be .72 on the overall scale.

The qualitative data included verbatim transcripts of interviews, discussion forum transcripts, and open-ended answers. In order to better understand the participants' experiences, face-to-face "in-person interviews" were conducted with 14 students (Johnson & Christensen, 1994). The interviews were conducted at the end of the semester, and each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The open-ended questions were added at the end of the "Principles and Inventories of Effective Online Teaching Questionnaire" to elicit students' opinions of the blended course design guided by principles, to inquire about positive and negative features of the online part of the course, and to inquire about positive and negative features of the face-to-face sessions in the blended setting. The forum transcripts included any messages that were written by the students or the instructor in the asynchronous discussion forum. New topics were posted weekly (or every ten days), and the discussions continued throughout each week. The transcripts were in the form of questions, answers, suggestions, and statements. Posted messages were printed and organized regularly; the organization was based on the quality of their content.

The qualitative data were analyzed by means of content analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), and the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. During the data analysis and interpretation processes, the qualitative results were compared with statistical findings gathered from the quantitative data collection (Cresswell, 2005). In this study, "a priori codes" were used to examine the raw data (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 508). The Seven Good Teaching Principles were considered to be the "a priori codes" for this study. Then, categories and subcategories were created, and each unit was marked with the appropriate category and subcategories. The quantitative component included questionnaire data that were analyzed and organized statistically by coding the answers. The data were then analyzed using the statistical analysis software, SPSS.

## The Findings

This study investigated student perceptions of their learning experiences in the blended course with respect to uses of the Seven Principles for Good Practice. While responding to the questionnaire, the students rated their levels of agreement with statements related to the seven principles. The results are shown in Table 1. The quantitative and qualitative data results indicate that the students' perceptions were generally positive regarding the blended course. The items for each principle in the questionnaire are also provided in Table 1. The highest scores in the good teaching principles' categories of contact, cooperation, and time on task indicate that the blended environment enabled easier interactions, and allowed the instructors and students to easily access to each other; promoted group and peer learning; and emphasized using time more productively. Only the "expectations" principle was perceived to need improvement and was not well supported by the blended course.

Table 1.
*Distribution of the responses for each item in the perception and principles questionnaire*

| | | % respondents | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Statements** | **Very often** | **Often** | **Sometimes** | **Rarely** | **Never** | **Not included** | **M** | **SD** |
| Student-Faculty Contact | My instructor was available for assistance throughout the course (electronic office hours, e-mail, discussion rooms). | 55.3 (26) | 42.6 (20) | 0 (0) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 4.51 | .62 |
| | My instructor served as a mentor/advisor. | 29.8 (14) | 53.2 (25) | 17.0 (8) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 4.10 | .68 |
| | My instructor shared his/her past experiences with me. | 27.7 (13) | 48.9 (23) | 19.1 (9) | 4.3 (2) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 4.00 | .81 |
| | My instructor provided guidance and information when dealing with technical problems or concerns related to the course. | 27.7 (13) | 40.4 (19) | 25.5 (12) | 4.3 (2) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 3.94 | .85 |
| | My instructor encouraged me to attend professional meetings and events in my field. | 14.9 (7) | 29.8 (14) | 23.4 (11) | 8.5 (4) | 6.4 (3) | 17.0 (8) | 3.46 | 1.14 |
| | Overall for Principle 1 | | | | | | | 4.01 | .51 |
| Cooperation | My instructor encouraged me to discuss key concepts with other students whose backgrounds and viewpoints are different from my own. | 31.9 (15) | 48.9 (23) | 12.8 (6) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 4.3 (2) | 4.16 | .74 |
| | I was asked to give opinions, reactions, opposing views, and/or thoughts regarding other students' work. | 19.1 (9) | 31.9 (15) | 36.2 (17) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 10.6 (5) | 3.84 | 1.13 |
| | The instructor encouraged me to collaborate on projects, and form a learning community and/or workgroup. | 29.8 (14) | 38.3 (18) | 17.0 (8) | 4.3 (2) | 6.4 (3) | 4.3 (2) | 3.76 | .82 |
| | Overall for Principle 2 | | | | | | | 3.92 | .63 |
| Active Learning | The instructor encouraged me to relate personal and professional events and activities to the course subjects. | 38.3 (18) | 27.7 (13) | 23.4 (11) | 8.5 (4) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 3.92 | 1.09 |
| | I took responsibility for my own learning. | 23.4 (11) | 42.6 (20) | 19.1 (9) | 6.4 (3) | 0 (0) | 8.5 (4) | 3.91 | .87 |
| | It was asked to undertake research or an independent study project. | 14.9 (7) | 21.3 (10) | 25.5 (12) | 6.4 (3) | 17.0 (8) | 14.9 (7) | 3.13 | 1.20 |
| | It was encouraged to suggest new readings, research projects, field trips, or other course | 10.6 (5) | 19.1 (9) | 34.0 (16) | 14.9 (7) | 12.8 (6) | 8.5 (4) | 3.00 | 1.20 |

activities.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Overall for Principle 3 | | | | | | | 3.49 | .82 |
| Prompt Feedback | I received timely feedback from the instructor. | 29.8 (14) | 40.4 (19) | 12.8 (6) | 10.6(5 ) | 2.1 (1) | 4.3 (2) | 3.89 | 1.05 |
| | The feedback was valuable, relevant, and helpful. | 27.7 (13) | 44.7 (21) | 8.5 (4) | 8.5 (4) | 4.3 (2) | 6.4 (3) | 3.89 | 1.08 |
| | I received timely feedback from the other students. | 14.9 (7) | 21.3 (10) | 27.7 (13) | 6.4 (3) | 23.4 (11) | 6.4 (3) | 2.98 | 1.41 |
| | Overall for Principle 4 | | | | | | | 3.59 | .94 |
| Time on Task | The course expectations were clearly communicated at the beginning of the semester. | 46.8 (22) | 42.6 (20) | 6.4 (3) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 2.1 (1) | 4.37 | .71 |
| | Assignments and projects were useful and relevant. | 29.8 (14) | 38.3 (18) | 25.5 (12) | 6.4 (3) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 3.92 | .90 |
| | The instructor helped me to understand the importance of sound self-pacing and scheduling for the course. | 21.3 (10) | 38.3 (18) | 29.8 (14) | 8.5 (4) | 0 (0) | 2.1 (1) | 3.74 | .91 |
| | The instructor helped me to set challenging goals for my learning. | 19.1 (9) | 29.8 (14) | 31.9 (15) | 8.5 (4) | 4.3 (2) | 6.4 (3) | 3.55 | 1.07 |
| | Overall for Principle 5 | | | | | | | 3.90 | .63 |
| Expectation | Assignments and projects required high standards for successful completion. | 17.0 (8) | 14.9 (7) | 29.8 (14) | 19.1 (9) | 17.0 (8) | 2.1 (1) | 2.92 | .90 |
| | Overall for Principle 6 | | | | | | | 2.92 | 1.33 |
| Diversity | The instructor understood diverse student perspectives, explanations, cultures, and interests. | 29.8 (14) | 44.7 (21) | 21.3 (10) | 2.1 (1) | 0 (0) | 2.1 (1) | 4.04 | 1.19 |
| | Multiple teaching approaches were employed in the assignments to accommodate different student characteristics and abilities. | 25.5 (12) | 34.0 (16) | 25.5 (12) | 6.4 (3) | 2.1 (1) | 6.4 (3) | 3.80 | 1.00 |
| | The selected readings and designed projects/activities were related to my background. | 19.1 (9) | 29.8 (14) | 25.5 (12) | 6.4 (3) | 8.5 (4) | 10.5 (5) | 3.50 | .79 |
| | Overall for Principle 7 | | | | | | | 3.78 | .76 |
| | Overall for all Principles | | | | | | | 3.97 | |

The qualitative findings are shown in Table 2. The interviews, forum transcripts, and open-ended question responses were analyzed, and their frequency analyses have been provided. The results reveal that the qualitative responses paralleled the themes of the questionnaire, and the majority of the perceptions were positive, regarding the use of Chickering and Gamson's Principles in Undergraduate Education.

Table 2.
*Student Perceptions of the each Good Practice Principles*

| *Principles* | *Perceived Advantages/Disadvantages* | *f* |
|---|---|---|
| Student-Faculty Contact | Sharing experiences-advice with students | *22* |
| | No time limitations to contact the instructors | *21* |
| | Whole week discussions in the forums | *20* |
| | Easy access to course documents | *15* |
| | Quick answers to questions by e-mail | *14* |
| | Continuous discussions in the forums and in-class lectures | *14* |
| | E-mail for student tracking | *13* |
| | Developed friendships through continuous contact | *10* |
| | Equality | *10* |
| | Being noticed by the instructor during week through discussions | *6* |
| Cooperation | Sharing experiences with experienced people (K-12 teachers) | *19* |
| | Peer activities in class | *15* |
| | Student groups with different student backgrounds | *13* |
| | A learning group for the practicum schools | *11* |
| | Need for small discussion groups in the forum | *10* |
| Active Learning | Dynamic discussions by the scenarios | *19* |
| | Authentic assignments | *18* |
| | Informed of professional events | *14* |
| | Conducting independent studies | *12* |
| Prompt Feedback | The forums supported dynamic discussions | *12* |
| | Timely feedback in the face-to-face lectures | *17* |
| | Frequent and detailed feedback in the forums | *14* |
| | Delayed peer feedback | *13* |
| | Peer feedback is time consuming | *13* |
| | OMPs were good for regular feedback | *12* |
| | Quick personal feedback by e-mail | *8* |
| Time on Task | Liked bulletin board announcements and e-mail reminders | *20* |
| | Easy and comfortable resource sharing on the Web | *17* |
| | Updated documents without time loss | *16* |
| | Extended discussions in the forums | *16* |
| | Instructor-student expectations discussed at the beginning | *14* |
| | Face-to-face discussions are practical | *13* |
| Expectations | Sharing good assignments on the Web | *8* |
| | Liked to be known by the instructor | 8 |
| | Forum discussions required improved ideas | *7* |
| | Feeling confident in online discussions | *7* |
| Respect Diverse Talents and ways of Learning | Authentic scenarios related to the students' profession | *14* |
| | Forum discussions for shy and self-conscious students | *13* |
| | Visuals for visualization | *7* |
| | Confident forum discussions for foreign students | *6* |

## Discussion

The findings reveal that, in general, the students' responses were positive. Most of the findings of this study were relevant and similar to the results of other studies in the literature.

Good Practice Encourages Contact between Students and Faculty: The students agreed that their face-to-face and online interactions with the instructor and other students were very helpful. Most agreed that the Web supported their interactions and facilitated their contact with each other throughout the course via the forums and e-mail. This finding concurs with the findings of other researchers that students generally perceive the asynchronous part of the course to be supportive of interactivity and involvement (Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Shea, & Swan, 2000; Motiwalla & Tello, 2000; Swan, Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, & Maher, 2000; Wang, 2010). The results also reveal that the students were pleased about having the opportunity to contact instructors and other class members outside of the lecture hours. As Ritter and Lemke (2000) also found, they felt comfortable knowing that the instructor is available to assist them at any time via the Web. Additionally, the students agreed that the instructor's use of e-mail for tracking was useful and helped them to improve their performance in the course. Similarly, Visser, Plomp, Amirault, and Kuiper (2002) used written messages to give the impression that the instructors were monitoring the students' studies. Another interesting finding was that the students explained that they developed friendships during the online discussions. Although they met face-to-face almost every week for lectures, most of the responses indicated that the week-long discussions in the forums within the blended course supported their social relations. Wang's (2010) study backs these findings that in blended learning environments, by means of integrating e-learning elements with traditional instruction, a more student-centered learning environment can be created which supports social interactions among the students. The results further show that the students perceived themselves to be closer to the course instructor and to have warmer relationships in the online sessions. Some explained that the online discussions made them feel equal to the instructor. Smith, Ferguson, and Caris (2001) similarly explained that in online discussions there is more equality between the students and the professor, and students feel more able to have intellectual discussions with the instructor.

Good Practice Encourages Cooperation among Students: The participants perceived that cooperative learning was supported and strengthened by the Web in the blended course. The students enjoyed their cooperation with the experienced K-12 teachers in both the online and the face-to-face activities. While forming student groups for cooperation, the instructor purposefully selected the members, so they would have different backgrounds. Although at the beginning some students complained about their group members, at the end of the semester they explained that they had obtained different viewpoints from other students in class. There were also some complaints about the large group sizes during the forum discussions, as the numbers led to the discussions straying from their focal points. Parallel small group discussions can be more focused on the topics in the forums (Graham, Cagiltay, Craner, Lim, & Duffy, 2000).

Good Practice Encourages Active Learning: Throughout the course, especially the instructor, but also the course assistants and the students shared news about professional events and meetings on the course news page. The study results reveal the students welcomed this information. Some students attended a few of the events and learned from them. The students also emphasized that the authentic scenarios used in the online and in-class discussions encouraged their engagement. The results reveal that the provided scenarios, which do not require certain "right" answers, led the students to engage in more dynamic discussions. Their independent studies and individual additions relating to the discussion topics allowed them to take active roles in their learning process. They remarked that independence was supported, as the blended course permitted both individual studies and peer-group study opportunities in both the online and the face-to-face environments. This positive finding is also reported in the literature (Suanpang, Petocz, & Kalceff, 2004, Macdonald, Stodel, Farres, Breithaupt, & Gabriel, 2001). The students further agreed that the technology helped to create a more dynamic learning environment, in which the shy students could be more active than in

the face-to-face lectures. Various studies in the literature note that people can overcome shyness by using discussion forums (Cheung & Hew, 2004; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Vonderwell, 2003).

Good Practice Involves Prompt Feedback: The study results indicate that most of the students were pleased with their feedback from the course instructor, and most also agreed that the technology supported timely feedback. Some of the students reported their satisfaction with the quick personal feedback by e-mail of their work, and they were pleased that they did need to wait for the class hour to get a response concerning their documents. However, the students did not perceive the feedback from their peers to be adequate. Specifically, there were some complaints about delays in peer feedback, both from the course assistants and from the students. This might be one of the reasons why the feedback principle's total mean score was low. One of the reasons for the low amount of peer feedback was discovered during the interviews: it was time consuming. Both the qualitative and quantitative results reveal that the students found reading and commenting on other students' work to be time consuming and "extra work." These results are supported by other studies as well; students typically find it tiring to read others' long comments and similar ideas (Ann & Frick, 2006; Ng & Cheung, 2007). Most of the students perceived the ongoing and prompt feedback provided via e-mail and the online forums positively. The students also agreed that they liked the face-to-face lectures allowed timely performance feedback, and that the forum discussions allowed frequent and detailed feedback because not having time limitation. Several studies in the literature report that frequent feedback in asynchronous discussions is critical for shaping the discussion process (Shin & Cho, 2003; Hantula, 1998; Jiang & Ting, 1998), and that delayed feedback makes students lose their feeling of connection and may cause them to feel lost in asynchronous discussions (Markel, 2001). OMPs were assigned to the students at the end of each discussion topic to acquire feedback about what they had learned in the forum discussions. The qualitative results reveal that the students liked this application, which enabled them to evaluate their understanding and which likewise provided regular feedback to the course instructor.

Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task: In contrast to Taylor (2002) and Batts' (2005) studies that found the time on task principle had the lowest mean scores among the seven, our results reveal that both the online and face-to-face portions of the blended course supported doing tasks on time. The students indicated that they liked the open-schedule, week-long discussions in the forum for timeless participation. They also appreciated the face-to-face lesoons because of having practical discussions. Easy resource sharing was particularly appreciated as well; the Web allowed the students to obtain the most current and updated materials without time loss. The students felt that sharing printed documents during the face-to-face sessions was time consuming. But storing the documents online on the course website provided advantages and was perceived as convenient. These results are supported by Testa (2000), who noted that instructional time is saved when technology can assist with collecting or distributing assignments outside of face-to-face classes. Additionally, according to the students' reports, the most highlighted features were the weekly reminders about assignments and the news that was sent to inform them about upcoming tasks. Also, the students liked that the instructor stated the course expectations and asked for their expectations at the beginning of the semester.

Good Practice Communicates High Expectations: The results reveal that the high expectations principle had the lowest mean scores, indicating that the respondents did not really grasp that the blended course promoted this principle. This result is similar to that reported by Testa (2000). The qualitative results reveal that the students had high expectations for the discussion forums, which were lengthened to promote deeper discussions. The extended discussion time throughout the week was the key feature. The students explained that they felt more confident during the forum discussions, because often nobody was in the environment. Thus, they could investigate, read, write, delete, and rewrite easily without distractions. As a result, they expressed that they expected improved comments from classmates. Ng and Cheung (2007) reported that participating in asynchronous threaded discussions facilitates reflection, similar to the reflective thinking which

occurs in journal writing. This also encourages the sharing of reflections with other people. The students had particularly high expectations of sharing good work on the website. They were eager to produce better assignments to serve as good examples on the Web. Additionally, the students felt that being recognized by the course instructor and being calling by their names communicated higher expectations.

Good Practice Respects Diversity and Different Methods of Learning: The students felt that the blended course broadened their opportunities in the learning environment by addressing different student needs and abilities in both the face-to-face and the online portions of the course. Academic discussions were done in both portions, and the class activities involved both individual study and cooperation. The students were pleased by the variety of activities that addressed different needs. They stated that they liked the content of the scenarios related to their profession that formed the topics during the discussions. There were international students in the course, and because they were not fluent Turkish speakers, they explained their preference for online activities that allowed expanded time. Studies in the literature have also reported that the asynchronous discussions enable non-fluent English speakers to engage more actively in face-to-face discussions (Ann & Frick, 2006; Thompson & Ku, 2005).

Moving from the study results some recommendations for instructors are provided who want to design a blended course based on the GPP are offered in Table 3:

Table 3.
*General recommendations for instructors designing blended courses based on the GPP*

| |
|---|
| *Student-Faculty Contact* |
| ▪ Maintain student-instructor interaction by holding actual and virtual office hours.<br>▪ Encourage students to communicate with the instructor by e-mail.<br>  o Provide a response policy (i.e. answer e-mail or forum questions in 24 hours time).<br>▪ Use e-mail messages for students' tracking in the course.<br>▪ Develop social interaction by designing asynchronous online discussions around determined topics. |
| *Cooperation among Students* |
| ▪ Design discussions that encourage peer work.<br>▪ Keep the discussion groups small especially in asynchronous discussions to have them more focused. |
| *Active Learning* |
| ▪ Incorporate authentic tasks related student's experiences in order to promote active learning.<br>▪ Assign not structured scenario-based activities which have multiple solutions that motivate students to think instead of just memorizing.<br>▪ Give students the opportunity to present their work to others in the face-to-face classes and to exhibit their work in the online environment.<br>▪ Use asynchronous discussions to increase the students' active involvement time. |
| *Prompt Feedback* |
| ▪ Support peer feedback.<br>▪ Provide feedback by e-mail personally and by forum responses to a group.<br>▪ Frequent feedback to shape the discussion process is critical in asynchronous discussions because delayed feedback might cause the students to feel lost.<br>▪ Provide private and group feedback both in face-to-face classes and in the online environment.<br>▪ Use different strategies to obtain regular feedback from the students (i.e., one minute papers). |

| |
|---|
| *Time on Task*<br>▪ Keep resources online and available to make students reach when they need.<br>▪ Provide updated documents on the course website.<br>▪ Post deadlines clearly to prevent confusion.<br>▪ Use weekly reminders to inform the students of upcoming events by e-mail or by an announcement. |
| *Communicate High Expectations*<br>▪ List expectations in the course syllabus and on the course website, so that students can access these anytime they want.<br>▪ Exhibit students' work on the course website or in the face-to-face classes.<br>▪ Provide authentic assignments to increase the students' expectations. |
| *Respect Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning*<br>▪ Permit various methods to conduct activities both in the online and face-to-face parts of the blended course to address different learner needs<br>▪ Allow students to select their own projects instead of selecting for them.<br>▪ Provide both written and verbal discussion opportunities.<br>▪ Present course materials in a range of formats. |

## Conclusions

By eliciting the participants' points of view, this study enriches and extends our understanding of a blended course design guided by the Seven Principles for Good Practice. The findings provide useful data for those attempting to design or maximize the educational potential of a blended learning environment. The students in this study were mostly pleased with the course and stated that it broadened their opportunities for learning.

This study involved an investigation of participants' views in the blended learning environment designed by Good Practice Principles in one course and thus hard to generalize the findings to other settings. However it can be said that the study findings can be a guideline for similar studies. Future studies on the design of blended course by Seven Good Practice Principles are needed to extend and verify the findings.

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