SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Chapter 12

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING BLENDED LEARNING

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Introduction

Blended learning is an approach to learning that combines face-to-face and online learning experiences. Ideally, each will complement the other by using its particular strength. While generally seen as a 'trend' in 'progressive learning,' Blended Learning can also be viewed as a kind of relic symbolic of the gap between 'traditional education' (for the last century or so in brick-and-mortar schools and classrooms) and connected and digital learning. This, of course, implies that digital-only is the future and the ultimate incarnation of learning, which is a short-sighted view. The point, though, is that blended learning is a mix of old and new as much as it is a mix of physical and digital learning. The teaching landscape is rapidly changing, the technological rise of the 21st-century and widespread integration of those technologies into our society, combined with access to the internet has integrally changed teaching in just a few years.

Our children and their following generations are already and will continue to grow up in a world that's a stark reminder of how rapidly the human civilization has changed, a society and world where smartphones and tablets are

widespread, affordable, and replacing most computers and laptops.

Tips for Implementing Blended Learning

1. Redefine your role in the classroom.

You, the teacher, perform a critical part in encouraging deeper learning. However, the role is evolving, particularly in blended learning environments. TNTP, a nonprofit organization dedicated to positive change in public schools, says teachers who employ blended learning should learn to see themselves as people with three distinct responsibilities. These include research and development, integration, and guidance. The three responsibilities may be owned by an individual teacher or shared amongst a team.

2. Start with a description of the curriculum.

Writing down what the next two weeks or semester will cover often identifies learning goals, objectives, and outcomes. The description also ensures your familiarity with the curriculum content and helps pinpoint potential digital resources, such as edgames, online quizzes, and videos.

3. Outline your goals.

Goals strip a curriculum description of the fluff, leaving you with a clear focus and targets to hit.

4. Determine learning objectives.

Learning objectives quantify goals. Set these so that you can measure classroom and student performance in real time and at the end of a learning block.

5. Define learning outcomes.

Outcomes define how students will achieve objectives and demonstrate competency in the subject matter. Specific outcomes could include classroom participation, online assignments, oral presentations, et cetera.

6. Choose a blended learning model.

Once you have a clear picture of what you want to teach and desire students to achieve, you can choose a blended learning model. The common models number six: face-to-face driver, rotation, flex, online-only, self-blend, and online-driver. Most of the models contain nuances. For example, the rotation model spans rotation stations, lab rotations, and individual rotations. Another common model includes the flipped classroom, in which online content and instruction is delivered online and at home. Students then come to a brick-and-mortar school for in-classroom projects and practice. Some teachers use one or more models to make their classroom content more engaging and rigorous.

7. Explore different teaching methods to complement the model.

Different models and teaching roles sometimes mean changing up your teaching methods. Some blended learning classrooms, for instance, use team teaching.

8. Use the right technology tools.

Software changes often, so it's important to set down the fixed matters first. Goals, learning objectives and outcomes, blended learning models, and instructional methods should dictate the technology choice, not the other way around. In addition, remember that you may need more than one tool. Students learn differently and have unique needs. It's unlikely that one edgame or digital resource will work well for all.

9. Aim for relevance and fun, not one or the other.

This tip relates to technology in that the tool should be relevant AND fun. That is, the digital content should complement learning objectives and achieve outcomes. If it doesn't, the tool is irrelevant and ineffectual. The tool, though, also needs to be fun. Students won't use a tool they don't like.

10. Design the classroom as a blended learning environment.

Layout and aesthetics affect student morale and the ability to learn. Plus, if you use a specific learning model, you may need to move desks and chairs around. You don't necessarily have to do the work on your own; Mark Philips, a teacher and educational journalist, notes in an Edutopia article that student involvement in classroom design and layout can "empower them, develop community, and increase motivation."

11. Know the traditional and online content.

To build trust with students, you need to know the content inside and out. This means revisiting the curriculum content, as well as testing digital content and edgames. You want tools that cement knowledge, lead to application and critical thinking, and motivate learning, not ones that sabotage your efforts or frustrate students.

12. Create individual and collective learning goals.

You established overarching learning goals earlier. Now, combine them with individual learning goals. Students work at different paces and may be on another learning path than another student. Learn to incorporate that information into your blended learning planning to see success with students and the classroom as a whole.

13. Develop a classroom culture that embraces blended learning.

Esther Wojcicki shares her process for creating a blended learning culture in the book "Moonshots in Education: Launching Blended Learning in the Classroom." She uses the acronym "TRICK," which stands for trust, respect, independence, collaboration, and kindness. With those values embedded in the classroom, students want to learn, grow, and help out their teacher and classmates.

14. Set expectations.

Students achieve when given goals, so set expectations. Let them know how to succeed in the classroom and at home, and they will.

15. Share an overview of classroom activities, projects, playlists, and outside resources.

With overall expectations set, share daily and weekly assignments. The process might not look all that different from standard homework tasks except that they involve online content and opportunities for in-classroom game play. Sharing additional resources for study can be a good idea, too, especially if you claim a couple of high performers or students who need to skip around assignments to stay engaged with the classroom content.

16. Provide clear instructions and routines for game play.

Students need to know to log out of an application and turn off computers or tablets before moving to a different classroom activity. The specificity is important; students probably don't have to log out at home, so they won't think to do it in the classroom.

17. Give students control over time, path, place, and pace.

It can be hard to relinquish control, but students excel when given the chance to direct their learning. They become more engaged with the content because they have a personal stake in their success.

18. Encourage collaboration in the classroom and online.

Collaboration gives students the chance to work through complex concepts and to help each other learn. It also offers opportunities for dialogue, which teaches students to position their points with facts and hard evidence. Collaboration should occur in the classroom and online; quieter students, for example, could become extremely vocal online. If you need more reasons to employ collaborative learning, the Global Development Research Center lists 44 of them.

19. Incite curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking.

Students start wondering and thinking when you ask, "What if?" You can raise that question through traditional teaching methods and online content. And, the more you ask open-ended and thought-provoking questions, the more students will seek out answers.

20. Challenge students to learn and grow with authentic, relevant tasks.

Nothing's worse than busy work, and even a fifth grader has an antenna finely attuned to it. Give students real, curriculum-based, challenging assignments, and they'll complete and compete to finish them.

21. Review classroom and online content regularly.

Online content supplements other teaching tools. As such, you should go over both pieces of content to ensure students' basic comprehension and deeper understanding.

Conclusion

Blended learning is important because it breaks down the traditional walls of teaching, ones that don't work for all students and now with access to present day technologies and resources we can tailor the learning experience for each student. Blended learning also offers flexible time frames that can be personalized to each person, offering them the ability to learn at their own pace. 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. With the heavy integration of technologies, we'll be able to improve teaching, information retention, engagement, responsibility and enjoyment. Students never outgrow their learning styles, meaning blended learning is more important than ever, no matter what the industry is, from schools to corporations, in all walks of life. 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.

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