Blended Learning: The best of two worlds

Blended learning is the best of two worlds; it not only provides students with the chance of receiving direct instruction, participate and socialize in pairs or groups, but it also provides them with a comfortable environment of learning which builds on their independency in acquiring knowledge (Bart, 2010). Blended learning is a revolutionary method for the traditional classroom experience. Through blended learning, students can learn at their own pace and manage their time guided by the instructions and explanations made by their teachers. The most exciting part about blended learning is to identify suitable ways and approaches to integrate the teaching and learning experiences of both face-to-face and online as one unit. This will help in promoting students’ creativity and thinking skills to a higher degree.

When designing a blended course, certain guidelines should be adopted in order to ensure effectiveness. These guidelines can be summarised as follows:

- **Set clear expectations**: Teachers should explain to students what they will learn as a result of using blended learning throughout the course.
- **Use a variety of assessment methods**: Integrate and take advantage of the different online resources. Teachers can use forums, weekly reflective diaries, online individual and group feedback sessions and students-led discussions.
- **Follow a clear scaffolding approach**: Apply scaffolding as a way to improve the quality and depth of student learning, especially after delivering certain instructional goals. Let students practice using online ‘hands-on activities’ in order to encourage them to participate independently in the classroom.
- **Attend to differentiation**: Teachers should cover a variety of activities in a blended course bearing in mind students’ learning styles and preferences. Use an array of online activities that would address different levels of students, ranging from students at risk to exceptional ones. This ensures reaching out to all students.
- **Offer students easy communication tools**: Provide students with simple ways for communicating to ensure that they are not frustrated when working independently.
- **Adopt different assessment methods**: Use a variety of assessments to evaluate students’ performance like online projects or quizzes to guarantee effective blended learning.

**Research says…**

“a blended learning approach is established whereby both teacher and learner combine traditional instruction with online learning in order to create a more personalized type of pedagogy.” (Thorne, 2003)

*Aya Elshahawi*

**Glossary of Terms**

**Voice Thread**: a web service allowing users to upload voice narrations. Students can attach questions directly to the lecture when and where they apply. The result is a discussion that is integrated into the lecture itself.

**Prezi**: a web based tool alternative to power-point to explore the relationship between ideas in a non-linear fashion and encourage higher order skills in higher education students as well as increase the percentage of audience interaction in any presentation.

**Social Bookmarking**: allows users to store their bookmarks on a password protected website that can be accessed from any computer on the Internet.

Dr. Rania Khalil

**Simple, flexible tools in Moodle**

*By Ghada Abdel Kader*

Creative practices:

- The uses for the online assignment tool on Moodle are limited only by your imagination.
- Start small and build up over time.
- Group assignments are a good example.
- Designing a good problem solution group activity does take some time, but an iterative approach works well. There is the prompt, background data, and a problem statement. The problem statement should be an interesting challenge linked to course goals and solvable by applying concepts and procedures learned in class.
- For more advanced challenges, create a problem where there is no clear answer, to encourage student online discussion.

Marwa Atieya
Do's and Don'ts of Blended Learning

♦ Do use the e-learning as it increases student engagement in blended courses. Students and faculty experience a level of comfort facilitated by student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions. When students become comfortable with the instructor and their peers, they become more involved with the course material.

♦ Do provide a brief summary of the uploaded material as this taps into the student’s schema and helps students to better process the input.

♦ Do not simply upload the material without presenting it in an interesting way. Regardless of how well designed an educational multimedia component may be, students may not perform to their potential if the material is not used in a well thought-out educational manner.

♦ Do encourage collaborative learning as when students work in pairs in both the face-to-face and with online (e-learning) lessons, working collaboratively can be more educationally sound and cognitively supportive.

♦ Do not provide one certain type of activity; vary the online activities (such as pictures, audio, video files, interactive material) in order to cater for the different learning styles of students.

Are You a “digital native?”

Self-test

Most students do not want to lose the classroom experience, but they also want e-learning. A drip feed approach with e-learning ensures a re-enforcing approach to language learning and understanding of classroom practice. Use the self-test below to check how far you have caught up with the digital age.

Do you:

✓ Voice Thread lectures and discussions?
✓ Blog to encourage group work?
✓ Encourage peer online editing?
✓ Build reflection and extension into activities?
✓ Bookmark to create a self-access facility?
✓ Connect e-learning with the real world?

Dr. Rania Khalil

Touchstone Online—Cambridge University Press
by Dr. Chris Hughes

The pedagogy of the Touchstone Online course adopts a ‘scaffolding’ approach designed to support the students as they slowly build their language level through e-learning. An online inductive approach is used to facilitate the learning process.

The Touchstone Online course objective is for students to achieve the learning outcomes utilising both traditional classroom teaching and online learning with the added flexibility of choice given to the teacher and student. Because so much can be achieved online, precious classroom time can then be used to maximum effect.

Further Reading & Web Links


Blended Learning with Web 2.0 Tools

http://wahyupur.wordpress.com

For further support on Blended Learning please visit:

ALSO - Advising and Language Support Office
English Department, Building D, ground floor, Office 107.

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References:

