

# BLENDED LEARNING. IT'S ALL ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION!

When I was asked to interview Jake Rosch on his vision on Blended Learning, I jumped at the opportunity. I believe that Blended Learning, when done well, can bring an extra dimension to learning, by creating a bigger playing field that supports different methodologies. Granted, I did not know who Jake was at the time of accepting, but I was sure that, with our common interest, the conversation would flow smoothly.

Here's what we discussed; I hope you find some inspiration to boost the learning experience you are creating in your institution.

## What would you say then is your definition of Blended Learning?

The definition we settled on at my school was: Blended Learning refers to when a student learns at school and through online delivery, with students control over time, place, path or pace.

Part one is the common definition; a style of education in which students learn through online and face-to-face learning.

But then the 2nd part is student control over time, place, path or pace. Not total control, but these are the factors that we play with when we are talking about designing activities for students at our school.

For example, I record a tutorial that students can watch.

They can watch it where and when they want. So that is time and place.

Then I can have 3 different tutorials, one designed for a beginner level, one intermediate and one for someone more advanced. Now all of a sudden, learners can choose which level they want to work at, that's the path.

And then I'll ask the student to let me know when they have mastered a learning concept, after which I will send them the assessment. So now I am giving them control over the pace.

## Maybe following that question. What to you are the key ingredients for creating a successful Blended Learning experience

At our school we created a Blended Learning framework that outlines the criteria we want to consider when developing a Blended Learning Program.

We developed it, but I have to give reference to: *Adapted from: A Blended Learning framework for curriculum design and professional development (Negin, Mirriahi\*, Dennis Alonzo and Bob Fox) School of Education & Learning and Teaching Unit, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia (Received 5 May; final version received 27 september 2015)*

It's based on 3 different topics and 3 levels.

The three criteria are;

- > Resources
- > Lesson design and activities
- > Feedback and assessment.

You can implement these criteria on one of three levels which are; effective, highly effective and leading.

For instance, effective level is the basic requirement we want all of our teachers to be at. This is what I would call technology-rich instruction. You know how to share online resources and collect work digitally. It is my job to make sure that everybody is at least at this level.

Highly effective would then be what we call actual Blended Learning, with students control over time, place, path and pace.

Leading is when you have someone doing something you have to share: present to your department, write an article about, or present at a conference.

## What tips/advice would you give to someone who needs to create a Blended Learning experience

- > Make sure that what you do is research-based. The Blended Learning framework, along with other great research, we developed that to fit our school's Blended Learning strategy.
- > Lead by example. Your workshop needs to model what you want people to do, so don't create a 30-slide presentation on your great interactive Blended Learning model you want people to implement.
- > Give structured time to design and create. If you want people to start building a Blended Learning course, give them time and support to create it, so they can really think it through.
- > Don't forget the social aspect in your Blended Learning. Make the people that are in your Blended Learning program feel essential. If you want actual change to happen, people need to want to be in the programme with you.



## HOW DID YOU GET INTO BLENDED LEARNING?

I started as a teacher in Minnesota, Brooklyn Park. Maybe in the news, you've heard about police shootings in America recently. That's where I taught. Our school was a Title I school, which means that most of our students came from a low socio-economic background. Because of this, we were entitled to extra funding. What most schools did with the money was buy technology. This was back in 2003.

So I had a Smartboard, a laptop cart and a lot of other cutting edge hardware. Our principal also bought a reading program called "Read 180". This Blended Learning programme used a station rotation model, which was pretty early in the Blended Learning design for K12 education. So students were grouped into one of three stations. One was on the computer using the "Read 180" software, one was with the teacher, and one station was independent reading. During the lesson, students would rotate stations at specific times. As the teacher, I could use the data from the "Read180" software to determine the learning activities at the teacher-led and independent working stations. Because of this, I already had a headstart into Blended Learning. I spent 5 years at Brooklyn Park and I was just starting to get into technology training for the teachers when I relocated to the UK.

My wife is British, and in 2010 we moved to the United Kingdom. I got a job at ACS International Schools, which is a top international school outside London. The iPad had just started being introduced into schools, and we wanted to harness this new mobile technology in the classroom. We quickly discovered that we needed to adapt our teaching methods to incorporate these new possibilities.

In 2015 Collège du Léman was looking for a Head of Educational Technology. I had recently completed my Master's degree, which mainly focused on design professional development along with my background in education and technology, I was hired.

I started here and I quickly noticed that again, there were 1 to 1 iPad but they didn't have a methodology attached to the technology.

So I went looking for a methodology. And you have a few to choose from.

In the end, I thought what would work best for my school was a Blended Learning model. So I started looking to develop a programme. I built our Blended Learning professional development model for the teachers as a way to say, this is how we would like you to use the technology with students.

### How do you measure if your Blended Learning strategy is successful? How do you do that in this teaching environment?

Self and peer assessment is an effective way to assess a students' progress. If you ask a student to complete a task and then they have to post that to the group, that's a way of assessing. You can do this in multiple ways. For example, in my newest Blended Learning training, I'm mainly leading new hires. I will ask them to design a series of 2 to 3 Blended Learning lessons for their students. Then they have to invite their head of department to observe. S/he can invite other people as

well. They might invite me, our Director General, or a colleague in our Blended Learning group to observe their lesson.

So now I don't need to go and check off to see if they did everything in the course or give them a quiz. I can just go and see the implementation.

### Why do you think a lot of companies struggle to organise Blended Learning in a good way?

A lot of the time organisations put their IT specialist in charge of their Blended Learning Program. They can set everything up, as they know the tech side, but it's not in his/her job description to make sure people implement the systems in a way that is best for learning.

It would make much more sense to involve someone with a thorough knowledge of the institution, but with maybe less expertise in technology, in designing your Blended Learning program.

Another part where I think a lot of institutions go wrong is that their Blended Learning program only caters to a select group of people.

In any organisation you have a mix of people with different levels of expertise on the technical and practice side.

Strong Blended Learning will increase both the technology implementation and the practice. It's important to balance that in your program.

### When you have created a Blended Learning program, how do you ensure no one gets left behind?

It's all about implementation.

If people are taking the course, they are trying to improve an aspect of their practice. Therefore your professional development needs to encourage people to implement. Experiential learning followed by implementation is key. This requires time, a variety of resources and outlining the expected outcome

When I design professional development, I base it on experiential learning. You put the person in the program in the learner's shoes. What is it like to be the customer/patient/student? You allow them to experience it and then you give them the tools and time to implement.

To cater for all levels of learners, you should design low floor, high ceiling activities. For instance, my French is terrible, but my colleague's French is really good. If we were in the same class, what the teacher would do is have a low floor, high ceiling activity. Same exercise, same class, but a different level of expertise.





So she could ask, “tell me what you did over the holidays”. I could do that, and my colleague could do that. My colleague could probably talk more and use more extensive vocabulary, but we can both do the exercise. We are both in the same activity and we are both doing it, so it fits all learners in this context.

This is also an effective way to create a sense of community, as you are building a story together. You can see what all the people in your group are creating and learn from each other.

**Do you still see a future for in-class teaching/learning ?**

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**In terms of tools that you use to set up a good Blended Learning experience, do you have any favourites?**

It needs to start with your LMS (Learning Management System). This should be your centre. Institutions should create what I call an EdTech Toolbox, where they choose tools and then say, these are the tools that we support, endorse and want people to use.

An example, Edpuzzle is a tool in our Edtech Toolbox.

With this tool, you can take any Youtube video and embed questions into the clip. Then before the class, you can see how many students engaged and understood the content. We found video is extremely important when it comes to online learning. People don't want to read.

A great tool for sharing online is Padlet. With Padlet, people can post what they have accomplished to a digital wall.

The number one thing with online learning we found is that you can deliver it however you want, but what it really comes down to is teacher presence. When I talk about face to face, that could be a ZOOM it's not in-class teaching, but you need these synchronous moments where everybody comes together.

As a student, I want to connect with my teacher and fellow classmates. Synchronous face to face teaching is a good way to do that. But asynchronous learning can match or even surpass synchronous learning, through feedback, messaging or recorded tutorials. If my teacher creates the tutorial and I see them talking me through the course material, that is teacher presence. I feel they are in the course with me and that makes me keep going because, let's face it, learning something new is difficult! ■



**Karolien Brusselle** loves staying on top of new trends in learning, especially Gamification and Learning journeys. Bringing her experience from Executive Education, she has recently joined The Tipping Point, eager to support learning in and for organisations.