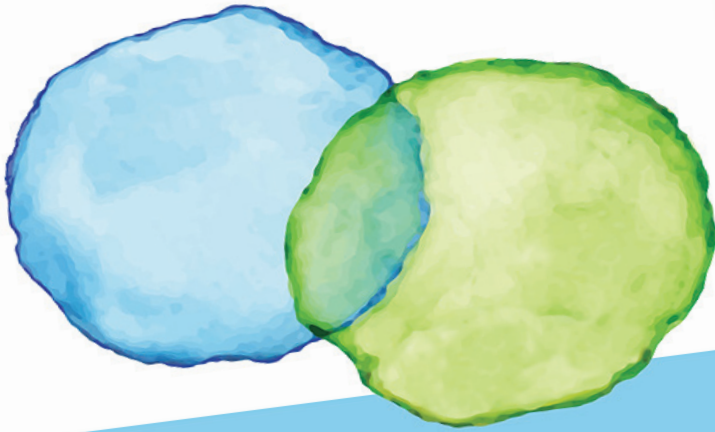STEPAN MEKHITARIAN

THE ESSENTIAL BLENDED LEARNING PD PLANNER

Where Classroom Practice Meets Distance Learning

CORWIN

Foreword by Michael Fullan

Thank you

FOR YOUR INTEREST IN CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Essential Blended Learning PD Planner* by Stepan Mekhitarian.

LEARN MORE about this title, including Features, Table of Contents and Reviews.

CORWIN

How Will Schools Transition Back to the Classroom?

This chapter will explore the successes and challenges of the distance learning experience and connect them to effective blended learning models that utilize a collaborative and constructivist—or meaning-making—learning approach. This connection will offer an opportunity to review your organization's vision for learning, develop a robust training and support program, and apply it to different elements of effective instruction.

LEVERAGING BEST PRACTICES FROM THE DISTANCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

As students return to the classroom, educators will lead the transition from distance learning back to in-person instruction. This is a critical opportunity to take advantage of the lessons learned from distance learning and implement instructional technology in the classroom using a blended learning model—an education program in which a student learns partly through online delivery of content and instruction with partial control over time, place, path, or pace (Knewton Blended Learning Infographic, 2014). Historically, distance learning has shown varying levels of effectiveness in terms of student success. However, critically exploring its instructional methodology and applying elements to a traditional classroom setting can result in great learning gains (Harris-Packer & Ségol, 2015).

**Part I:** A New Vision for Learning and Professional Development

Chapter 1: Elements of an Effective Blended Learning Classroom

- Effective instructional practices from distance learning
- Effective instructional practices from the traditional classroom
- A focus on conceptual understanding and constructivist learning

Which come from...
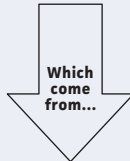
Chapter 2: Planning an Effective PD Program

- Peer observations in BL classrooms *(tips in Chapters 3 & 5)*
- PLCs focused on best practices *(tips in Chapters 3 & 4)*
- Tech integration with a focus on instruction *(tips in Chapters 3 & 4)*
- Research on BL theory and effective practices *(tips in Chapters 4 & 5)*
- Analysis of effective models in a BL classroom *(tips in Chapter 5)*
- Teacher workload sustainability *(tips in Chapter 5)*

That focuses on...
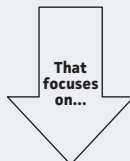
Part II: Applying PD Strategies to Instructional Practice

CH. 3: RIGOROUS LEARNING FOR ALL	*CH. 4:* PERSONALIZED ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK	*CH. 5:* CLASSROOM CULTURE
- Differentiation for equitable access - Constructivist learning opportunities - Effective questioning - Student collaboration	- Assessments to gather actionable data - Actionable feedback for all students - Facilitating self-monitoring - Peer feedback	- Digital citizenship training - Learning environments in a BL model - A collaborative learning culture - Tech integration and management

And leads to...

Part III: Bringing Training and Application Together in One Cohesive Program

Conclusion: Bringing It All Together

- Creating a vision based on key takeaways
- Focused leadership during the transition
- Building your professional development team
- Collaborating with students and parents as stakeholders
- Soliciting feedback on distance learning
- Sharing blended learning impact on student learning
- Preparing students for a new world

The dramatic shift to distance learning rapidly introduced instructional technology to millions of educators, but determining how technology should be utilized to enhance learning is a skill that educators need to master to effectively implement blended learning. Many educators were able to seamlessly adapt their instruction to the online space while others, who adopted instructional technology for the first time during COVID-19, did not have the extensive professional development (PD) support to learn how to leverage technology for learning in effective ways. There are several instructional practices that must always be considered when designing a learning experience, whether in a distance learning environment or the traditional classroom:

- Differentiated supports for equitable access
- Actionable feedback to students
- Effective questioning to facilitate constructivist learning
- Student collaboration
- Assessments to gather actionable data
- Highly rigorous learning opportunities

Effective instructional practices that promote these key features of high-quality learning look different in traditional and online classrooms. Figure 1.1 demonstrates how to dramatically impact student success by taking the best of both worlds—our most effective classroom strategies and online strategies—to create a blended learning program that supports all learners.

FIGURE 1.1 ● Elements of an Effective Blended Learning Classroom

Effective instructional practices applied in a **Traditional Classroom**

Highly Effective Blended Learning Classroom

Effective instructional practices applied in **Distance Learning**
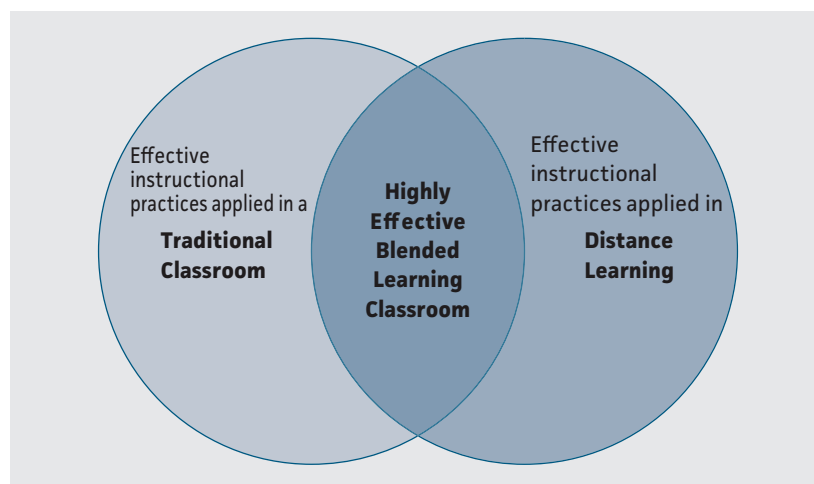
Determining *what* to incorporate in the blended learning classroom and *how* to do it are at the core of the transition. Establish a professional development task force comprised of instructional leaders at your school. Start with a collaborative analysis of successes during distance learning, and compare findings to pedagogical practices before the transition. Use Figure 1.2 to facilitate a conversation with faculty members and instructional leaders to identify how instructional practices differed during distance learning. Identify the instructional practices enhanced by the distance learning experience and the evidence that validates these claims. Be sure to solicit feedback from students to build their capacity as insightful learners, as well as to get their perspective on strategies and resources that helped them learn during distance learning (more information on resources to gather this information can be found in the conclusion). Use these findings and the Figure 1.2 to create a list of practices that can be enhanced by instructional technology in a blended learning classroom for PD planning. These practices will form the basis of the PD program we explore later.

Be sure to solicit feedback from students as well to get their perspective on strategies and resources that helped them learn during distance learning.

As you review your findings in Figure 1.2 on page 11. look to see if the practices you list are online versions of traditional classroom practices or if they utilize instructional technology to enhance rigor and promote meaning-making and discovery. Online versions of traditional classroom practices simply emulate traditional classroom teaching online. In these cases, technology serves as a vessel to convey information in the same way it would be delivered in a traditional classroom setting. In a true blended learning model, classroom practices and norms shift to facilitate student discovery. Figure 1.3 demonstrates examples of each approach to online learning. The more robust approaches to blended learning in Figure 1.3 show how a teacher can advance learning by using technology to develop activities that facilitate discovery based on constructivist learning. Work with your task force to fill out your own examples in Figure 1.3. This will help you develop a common understanding of the kinds of rich learning experiences instructional technology can facilitate.

FIGURE 1.2 ● Determining What Distance Learning Practices to Incorporate in Your Blended Learning Program

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE	IMPLEMENTATION DURING TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION	IMPLEMENTATION DURING DISTANCE LEARNING	WAYS DISTANCE INSTRUCTION ENHANCED LEARNING	EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS	POTENTIAL IMPACT IN A BLENDED LEARNING CLASSROOM
Differentiated supports for equitable access					
Actionable feedback to students					
Effective questioning to facilitate constructivist learning					
Student collaboration					
Assessments to gather actionable data					
Highly rigorous learning opportunities					

Figure I.2 is available as a downloadable template on the Companion Website at Resources.Corwin.com/BlendedLearningPlanner.

FIGURE 1.3 ● Maximizing Technology for Learning

	ONLINE VERSIONS OF TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM PRACTICES	UTILIZE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE RIGOR AND PROMOTE MEANING-MAKING AND DISCOVERY
Math Example	The teacher records a screencast introducing the Pythagorean Theorem and explaining how it can be used to calculate the hypotenuse of a right triangle. The teacher then assigns several problems with figures of right triangles and asks students to calculate the hypotenuse for each one.	The teacher poses a question involving a quadrilateral backyard and provides rigorous prompts to facilitate discussion and online research, ultimately leading to students deriving the Pythagorean Theorem, developing an adjustable model, and applying it to solve the initial problem.
Social Science Example	The teacher directs students to an article and an online documentary film about important historical figures during the American Revolution and asks students to select one figure and write a short paper about their contribution. Students are expected to conduct their own research and include it in the paper.	The teacher asks students to research and identify several key factors that contributed to the outcome of the American Revolution. Students choose one figure from each side and prepare a short paper explaining the impact of that person. Then, student groups combine their summaries in an online, interactive format and share with the rest of the class. This can include video presentations, interactive maps, and virtual interviews with experts on the subject. Based on the group projects, students vote on the impactful figure and justify their selection.
Your example:		
Your example:		
Your example:		

Figure 1.3 is available as a downloadable template on the Companion Website at Resources.Corwin.com/BlendedLearningPlanner.

WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING?

To maximize the instructional impact of blended learning, we must understand the potential of instructional technology

and its role in the classroom. Instructional technology can dramatically impact all students' learning if educators are trained to implement it effectively (Pregot, 2013). Blended learning revolutionizes the traditional relationship between teachers, students, and content by shifting the roles of all three in the classroom. In a traditional classroom, the teacher's role has been to share content knowledge directly with students. In the blended learning classroom, students drive the learning process through discovery and by exploring content and how it builds on their previous knowledge. This also builds students' capacity for self-monitoring and independence, both critical levers of culturally responsive learning.

The distance learning experience rapidly expanded technical proficiency, but to truly move toward a blended learning model—whether in an online or classroom setting—we must develop instructional practices to promote the meaning-making and differentiated approach.

The role of the teacher is to support and carefully facilitate this student-driven learning experience. Blended learning includes many of the characteristics of effective learning approaches praised by educators and researchers—differentiated, self-paced, discovery based, and collaborative—but utilizes technology to facilitate these types of learning. Research by Milthorpe et al. (2018) confirms "many of the narratives about blended learning . . . in terms of increased student engagement, access, interactivity, and flexibility" (p. 357).

In the past, limitations in technology, pedagogical research, and reluctance to engage with technology have impacted the effectiveness and scope of this type of instruction. The distance learning experience rapidly expanded technical proficiency, but to truly move toward a blended learning model—whether in an online or classroom setting—we must develop instructional practices to promote the meaning-making and differentiated approach. This is especially important as we consider the possibility of more distance learning scenarios in the future (Preston, 2020). Blended learning's mix or "blend" of face-to-face instruction and online experiences enhances learning through flexible pacing and differentiated approaches to address diverse learning modalities and ensure all students have access to rigorous learning opportunities.

The differentiated and highly individualized nature of blended learning lends itself perfectly to the constructivist learning approach by giving students ownership over their learning and allowing them to learn through discovery. Constructivist learning has been championed by education researchers such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and Dewey for decades. It is built on the idea that learners make meaning by building new learning experiences on their previous knowledge and experiences. Researcher Ültanır (2012) argues that "real understanding is only constructed based on learners' previous experience and background knowledge."

The differentiated and highly individualized nature of blended learning lends itself perfectly to the constructivist learning approach by giving students ownership over their learning and allowing them to learn through discovery.

The blended learning model makes it possible to give each student this kind of ownership over their own learning, allowing them to learn through discovery and "construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come into contact" (Ültanır, 2012, p. 195). Throughout the book, we will focus on developing blended learning opportunities that support this meaning-making approach rather than simply using technology as a platform for traditional classroom practices.

In the blended learning classroom, students drive the learning process through discovery and by exploring content and how it builds on their previous knowledge.

BLENDED VS. DISTANCE LEARNING

It is important to distinguish blended learning from distance learning, which offers instruction similar to the classroom experience in an entirely online setting. Courses taken virtually are examples of distance learning, while blended learning mixes "face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning" (Singh, 2003). Distance learning may include live instruction online and self-paced learning, but it lacks the face-to-face classroom and physical exploration components

such as manipulatives and lab experiments that are critical for many learning modalities. As Singh (2003) explained:

> Learning requirements and preferences of each learner tend to be different. Organizations must use a blend of learning approaches in their strategies to get the right content in the right format to the right people at the right time. Blended learning combines multiple delivery media that are designed to complement each other and promote learning and application-learned behavior. . . . The concept of blended learning is rooted in the idea that learning is not just a one-time event—learning is a continuous process. Blending provides various benefits over using any single learning delivery medium alone. (p. 52)

When implemented with fidelity, blended learning also offers greater balance between teaching and planning. Differentiated, rigorous learning opportunities involve more planning but less direct instruction in the classroom, so the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning and has more time to plan during school hours. This approach enhances learning for students as they learn through collaborative and constructivist learning activities. In addition, it fosters workload sustainability for teachers. Chapter 5 will address sustainability in more detail.

BLENDED LEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

As technology has become more prevalent in classrooms over the years, many schools in affluent communities have adopted collaborative and constructivist learning opportunities that facilitate creative thinking and problem solving, while schools in communities with a lower socioeconomic status have focused on basic skills training to help students catch up on skills needed for graduation. While both are important, this discrepancy creates a clearer path toward leadership for students in the affluent schools. To ensure all students are successful, we must incorporate collaborative and constructivist learning opportunities in all classrooms and not wait until all basic skills are mastered. Utilize the power of blended learning to achieve both. Our students cannot afford to wait for those opportunities.

Moreover, it is critical to understand the importance and positive impact of blended learning on students. Aside from it being an effective approach to equity in the classroom, researchers Ling et al. (2010) have found that student satisfaction with the blended learning approach is very high. Blended learning can be a powerful tool to help students understand instructional content and apply it to real-world challenges that are critical for 21st century learning (Beckem & Watkins, 2012). Researchers cite the enhanced learning experience blended learning provides and the positive feedback received from students using the approach. Bonk and Graham (2004) thus highlight the many merits of blended learning for both teachers and students, including "(1) pedagogical richness, (2) access to knowledge, (3) social interaction, (4) personal agency, (5) cost effectiveness, and (6) ease of revision" (p. 7). The merits—particularly the first four—reinforce the potential of blended learning to transform the educational experience for students through constructivist learning opportunities.

Student mastery of course content and the development of critical thinking skills, and not technology, must remain the focus of any instructional plan.

Blended learning is not the result or goal of effective instruction, but rather an approach to help students understand content through a constructivist approach and, at a deeper level, through increased levels of individualized differentiation and a self-starting model. Student mastery of course content and the development of critical thinking skills, and not technology, must remain the focus of any instructional plan.

TECH TIP

To maintain the focus on instruction over technology, avoid initially implementing blended learning as a one-on-one model in which every student has a computer at one time. Without proper training and support, that may lead to an overemphasis on technology. Instead, begin with three students for each computer and rotate through activities to ensure that instruction is front and center. As students and teachers get used to using technology as needed for learning, more devices can be introduced. This also reduces the initial investment in technology needed to begin an effective blended learning program with instructional technology.