Blended Learning in the Classroom

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Introduction

Blended Learning has various models ranging from Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual. There is a need for change in education, specifically in the high school technology courses, as well as in core subjects. Emerging technologies are forcing a radical change that can be difficult for a school district. Are students actually engaged in learning? Are teachers ready to implement a change? Will the administration be willing to adopt the change throughout the district? Educators are faced with budget restraints as well as being burdened with teaching students to pass a state adopted assessment. Although most classrooms have some version of technology, some teachers just use technology as a mere tool instead of being integrated into a blending learning model. By using a blended learning model, students retain knowledge, collaborate, are engaged in learning, and are learning how to be life long learners in the digital age.

This literature review will discuss blended versus traditional course delivery, blended learning with everyday technologies to activate students’ collaborative learning, impact on student performance, differences in blended learning and full e-learning, Course Management Systems (CMS) and blended learning, and the importance of specific staff development needs for schools that adopt blended learning.

Review of Literature

Blended Versus Traditional Course Delivery

Students at the high school level are arriving each year with digital skills that exceed some of the educators in that very school. Although the educators have a college degree in a subject area, some educators are lacking the digital skills that will
bridge the gap between the classroom and the digital world. Students of all backgrounds can benefit from a blended learning model. Deeper thinking skills can be attained through collaboration for students as well as educators. Tsung and Walsh’s (2016) study showed that students reported higher learning levels when using a blended learning approach versus a traditional classroom. Riffel and Sibley’s (2005) study showed that students learned more in blended learning and were able to learn more effectively than in a traditional classroom. Keller’s (1987a, 1987b) ARCS (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) model showed that students adopt ownership over projects, are more engaged in learning, can transfer knowledge into other areas of learning, and are more motivated for success when using the blended learning model. Skills learned through this process aid in the transition from high school to higher education or directly into the workforce.

**Blended Learning with Everyday Technologies to Activate Students’ Collaborative Learning**

The Vesisenaho, Valtonen, Kukkonen, Havu-Nuutinen, Hartikainen, Karkkainen (2010) study discusses the importance of blended learning and the use of software to enhance deeper learning skills for students. When students and teachers work together to create a lesson or project, collaboration, voice, and ownership occur throughout the assignment. If a student can transfer previous knowledge learned into current knowledge being taught seamlessly, then success will occur both for the student and the teacher. Student collaboration fosters growth through peer and teacher reviews by allowing the student to think outside the box and gain a new or different perspective. Obtaining a different perspective from peers, reviewing opinions and suggestions,
offering opinions and suggestions often leads to higher level thinking, therefore the
information will most likely be retained and transferred into new knowledge.

Students are collaborating through social networking online through social media,
wikis, and blogs. Transferring social media knowledge by collaborating in the classroom
is a process that students can understand and will be successful in the transformation.
These skills can be used in a learning situation and can be enriched throughout a
student’s high school, higher education, and future careers. Social software and online
learning allows the student access to information before, during, and after class. Kose
(2010) supports the blended learning model to enhance learning by providing
information to students online as well as the traditional face-to-face method of teaching.
The key is to use the social software not only outside the classroom, but also in the
classroom to promote ideas and offer instant feedback.

Teachers are able to provide instant feedback and evaluate what skills were or
were not mastered. Student blogs, opinions, and feedback to the teacher assists the
teacher in restructuring or redesigning a lesson that is more meaningful and successful.
Lower level learning presented online provides more quality time during the face-to-face
instruction in class. Addressing higher level learning in the classroom allows the
teacher more time to answer specific questions and to reflect on the effectiveness of the
lesson.

Assessing the Impact of Blended Learning on Student Performance

Kwak, Menezes, and Sherwood’s (2015) study addresses blended learning
through online quizzes and face-to-face lectures. One study by Brown and Liedholm
(2002) showed that students performed better in a face-to-face instruction than those
students who participated in the blended learning model when taught knowledge that is more difficult to learn. It was found that if assessments were non-cumulative, then blended learning was not effective.

One experiment in this particular review was to reduce the face-to-face lecture time from two hours to one hour. The online information was provided after the face-to-face lecture. Content delivered online was video taped lectures. This required a quick turn around response time to deliver edited videos, other presentations such as PowerPoint, and uploading links to Blackboard.

Further findings concluded that students preferred online videos because it provided them ownership over their assignments through choice and the freedom to access online content on demand. On the other hand, students wanted more social interaction. Furthermore, the study shows that students still needed opportunities to ask questions and obtain instant feedback from peers and teachers. Another component that was lacking by merely watching online videos was student motivation. Surprisingly enough, 90% of the students preferred face-to-face lectures over the online lecture.

An Empirical Investigation Linking Learns’ Adoption of Blended Learning to Their Intention of Full E-learning

Al-Busaidi’s (2013) study addresses how universities are introducing the blended learning method before rolling out a full e-learning environment. Lauden and Lauden’s (2003) report that e-learning provides value to education and business platforms. Learning management system (LMS) tools such as Moodle and Blackboard are beneficial in the online learning process. LMS is a useful tool for both the students and
the educators. Both platforms offer means of communication, assignment submission, feedback, discussions, collaboration, assessments, and grading tools.

Full online learning is advantageous to the learner because of instant access, flexibility with time, collaboration, more up-to-date information, less travel time, personalized instruction, and a varied approach to the information to be learned. Baldwin-Evans (2004) study revealed the drawbacks to full online learning. Issues addressed were technical difficulties, lack of planning, lack of LMS support, and money. Furthermore, instructors are faced with the challenges of developing up-to-date content to deliver to students. Instructors also need professional development to be more effective in delivery of content. Students again need to be self-directed learners and have the motivation needed to meet deadlines while learning and retaining information.

Baldwin-Evans (2004) study also revealed that blended learning is a combination of allowing students to participate in various methods of learning including workshops and learning from co-workers and other online information. LMS in blended learning is beneficial in providing information to students in various methods. Assignments posted and graded, discussion boards, collaboration, videos, and assessments are located in one place in LMS. This is very user-friendly for students taking online courses.

Hitting the Nail on the Head: The Importance of Specific Staff Development for Effective Blended Learning

Owen's (2012) study revealed that instructors were more successful and student learning was more beneficial when proper professional development was provided for blended learning. Proper professional development for distance learning will encourage traditional instructors to test and implement the blended learning model. Prosper and
Trigwell’s (1999) study stated that the student-centered approach seems to be more beneficial to the student’s level of learning. Students gain more in-depth knowledge when lessons are meaningful and student centered.

Educators who have recently graduated college are accustomed to online learning and online professional development. Educators who have been teaching for years need to learn how to blend traditional pedagogy with the integration of technology. In order for students to achieve deeper learning, Educators need specific professional development for online courses as well as the blended learning environment.

Conclusion

Blended learning is an exciting movement that is being utilized world wide. Both the student and instructor benefit from this model. Students are given a voice in individualized learning. Those students who are motivated, disciplined, and have time management skills seem to excel in blended learning and online learning. Full online learning is beneficial to corporations as well as educational facilities. The big picture is to produce students who will be lifelong learners and a beneficial member of society.

Many higher education facilities are using Blackboard, Moodle, and other software as a method for rolling out online courses. When students participate in online courses in high school, they are more likely to be successful in higher education. Although starting an online system for learning at the high school level could be costly, it is worth the investment if implemented properly and widely supported by administration and teachers.

Professional development must be a high priority for any institution that wishes to adopt the blended learning model or full online courses. Once teachers make a paradigm shift into the
digital education of students, then students will experience a more student-centered education.

When students have ownership of learning, it’s a win-win situation for all concerned. Providing high quality online learning is challenging, but rewarding. Producing successful digital learners in this digital age is powerful and exciting and will further enhance not only educational facilities but industry as well.
References


