

“Blended learning is an austerity measure in disguise”

IT plays a key role in designing and facilitating blended learning. By recording lectures and instruction, offering online assignments and providing online feedback, education can be given (and the building used) more efficiently. This would imply that blended learning is a cost-cutting measure. After all, fewer lecturers in front of the class and schedules that are not as full seems cheaper.

However, IT and online tools in and of themselves can never replace a good lecturer. On the contrary – the most successful blends rely heavily on the quality of the lecturers. After all, they are the ones who put together the content, provide guidance, monitor progress, and adapt content to needs. Blended learning is therefore more about changing the role of the lecturer. So while the lecturer will have a more coaching, facilitating and organising role - which has been the case for some time - this does not mean that less of it is needed. Quite the opposite.

PROPOSITIONS

“The more knowledge clips I make, the cheaper I am for training.”

“Scheduling a lot of consultations with students means I hit my teaching hours and don't get other tasks piled on top of that.”

“If we start teaching online again, classes will be merged and fewer lecturers will be needed for my course.”

“Thanks to the knowledge clips I created, I have more time to consult and discuss the subject matter with students, sometimes my consultations even run out because of this.”

“Blended learning is the same as online emergency teaching”

Do you recognise this dialogue?

“And... is it working, this blended learning?”

“Distance learning? No way, everyone just comes back to college, so no more hassle with online sessions!”

“Yes! That’s great, of course, but I’m talking about blended learning – not emergency teaching... does it work at all?”

Online emergency teaching is an ad hoc solution to not being able or allowed to teach on-campus. The emphasis here is on ‘ad hoc’ and ‘emergency’; the design is not well-considered and it is used as a temporary solution. Blended learning, on the other hand, is redesigned education that may have some features of emergency teaching but is much more than that. Precisely because it is aimed at a thorough and well-considered design – often by a team of lecturers and with long-term goals – it is an educational concept and not a stopgap solution. Blended learning is not about doing more online, it is about enhancing the learning experience.

PROPOSITIONS

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, I recorded all my online classes. Students have to watch these and can email me if they have any questions. This also made my teaching blended.”

“The online classes during emergency teaching inspired me to build the module differently. It’s now a mix of online and offline learning activities that I put together with my colleagues. That’s truly blended.”

“Blended learning is using an online tool in class”

Online tools can facilitate blended working forms. They can therefore make that working form more interactive, attractive and effective. However, a tool is a means to facilitate the working form, not an end in itself. Using online tools does not automatically lead to blended learning, as the latter involves the harmonious integration of different activating strategies, which is achieved by combining F2F interaction with information and communication technology (IT). In other words, the use of an online tool only adds value if it is placed in a broader context. Blended learning is thus first and foremost a design process, and the associated IT follows naturally.

PROPOSITIONS

“Students complain, ‘another online quiz in Kahoot?’. I try to make my teaching blended, but this way it doesn’t work at all.”

“The IT department has purchased new tools that are available in the LMS. If we start using these tools, our teaching will automatically be blended.”

Discussion cards: misconceptions

“Blended learning – yet another new thing to contend with.”

Blended learning is not a new concept; integrating different strategies and deploying digital technologies is something lecturers have been doing for as long as education has existed. The digital technology side of blended learning is relatively new, but with the advent of the internet over 25 years ago, online learning has by now gained a structural place in education. Blended learning as a concept is intended precisely to harvest all that experience and knowledge and integrate it into sustainable educational designs. Thinking about your educational design is nothing new, but getting to grips with new strategies and technologies does require the necessary professional development.

PROPOSITIONS

“Our vision of blended education is a logical extension of what we have been doing in the classroom for years, it is just more formal now. With the new LMS and in making our teaching more flexible, we are more blended than ever.”

“As of next academic year, all our educational offer will be blended. We therefore need to have a news LMS.”

“Blended learning is just a hype which will blow over.”

Discussion cards: misconceptions

“Blended learning is the same as hybrid learning”

The concepts of blended and hybrid are often conflated. However, the effects of these different concepts on educational design and educational practice are so disparate that we cannot afford this confusion. To clarify the difference in a nutshell, dictionary.com provides the following definitions:

Blend = a mixture produced by blending (mixing or intermingling smoothly and inseparably). **Hybrid** = anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of elements of different or incongruous kinds. These definitions make the difference obvious: one is a whole, whereas in the other, different elements coexist.

Blended learning is aimed at an educational design in which different integrated learning activities are coordinated with each other. So it is one whole: a student engages in a particular learning activity online at one time and F2F at another time. Sometimes this is synchronous, sometimes asynchronous.

Hybrid learning, on the other hand, describes learning activities of different kinds, most commonly F2F and online, which coexist simultaneously (or synchronously). One part of a group sits in the classroom, the other takes part online. In this case it is therefore more appropriate to refer to this as multi-location learning.

PROPOSITIONS

“Blended learning is the result of a design, whereas hybrid learning is an educational setting. And online learning is ‘only’ a part of both concepts.”

“I didn’t like hybrid teaching, so I’m not going to get into blended teaching. Online just doesn’t work.”