

## BLENDING LEARNING: A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH TO LEARNING

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We live in a world that is experienced “on the go.” A world where place is often not defined simply by physical location. Today people are connected in ways that were almost inconceivable just a few decades ago. Children do not have to wait for adults to impart knowledge or share experience. For better or worse, most independent learning is done through YouTube and Wikipedia and people’s accomplishments and experiences are not seen as real if they are not published online for the world to see. Outside of the traditional classroom, where are people simply sitting, listening, and taking notes? Nowhere really, however, many teachers feel frustrated by the lack of participation that they see from students. Sadly, many classrooms have failed to adapt to society’s paradigm shift on learning and the public forum.

Blended learning is an approach to learning that attempts to meet the demands of modern learners by combining the traditional classroom and the online sphere. One of blended learning strengths is its approach to space. It turns the conventional model that adheres to linear thinking and learning on its head. We typically think of the front of the room as the stage where instructors perform. However, by nature this layout creates an audience of passive,

unengaged learners. Instead if the desks are rearranged where the students are center stage, then the instructor can move about freely and assist students as they are participating in learning activities. This space also extends online where students are able watch and rewatch lectures at their own pace, thus making class a place where learners are expected to actively produce. It is puzzling that most traditional learning does not expect students to come to class prepared to contribute to the learning process. Of course, instructors assign homework, but homework is more about completion than preparing students for class production. As a teacher, it feels like you are at a party with 30 people and you are the only one who brought food and beer.

Everyone looks at you to feed them, yet you want them to learn how to feed themselves, and yes, bring something to the party.

Blending learning is built upon collaborative, project-based activities, heavily relying on Bloom's Taxonomy-based objectives. The concept of "class" is a shared experience where the students play the lead role and the teacher is a learning resource who offers clarification and guidance instead of the role of master whose lectures must be memorized for exams. Of course this approach to teaching is intimidating for many teachers for fear of losing control or authority in the classroom; however, this approach makes a stronger case for instructors. Teachers must be highly skilled to facilitate this more organic approach to learning that does rely on rote learning from textbooks.

Another common fear for educators is that all learning will eventually go online, making teachers irrelevant. However, blended learning, which is becoming extremely popular and effective, requires face-to-face time in the classroom compared with less successful online-only education that does not.

Currently, I am looking into ways to incorporate blended learning into my classrooms. I