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The changing role of teacher in blended learning

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Abstract

The traditional classroom design was initiated in the industrial revolution and is no longer ideally suited to educate the students of today. Classrooms need to change, to keep up with developments in technology and society. Blended learning is a new style of learning that combines online and face-to-face learning to create a more student-led learning experience. It was often mistaken that blended learning approach usurps the teacher and replace him/her with a digital learning tool. This is far from the truth, in a blended learning classroom, the technology is part and parcel of teaching students the facts and concepts, but the deep learning, the true understanding of the concepts comes from teachers. Blended learning has changed teacher's role in digital learning design but without him/her, blended learning doesn't work. This paper explores the changing role of a teacher in new age learning i.e. blended learning and essential pre-requisite of blended learning for teachers.

Keywords: Blended learning, industrial revolution, blended learning for teachers

Introduction

Learning is changing. With the recent onslaught of digital and wireless devices, learning can now be undertaken from anywhere at any time. The traditional method of *teacher + classroom + homework = results* is now becoming outdated, and has been replaced by a richer, more collaborative approach to learning i.e. blended learning. Blended learning is a combination of offline (face-to-face, traditional learning) and online learning in a way that the one complements the other. It provides individuals with the opportunity to enjoy the best of both worlds. For example, a student might attend classes in a real-world classroom setting and then supplement the lesson plan by completing online multimedia coursework. As such, the student would only have to physically attend class once a week and would be free to go at their own pace (and without worrying about scheduling issues).

Blended learning offers the learner greater flexibility and an element of self-direction. It gives students freedom of choice, and empowers them to take greater ownership of their learning journey. In our information-rich society, Google, for better or worse, now knows more than the teacher. Through the internet, students have easy instant access to detailed information and knowledge about any given subject. This new method of learning allows teachers to personalize the learning journey to the needs of the student. Students can work at their own pace, with more or less help from the teacher as is required.

Blended learning is often also referred to as "hybrid" learning, and can take on a variety of forms in online education environments. While some organizations may only use blended learning techniques on rare occasions, others might utilize it as a primary teaching method within their curriculum. There are two key principles commonly associated with blended learning (which are the "secrets" to its success): students who can share information and work with other students directly in a collaborative setting have a more enriched learning experience, and collaboration between students can be improved upon if group activities rely on information gathered from online resources or lessons. It's also been suggested that students who complete online coursework followed by interactive, face-to-face class activities have richer educational experiences.

Thus, blended learning combines the best aspects of online learning with the best aspects of direct instruction, helping teachers easily manage to do much more to meet student needs without adding to an already weighty workload.

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Perquisites of Blended teaching for a Teacher

Technology can also give teachers crucial information to understand individual needs of students to support and strengthen their learning. When teachers use good technology effectively, it provides them the power to become even greater experts in the content areas they teach. In a blended learning classroom, the technology is part and parcel of teaching students the facts and concepts, but the deep learning—the true understanding of the concepts—comes from teachers. Rather than follow the traditional roles of sharing content and grading papers, classroom teachers in the blended learning model must:

1. Be willing to learn: In a blended learning program, the teacher should be prepared to:

- Access, analyze and aggregate data
- Use data as an integral part of the planning process for each individual student, groups of students and the whole class
- Use benchmark tests and other assessments to direct instruction at different levels (individual, group, class)

To help teachers learn their new roles and to understand online learning, many blended learning programs require that the teachers take an online class themselves as part of the required professional development. With proper professional development, a “traditional” teacher can develop the data-analysis skills needed to get the most out of the blended learning model.

2. Be open to new teaching strategies: The blended learning teacher should:

- Have a wide breadth of content knowledge in order to teach multiple subjects
- Differentiate instruction based upon student needs (as determined by the data)
- Focus on academic intervention and enrichment

3. Be leaders: To help guide students in a blended learning environment, teachers should:

- model learning and show students how to find information and answers (or ask the right questions)
- be able to manage project-based learning activities
- have strategies in place to keep students on-task, engaged and motivated

The teacher must interpret and analyze information, students need to learn to reason, integrate information and demonstrate knowledge through application.

Role of Teacher and Student in Blended Learning

Blended learning shifts the teacher’s role from knowledge provider to coach and mentor. This shift does not mean that teachers play a passive or less important role in student’s education. Quite the contrary, with blended learning, teachers can have an even more profound influence and effect on student’s learning. In the traditional model, the teacher is the provider of knowledge. Blended Learning, on the other hand, positions the student as an active pursuer of knowledge. So while students will spend more time learning at computers, they still need a great deal of guidance in learning how to learn. Below is a list of all the roles the teacher takes in the Blended Learning classroom:

- **Facilitator:** In the blended learning method, the role of the teacher changes, and they move from being the ‘Sage on the Stage’ to more of a ‘Guide on the side’.

The teacher’s main role is to facilitate the gaining of knowledge and understanding of information.

- **Coach and tutor:** A teacher needs to encourage students and celebrate their successes. Teacher should also works with them one-on-one during student learning time.
- **Classroom planners:** The blended classroom requires a teacher to opt for long-term planning of curriculum and instructions in advance. Curriculum planning as well as instructional strategies must be figured in advance even before the session starts. The curriculum design must feature essential built-in resources for accommodating differentiated instructional strategies as well as assistive elements, rather than changing the design later when such a user may opt for a course.
- **Content Experts:** A blended setting requires teachers to master the art of content creation as well as content utilization. Not only is it imperative for teachers to transform the stretched-out learning materials in quicker, succinct, and more engaging micro content, but also to render that content in different formats such as video, tutorials, learning through doing, eBooks, online lectures, podcasts, and others, so as to capture the learning style of diverse students in their classrooms.
- **Collaboration:** Students should be helped in figuring out, how to make collaborative opportunities productive as well as guidance on using online collaboration programs.
- **Opportunity for extension of learning:** Perhaps the most important aspect of metacognitive learning is a student’s ability to question, monitor, and explain his or her own learning. The role of the teacher here is immense—teaching students to understand their own learning and evaluate their own confusion. Ultimately, it is often the teacher who helps students identify their challenges and successes—and set achievable, high goals.
- **Analyzer of student data to support instructional decisions:** Technology makes it easier to collect and analyze immediate feedback and scores but only a teacher can determine the next best step for the class and each student.
- **Risk Loving:** The blended learning setting provides the perfect outlet for teachers to explore risk-taking and in fact risk-taking teachers with higher engagement statistics, fulfilled learning outcomes, as well as greater referrals from learners. Blended learning allows teachers to experiment with different instructional techniques, content strategies, as well as assessment formats to suit a diverse variety of learners for same set of learning outcomes.
- **Manager of effective differentiation of learning:** Teachers research and assign various resources for students to use for learning in a blended learning environment, both traditional and online, and they tailor levels for each student.
- **Evaluator:** Teachers should be able to assess and provide students with actionable feedback. Blended learning yields more frequent and more personal teacher interaction with individual students, teachers have the opportunity to deepen and strengthen student/teacher relationships. The trust that comes with close relationships can give teachers insights into students’ personal struggles and needs—insights which

empower teachers to comfort and coach students through challenges that often serve as obstacles to learning.

Conclusion

Blended learning, in theory, can be completed from anywhere at any time, and is ideally suited to all kind of students. However, more forward thinking schools are implementing similar methods of learning for younger students. The benefits are manifest in a more responsible learner, one that is constantly challenging, creating and discovering. Blended learning provides an appropriate balance between online instruction, which offers the interactive, tech-based learning, individualized pacing, and privacy that keep students continuously engaged and motivated, and teacher-led instruction, which personalizes the learning experience and adds the human elements of encouragement, compassion, and caring guidance that only teachers can give.

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