

DIGITAL MEDIA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING



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Chapter 12

IMPLEMENTING BLENDED LEARNING IN CLASSROOM

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Introduction

Blended-Learning is an effective combination of E-Learning material and face-to-face teaching, such as lectures or seminars (Garrison and Kanuka 2004). E-Learning means the use of electronic media and information and communication technologies for educational purposes. This includes numerous types of media such as text, audio, image, animation or video, and can be computer or web-based learning (Kerres, 2013; Wikipedia). It provides individuals with the opportunity to enjoy the best of both worlds.

For example, a student might attend classes in a real-world classroom setting and then supplement the lesson plan by completing online multimedia coursework. As such, the student would only have to physically attend class once a week and would be free to go at their own pace (and without worrying about scheduling issues). It is often also referred to as "hybrid" learning, and can take on a variety of forms in online education environments. While some organizations may only use blended learning techniques on rare occasions,

others might utilize it as a primary teaching method within their curriculum. According to Oxford Dictionary "Blended Learning is a style of education in which students learn via electronic and online media as well as traditional face-to-face teaching".

Implementing Blended Learning in your Classroom

Blended learning doesn't have to be overwhelming. It can't be, because educators already have a busy, demanding schedule. Since technology is not leaving the classroom (at least for the present), let us help you embrace it.

Here are five simple ways you can start implementing blended learning in your classroom today even if you have little knowledge about new technology.

1. Use what you already have.

How long have you been teaching? Two years? Five years? More than ten? Even if you just recently started teaching, you have already created and perfected lesson plans, probably in a traditional teaching style. Keep them. Do not waste your valued time reinventing all your lesson plans to work with technology. Instead, sit down with your lesson plans and think about how you can teach part of your lesson plans with technology. Could you add a short video you found on the web that relates to the lesson's theme? Having students watch a short video in class is a great way to break up a long traditional lecture.

2. Turn on the cell phones.

You probably have an anti-cell phone school policy, and there might be three or four signs hanging in your classroom right now that say No Cell phones. Well, today is the day you throw those signs away. Although cell phones

have the potential for distraction, they are also a piece of technology we all know how to use (and students WANT to use) and one that you can easily incorporate into your classroom. Odds are more than 80% of your students have a cell phone. Break from your lesson for a brainstorming session. Instruct your students to log into their twitter accounts (although at this point they may think you have lost it). Tell them to tweet content relating to today's lesson with a hashtag so you can keep track of who participated. (Example: something simple like #history4322)

3. Send interesting work home.

The school bell rang in the middle of your discussion and you wish you had just a few more minutes. Now you do. Assign a video to watch or a set of questions to do online prior to the next class session. You can send students the video link or worksheet in an email, and then your students can be prepared and ready for the class discussion. For example, send a message to your students with the link to an online documentary. Thanks to technology, you can now augment your lessons with additional educational info.

4. Create some in-class group work.

Learning to collaborate is a key life skill. Many business teams collaborate on a daily basis and working together effectively is key. You can teach this skill in your class with everything from homework assignments to huge projects. For example, Google Docs works just like Word, and the best part of Docs is that you can view and edit others' work simultaneously.

This means that whether your students are in class or at home, everyone can stay involved. Try using Docs with a

small assignment at first. Have all your students jump on a device and open a document you shared with them. Give them a question and allow them all to respond to the question on the shared Doc. The result, students will be able to see how easily their work can be shared, and both you and your students will be ready for their next big project.

5. Organize some online study sessions.

During my middle school days, I remember having study sessions before a big exam. We would always play Jeopardy. My teachers would cover the chalkboard in construction paper that had a dollar amount on one side and the question on the back. We divided into teams, and one person would go up to the board at a time.

What if you could eliminate the construction board, some prep time, and the slow one-answer-at-a-time system? What if everyone could answer every question and all have the same time prepping for the test? Now they can. With a program like Kahoot, every student can be involved right from their mobile device. Break out those cell phones again, and let every student review every question for tomorrow's test.

The Benefits of Blended Learning

Blended learning offers many opportunities for both the teacher and the student that a traditional brick and mortar classroom may not. With the increasing demands of state standards and busy school days, blended learning permits students to learn a portion of the academic content at home and gives teachers the ability to engage students in a richer, deeper, and more meaningful context in the classroom.

Blended learning enables the teacher to become more of a participant in student learning and can help facilitate

student mastery of content with enriching learning activities introduced and completed when the class meets face to face. Let's get into the key advantages.

1. Flexibility

A blended learning approach provides ultimate flexibility in presenting content. Complex topics can be presented in the classroom, while other subject matter can be available online. With an online component, you'll also increase flexibility and convenience over how and when your employees participate in training.

2. Effectiveness

Garrison and Kanuka, have studied blended learning. Their research concludes that "blended learning has the proven potential to enhance both the effectiveness and efficiency of meaningful learning experiences."

3. Efficiency

With a well-planned blended learning strategy, you can efficiently and quickly deliver training to a broad audience. And with digital assets such as videos and recordings and eBooks, the potential for re-use is huge. You can easily help more people get up-to-speed after the initial rounds of training have passed.

4. Cost-effectiveness

Most of us like strategies that can save our organization money. And blended learning is one of them! Including more online options in your training program saves on travel and missed work. When you are hosting live events online, you eliminate employee and instructor travel costs. When the venue is your own desk, that's clearly a savings over large rooms!

5. Personalization

Any training that is not well implemented can create an isolating, cookie-cutter, impersonal learning experience. But the good news is that a well-crafted blended solution can provide a seamless transition from classroom to computer or vice-versa. You can design ways of continuing discussion themes and personalizing content to a person's specific job or interests.

6. Extended reach

Almost always, creating a blended learning strategy reduces classroom teaching time. By digitizing the expertise of talented instructors or subject-matter experts, you can reach more people with high-quality content at a fraction of the cost. That frees up knowledgeable instructors to offer more classes, or create more training content, or work on other things.

7. Covers all learning styles

It's always important to take learning styles into account then designing training for adults. Effective blended learning is a "best of all worlds" solution that can help you cater to all learning styles through a variety of mediums and techniques.

The Disadvantages of Blended Learning

Here is the list of things that can be challenging as you incorporate blended learning into your training program.

1. High maintenance cost

Incorporation of advanced technology in your blended learning projects such as infrastructure setup and devices are at times costly. In a corporate setup, this is especially true for bigger organizations having various departments or a large workforce. But if you compare this cost with all the other benefits that come with blended learning, this is not only a short-term expense but it will eventually be quite beneficial in the long run.

2. Technological dependence

In order to achieve the learning objectives of your blended learning program, the content developers use the technological tools and resources that are easy to use, reliable, and up-to-date. All of this is possible if participants have strong internet connectivity as this has a meaningful impact in terms of overall learning environment and experience. That is why incorporating this learning strategy depends on technological feasibility, and in case of technical issues or

inadequate technical accessibility, the objective of this advanced learning strategy is unachievable.

Also, since blended learning is about technological dependence, there is a limitation with regards to technical skills of both the instructors and the learners. Students and instructors who are not tech-savvy can face a great barrier in terms of smooth interactions. The participants will face difficulty in accessing the course material; therefore, this learning strategy must come with adequate technical support.

3. Wastage of offered Resources

This is in connection with the limitation discussed in above point. That is, if the learners or students are unaware of technology used in the learning course, there is a chance you won't get the desired results. Similarly, if the provided technological tools are inadequate and not in relevance to the course material, then this will also be a wastage of resources without improving ROI.

Conclusion

Hence, to achieve your learning objectives in the best possible manner, the content developers have to incorporate the technological and other relevant aspects wisely in the learning content. After all, blended learning creates more engagement amongst the learners, increases the rate of retention in organizations, keeps learners more motivated, provides the best learning environment and facilitates both the personal and professional development programs.

Indeed, it has the values of traditional learning and at the same time, it offers great feasibility by leveraging technological advancements to save time and money both. This learning strategy has now given rise to many learning

platforms globally and is now one of the most adopted learning tools.

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