BLENDED LEARNING: A NEED FOR PRESENT ERA

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Abstract

The concept of "blended learning" appeared in the discussions about education at the beginning of the 21st century at the moment when the concept of e-learning started to lose its credibility. Although this latter concept had many supporters in the 1990s, the end of the century brought as many opponents due to the fact that the students were not highly motivated and responsible to do all the work on their own and they felt isolated and unsupported while learning. Thus, a new concept had to be invented, not necessarily to replace e-learning but add to it. This paper gives an overview of the concept and process of blended learning, the key ingredients that form this process.

Introduction

The digital world calls for changed mindsets about schooling, teaching, learning, and assessment. Teachers – who are often more comfortable with broadcast and interactive technologies – are now expected to embrace online participatory learning technologies in support of active, passion-based learning by students who live and will work in a digital world. These teachers need support in making major shifts in their practice: how they work with disciplinary knowledge, how they design for learning and assessment, and how they embrace technology. It is time for top-down approaches to schooling to give way to the active, engaged, and collaborative teaching and learning relationships made possible by new educational technologies.

Blended learning

Blended learning has become the norm in large enterprises today as a method for delivering training to large, diverse populations. This trend is driven in large part by the need to deliver

more kinds of training to more trainees in more places—within existing training budgets. The definition of blended learning has also changed, from a simple blend of classroom training and e-learning courses to more complex programs that incorporate an array of synchronous and asynchronous learning modalities. Whatever the mix, the goal is to empower the individual to achieve understanding of a given topic, become self-sufficient, improve his or her job performance and ultimately drive results that support learning objectives. Blended learning can support a variety of informal learning processes. Blended learning expands the traditional role of training beyond the its usual scope of formal training by providing a robustset of tools that allow trainees to obtain the information and instruction they independently and uniquely need, all within the daily flow of work.

Bringing Clarity to the Confusion

There remains much confusion in the field of blended and virtual learning over what these terms actually mean. School officials will sometimes say their campuses are incorporating blended learning, but what they mean is their classrooms use technology to enrich learning. A student may use the blended learning is widely accepted and was developed by the Innosight Institute in 2012 with input from more than 100 education experts and 80 organizations. Innosight further breaks down blended learning into four models:

Models of blended learning
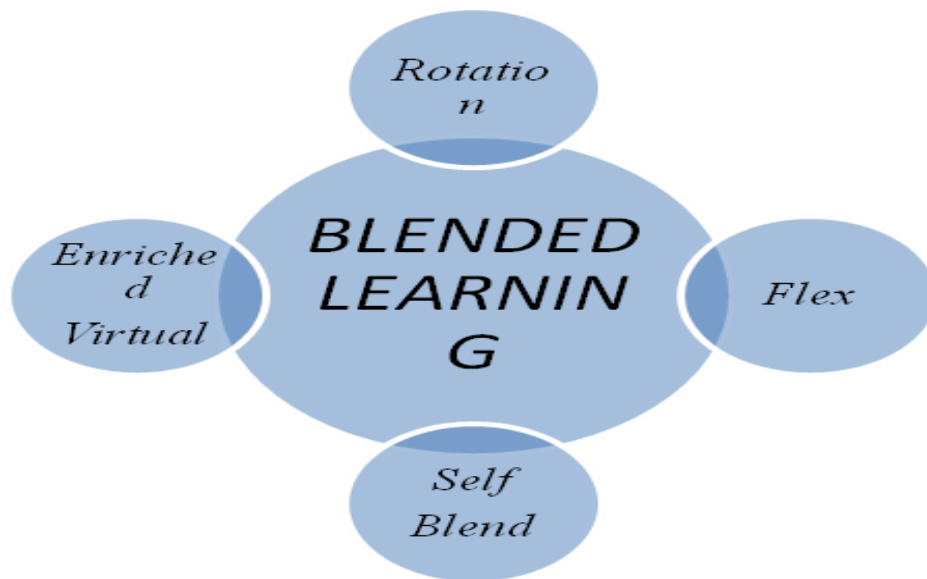
1) **Rotation:** Students' time is split between different modalities: sometimes in the classroom, sometimes in the lab. In class, students rotate on a scheduled basis between stations, such as group projects, individual tutoring or independent online learning.

2) **Flex:** Students move on an individually customized, fluid schedule among different learning modalities, with teachers providing help as needed. Such models often employ differentiated staffing.

3) **Self-blend**: Students attend traditional school but take one or more classes online.

4) **Enriched virtual:** Students learn at a physical school but teachers are brought in remotely, or divide time between campus and home online learning; this model began as full-time virtual schools developed blended programs to give students more face-to face time.

Defining blended learning

In this respect, the definitions of the verb "to blend" provide explanations that can further be used to explain the concept of blended learning. "To blend" means "to combine or mix so that the constituent parts are indistinguishable from one another", "to combine (varieties or grades) to obtain a mixture of a particular character, quality, or, "to form a uniform mixture", "to become merged into one", "to create   harmonious effect or result"

As we can extend from, these definitions the concept of blended learning implies a combination of factors that are used together so that we can obtain harmonious results which can be seen in our students' professional training Nevertheless, there is not a unique definition that can cover all aspects of the concept of blended learning, especially because it is more than a concept: it is an on-going process that develops with every teacher or trainer who applies it. The blended learning approach transforms the traditional face-to-face classroom interaction into social on-line interaction, taking advantages of the technology used by most students.

The term blended learning has become ambiguous. According to Margaret Discroll, blended learning is defined as a combination or mixing of at least four different methodologies, including:

• Mixing of technology-based learning (e-learning, collaboration, virtual classroom, etc.)

• Combination of pedagogical approaches (behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism)

• Mixing of forms of instructional technology (face-to-face, Internet, CD-ROM, etc.)

• Integrating instructional technology with actual job activities

Blended Learning can be described as a learning program where more than one delivery mode is being used with the objective of optimizing the learning outcome and cost of program delivery. However, it is not the mixing and matching of different learning delivery modes by itself that is of significance, but the focus on the learning and business outcome. Therefore we propose to refine this definition to say: Blended learning is any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.

Blended Learning: blend of Traditional and On Line Learning

A blended learning approach combines face to face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities to form an integrated instructional approach. Blended learning is a student-centered approach to creating a learning experience whereby the learner interacts with other students, with the instructor, and with content through thoughtful integration of online and face-to-face environments. A well-designed blended learning experience thoughtfully organizes content, support materials, and activities via synchronous and asynchronous learning events, all of which are delivered in a variety of modes ranging from traditional lecture to online tutorials. In contrast

to teacher-centered, rote-learning approaches, blended learning environments provide multiple ways to access content and to demonstrate mastery. A blended approach gives the learner the opportunity to be more responsible for his or her learning, which creates a learning situation that may be more meaningful on an individual level. Blended learning is realized in teaching and learning environments where there is an effective integration of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning as a result of adopting a strategic and systematic approach to the use of technology combined with the best features of face to face interaction.

Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identified six reasons why one might chose to design or use a blended learning experience: (1) pedagogical richness, (2) access to knowledge, (3) social interaction, (4) personal agency, (5) cost effectiveness, and (6) ease of revision

Ingredients of the Blend

Blended learning is not new. However, in the past, the ingredients for blended learning were limited to physical classroom formats (lectures, labs, etc.), books or handouts. Today organizations have myriad learning approaches to choose from, including but not limited to:

Synchronous Physical Formats	Synchronous Online Formats (Live eLearning)	Self-Paced Asynchronous Formats
•Instructor-led classrooms & lectures •Hands-on labs & workshops •Field trips	•eMeetings •Virtual classrooms •Web seminars & broadcasts •Coaching •Instant messaging	•Documents & web pages •Web/Computer-based training modules •Assessments/Tests& surveys •Simulations •online learning communities

Dimensions of the Blend

The original use of the phrase "Blended Learning" was often associated with simply linking traditional classroom training to eLearning activities. However, the term has evolved to encompass a much richer set of learning strategy "dimensions." Today a blended learning program may combine one or more of the following dimensions, although many of these have over-lapping attributes.

➢ **Blending Offline and Online Learning**

At the simplest level, a blended leaning experience combines offline and online forms of learning where the online learning usually means "over the Internet or intranet," and offline learning happens in a more traditional classroom setting.

➢ **Blending Self-Paced and Live, Collaborative Learning**

Self-paced learning implies solitary, on-demand learning at a pace that is managed or controlled by the learner. Collaborative learning on the other hand implies a more dynamic communication among many learners that brings about knowledge sharing. The blending of self-paced and collaborative learning may include review of important literature on a regulatory change or new product followed by a moderated; live online, peer-to-peer discussion of the material's application to the learner's job and customers.

➢ **Blending Structured and Unstructured Learning**

Not all forms of learning imply a pre-meditated, structured or formal learning program with organized content in specific sequence like chapters in a text book. In fact, most learning in the workplace occurs in an unstructured form such as meetings, hallway conversations, and e-mail. A blended program design may look to capture active conversations and documents from unstructured learning events into knowledge repositories available on-demand, supporting the way knowledge-workers collaborate and work.

➢ **Blending Custom Content with Off-the-Shelf Content**

Off-the-shelf content is by definition generic - unaware of your organization's unique context and requirements. However, generic content is much less expensive to buy and frequently has higher production values than custom content you build yourself. Generic, self-paced content can be customized today with a blend of live experiences (classroom or online) or through content customization. Industry standards such as SCORM (Shareable Courseware Object Reference Model) open the door to greater flexibility in blending off-the-shelf and custom content – improving the user experience while minimizing cost

Different Forms of blended learning

Flipped Classrooms   *Online Learning*   *Distance Learning*   *Virtual Learning*

Hybrid Learning

✓ **Flipped classroom models** are another form of blended learning where material that traditionally would have been covered in class, such as an instructor's lecture, is provided for students to study outside of class (a video recording of the lecture, for example). The material normally considered as homework — activities related to the content, plus discussion — are then done in class.

✓ **Hybrid learning** is another term often used: Is it different from blended? No, says Vicky Phillips, CEO of Get Educated, a consumer and research group focused on online learning.

✓ **Online learning** is the most recent delivery method used for distance learning instruction.

✓ **Distance learning** is any type of learning that takes place with the student and instructor geographically distant from each other.

✓ **Virtual learning** is any learning that occurs where either the instructor or student are present for an educational event in virtual rather than physical form.
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Final Words

Blended learning is about effectively integrating ICTs into course design to enhance the teaching and learning experiences for students and teachers by enabling them to engage in ways that would not normally be available or effective in their usual environment. In many cases the act of

"blending" achieves better student experiences and outcomes, and more efficient teaching and course management practices. It can involve a mix of delivery modes, teaching approaches and learning styles. Advances in technology provide new opportunities for teachers to design and deliver their courses in ways that support and enhance the teachers' role, the students' individual cognitive experiences, as well as the social environment. Blended learning technologies can: Broaden the spaces and opportunities available for learning; Support course management activities (e.g., communication, assessment submission, marking and feedback); Support the provision of information and resources to students; Engage and motivate students through interactivity and collaboration. So it is not just about using technology because it is available; blended learning is about finding better ways of supporting students in achieving the learning objectives and providing them with the best possible learning and teaching experiences, as well as supporting teachers in their role (including the management and administration of courses).

References

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Links:

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