ONLINE AND BLENDED INSTRUCTION

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Introduction

Blended and online courses involve the use of technology for the delivery of language instruction. Both have been shown to place considerable practical and pedagogical demands on teachers. One obvious difference with classroom teaching is the (increased) use of technology. Teachers need to master the tools for communicating with students online, developing electronic materials, and assessing students' online work. Perhaps more importantly, at the pedagogical level online instruction requires the ability to observe and direct classroom interaction and group dynamics from a distance. Monitoring student engagement, placing students in virtual pairs or groups, and giving feedback, are only some of the aspects of language instruction that can be quite different, and challenging, online. More broadly speaking, blended and online instruction offer potential for a greater focus on the learner, and a change in the role of the teacher to one of a facilitator of learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Online and blended instruction can increase opportunities for flexible learning, with the delivery of instruction and further learning opportunities at any time and the potential for increased self-directed learning. But the realisation of this potential depends on the ability of teachers to draw on the pedagogical advantages of these particular learning contexts, while avoiding their pitfalls. In this chapter we look at current thinking and best practice in online and blended learning.

Background

Blended and online learning have been used in language education since the arrival of the internet, but have gained dramatically in popularity in recent years because of the widespread availability of computers and – crucially – faster internet access, making the real-time use of multimedia possible. Sometimes the term blended learning is used to describe the use of different approaches to teaching within one course (White 2003), but generally (and in this chapter) it is used to refer to the combination of face-to-face and online teaching. Similarly, blended learning is sometimes used to describe classroom teaching that uses technology (such as an Interactive Whiteboard) but here we focus on online delivery. The previous chapter in this book deals with the broader use of technology in CALL. Blended learning thus sits on a continuum from less to more inclusion of online delivery, with purely online courses delivering all instruction online.

Face to Face	Blended	online

Use of technology

Online learning is not necessarily the same as distance learning. Although distance education can be delivered entirely online, other forms of instruction and communication are possible (and in many countries are still the norm), such as through printed self-study materials, the use of audio CDs, and communication via mail. Another difference is that distance education takes place away from the host institution, whereas in onlne instruction this is not necessarily the case. Unlike in distance education, students may all be local to the institution and may even participate in the online class from within the institution. They are certainly likely to use central facilities such as libraries, and to meet other students in person.

In the 1990s high hopes were expressed for online instruction. Some predicted the end of classroom teaching and the delivery of all language teaching online, enabling everyone to get access to eduction cheaply, easily, and from anywhere. It soon became clear, however, that in reality there were many challenges, both technical as well as pedagogical, as a result of which blended learning became more popular as a way to draw on the strengths of both face-to-face and online instruction. This also meant that the initial link between online and flexible or open learning became less clear. Although online instruction can be used to deliver courses flexibly, for example by allowing participants to learn at their own pace and by allowing them to choose different course modules based on individual needs, it is probably now more common to see online instruction delivered as a 'regular' language course, with a set curriculum, led by a teacher, and delivered within a given time frame. Blended learning in particular, is now a regular part of language classrooms around the world.

Many reasons are given for the use of online instruction but an important part of the rationale is the increased opportunity for exposure to (authentic input in) the target language and opportunities for interaction. Recent research has reiterated the importance of giving learners ample access to the target language (e.g. N.Ellis 2002a,2002b). Online instruction can offer this, especially in foreign language learning contexts, for example by building on authentic materials available on the internet and deliverd in the context of task-based instruction (for an investigation of the relationship between task-based language teaching and technology, see Thomas and Reinders 2010). Similarly, the roles of output (Swain 1985) and interaction (Long 1996) have been shown to be crucial in the development of L2 competency.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been shown to be beneficial in encouraging communication between language learners and to have a number of benefits over face-to-face contexts, such as the opportunity for the development of intercultural communicative competence (Peterson, 2010). In addition to these pedagogical benefits, blended and online instruction can allow for a degree of flexibility in the delivery, and as such can offer practical advantages for students who may be unable to attend classes in situ or at fixed times. One possible effect of this is that by encouraging learners to work more with other learners, and possibly without the direct or constant intervention of the teacher, blended and online learning can help to foster learner autonomy, or at least to make learners aware of the opportunities for continued (self-)study after completion of the course. Finally, the use of online technologies has been shown to be a motivator for many students. Although it is not clear to what extent this is as a result of a novelty effect that will wear off as the use of technology becomes more commonplace, but at least the use of online instruction allows teachers to choose a delivery format that is more in line with learners' expectations and the ways in which they are likely to use the language outside the classroom (Benson and Reinders 2010).

The challenge for blended and online instruction is to establish best practice, based on research into how learners learn online, and how teachers teach online. We will now look at the different approaches to blended and online instruction.

Delivery formats

There are different options for including an online component into an existing course. These range from the occasional use of online resources to the delivery of (part of) the course online. Many textbooks include supplementary materials that students can complete in their own time and several publishers produce online repositories that can be used as stand-alone materials or as part of a course. Building on materials that are linked with the classroom textbook has the advantage that there is a continuity between what the students do in class and online. Well-designed materials encourage students to expand on what has been covered online and provide the necessary scaffolding for further independent exploration of the language. Many materials, however, are more limited in scope and simply offer additional practice materials. In this case, teachers will have to create their own materials, or devise tasks that require interaction with real-life resources, such as, for example, webquests (Godwin-Jones 2004).

A common way to include an online component in a blended course is by using computer-mediated communication (CMC) to encourage interaction in the target language. Learners in the course can be paired or grouped and given specific tasks or more general guidelines for interaction. Similarly, learners can be encouraged to communicate with native speakers to further practise the language. CMC can be done through text chatting, or by using voice (and video). For many years text chatting was the most widely used technology and a substantial body of research exists to show that it significantly increases student participation, that it lowers anxiety (most likely because it is perceived to be more anonymous and thus less threatening), and increases motivation (Kötter 2003). Studies such as those by Chun (1994), Smith (2003) have also shown that the type of interaction in a chat environment can lead to instances of negotiation of meaning and focus on form, which have been shown to be beneficial for L2 acquisition. Recently, the use of voice communication has become common, especially through the use of VOIP (voice over internet protocol) applications such

as Skype. With such programs now becoming available on mobile phones, the opportunities for spoken interaction between learners, even those located in different countries, becomes more feasible.

Materials, tasks, and communication tools can be made available through VLEs or Virtual Learning Environments. Many institutions use VLEs such as Blackboard or Moodle to make these available to students. Such programs make it easy for teachers to monitor students' participation and to give feedback. Recently, more informal tools that emphasise 'horizontal' communication and learner participation, such as social networking sites like Facebook, and Multi-User Virtual Environments like Second Life (Linden Research Inc. 2008), are starting to be used as ways of motivating students and to encourage them to actively contribute to the online course community. A detailed description is beyond the scope of this chapter but such programs do seem to offer particulary accessible ways of including an online component into a course (Thomas 2009).

Best practice in online instruction

All of the delivery formats mentioned above have in common that they place certain demands on teachers that are not normally found in 'traditional' classrooms. One obvious skill set teachers will need to have is to use the technology effectively. This applies at the practical level, in terms of the ability to use computers and software, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in terms of the ability to find appropriate online materials. The textbook used in class may come with a supplementary website and it is the teacher's job to determine the relevance and appropriacy of that resource. Another skill is the ability to find *opportunities* for learning and teaching online. What is the best technology for the pedagogic goal at hand? Should use be made of oral or written communication tools? Of synchronous or asynchronous communication? What is the best tool for the job? In many cases the tools may be there but the teacher will need to find ways to package them together with appropriate instructions, activities, and support; what is the best combination and how can they be best put together? Questions such as this have recently been investigated more explicitly (Hubbard 2006). Clearly, the practical and the pedagogical soon overlap and we therefore now consider the specific *teaching* skills that are needed online.

One starting point is to look at how teachers and students themselves experience online instruction and to identify key skills from this. A number of studies have found (cf. Mechaca and Bekele 2008) that teaching online is perceived by many teachers to be both exciting and frustrating at the same time. Technical problems (poor computer facilities, unreliable internet connections, poor IT support) are a common concern, but many teachers also feel ill-prepared for relinquishing some of the comfort and control that a familiar classroom offers. Useful insights also come from the end-users, the students who participate in online courses (White 2003, chapter 5). Students commonly report a sense of isolation, even loneliness, when working online without direct contact with other students. Clearly, teachers have an important role to establish and maintain group dynamics (see below). Students also frequently report finding it difficult to work without clear guidelines. Tasks that may seem exciting and motivating to the teacher, perhaps especially those that ask students to interact with native speakers, can be daunting to learners, unless sufficient scaffolding takes place and students feel they are supported throughout. This also helps to mitigate a further problem, which is the (perceived) need to maintain greater self-discipline in online study. The greater flexibility and

independence students have on the one hand, may, without proper preparation and guidance, become a liability to learning.

From the above it is clear that teachers need certain skills to successfully teach online. Many of these relate to supporting the learning process and establishing and encouraging participation in an online community. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one rationale for language teaching online is the opportunity it offers for interaction, either between learners, or between learners and members of the target language community. It is crucial then for teachers to know how to encourage this communication. Simply creating an online forum or setting up a discussion group has been shown not to be successful (Mason 1998). Learners need to understand what is expected of them in terms of the topic, the type of language, its purpose, and the amount and frequency with which to post. Writing or speaking activities that do not build on the available resources online or make some real-world connections, are less likely to be motivating to students, and are less likely to be successful (Reeder 2010).

Online interaction is less likely where learners do not feel they are part of a community and do not feel comfortable to communicate. An important role for the teacher is to create a sense of community, which has been shown to correlate highly with student achievement (Brown 2001). In blended learning this may be easier as students know each other from class, but in all cases, group dynamics can change dramatically online. Shy learners may become vocal and confident ones disappear altogether. Managing group dynamics online is a delicate task that involves taking into account the social and affective aspects of learning, and how these differ between the physical and the virtual domain. This involves a certain amount of learner training as well; no matter how tech-savvy, not all students are naturally good at *learning* online, especially not with and from others (Pegrum 2009). Another way to ensure student participation is to create tasks that *require* collaboration to be completed, such as information gap or opinion gap activities. Although each context is different, a general guideline for teachers is to be active (plan ahead, prepare the online component of your course), proactive (notice problems early on), and present (be online frequently, be visible, post, reply, communicate).

The presence of the teacher is a key characteristic of successful online interaction. Learners should not simply be left to themselves but be encouraged, supported, and where helpful, directly taught. Online interaction requires a great deal of monitoring on the part of the teacher, and because signals that may help to identify problems early on in class are absent or less visible (students showing up late, not contributing to class discussions), it is important to have mechanisms in place to know when to intervene (for example, by counting the number of blog posts or discussion threads a student has replied to). Related to monitoring is the topic of feedback. Because the teacher is not as visible online, it is easy for learners to feel as if they have been abandoned. Frequent, individualised, and detailed feedback is as important online as it is in the classroom (if not more so). It is also important to consider the format of the feedback; mostly, feedback online consists of written comments (either though posts or chat). Different learners respond differently to different modes of feedback, and it is useful to combine oral as well as written feedback, in a variety of forms (e.g. a one-to-one Skype conversation to discuss overall progress, a reply to a blog post with a brief evaluative comment, a 'thumbs up' (the 'like' option) on Facebook, etc).

What the above implies is that teaching online involves a great deal of *support* and *facilitation* of learning, perhaps even more than direct instruction. The benefits of online delivery are mainly in the area of language *use*. Although explicit teaching, controlled

practice, and exercises can certainly be presented online, the added value over classroom instruction is the ability to encourage learners to learn by doing, to learn from others, and to explore opportunities *outside* the immediate pedagogical environment offered by the course. The ability to coach learners, to encourage risk-taking, to make them feel supported, to develop positive group dynamics, are, then, some of the types of skills that a successful online teacher needs. These are not easy skills to develop, but they are rewarding and help to create a more successful learning experience for the students.

Conclusions

Blended and online teaching share a potential to enhance regular language instruction by opening up the language classroom to the outside world. Both can be motivating for learners, exciting for the teacher, and meaningful for language development. However, both also come with specific challenges and many of these are only now starting to be addressed. For example, what is the ideal 'blend' between online and classroom instruction? Although it is clear that explicitly linking classroom and online instruction is pedagogically sensible, it is not always clear how to do this. Mechanisms for facilitating interaction and feedback, and balancing direction instruction with the need to encourage a more independent exploration of the language through using it, are challenging at the best of times, but become even more demanding online. The challenge for individual teachers, as well as for language teaching as a profession, is to work out how to avoid the drawbacks and build on the best that both worlds have to offer.

(3300 words)

Key readings

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Resources

following immediately after the conclusions, up to 10 key readings for the topic. Key works you would regard as "essential reading" for a teacher/teacher educator to follow up. These should be in a separate section from work cited within the chapter

https://www.calico.org/a-109-Becoming%20a%20Webhead%20Bridging%20the%20Gap%20from%20Classroom%20to%20Blended%20or%20Online%20Teaching.html

Laurillard 2002
Please list full reference details for all those used in the article. As the book is directed at practitioners, please do not use overly extensive referencing in the chapter.

Bits and pieces
Sloman 2003: first use of blended learning

Blended learning focuses on optimizing achievement of learning objectives by applying the 'right' learning technologies to match the 'right' personal learning style to transfer the 'right' skills to the 'right' person at the 'right' time" (Singh & Reed, 2001).

> Research by Kelm (1992) and Chun (1994) confirms that this type of CMC represents a valuable tool in CALL. These researchers showed that the anonymity afforded by CMC provides an effective means to facilitate learner-centred target language interaction. Their studies provide evidence for enhanced participation, reduced anxiety and types of strategy use associated with language acquisition. Following on this early work, the other studies examined here (Blake, 2000; Darhower, 2002; Fernandez-Garcia & Martinez-Arbelaiz, 2002; Lee, 2001, 2002; Smith, 2003a, 2003b) have demonstrated that the use of tasks in CMC provides a means to promote beneficial types of interaction hypothesized in psycholinguistic and sociocultural SLA research. Taken as whole, this research has been consistent in showing that the use of tasks in real-time CMC environments presents an effective means to elicit negotiation of meaning focusing on new lexis.

Dear Hayo

Many thanks indeed for accepting our invitation to contribute a chapter to the *The Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Language Teaching*. We have had an excellent response and are now ready to move ahead.

We indicated in our last letter to you that we would forward more information about the format for the chapter. A guide to the kind of style/tone we are aiming for is the *The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Teacher Education* (Burns & Richards, 2009) and *The Cambridge Guide to TESOL* (Carter & Nunan, 2001). We are happy to forward sample chapters from Burns and Richards if these are not available to you.

Our readership will be students studying in undergraduate and graduate TESOL programs, language teachers and teacher educators. So, although the chapter should draw on theory and research and the key issues in each topic area, the primary aim is to focus on implications for effective practice. We envisage the format and major headings to be:

1. Introduction: 1-2 paragraphs that overview the scope of the chapter

2. Background: 3-4 paragraphs providing a brief overview of major/noteworthy trends in the development of the area up to the present

3. Key issues: this section will be the main part of the chapter. Please use sub-headings within this section appropriate to the scope of your topic

4. Conclusions: rounding off your chapter – this section could include future trends, challenges, questions for research/practice, etc.

5. Key readings: following immediately after the conclusions, up to 10 key readings for the topic. Key works you would regard as "essential reading" for a teacher/teacher educator to follow up. These should be in a separate section from work cited within the chapter.

6. References: Please list full reference details for all those used in the article. As the book is directed at practitioners, please do not use overly extensive referencing in the chapter.

It would also help us in editing the volume if you could:

- Follow the heading and sub-heading format in CGSLTE (block capitals 14 point for headings; block capitals 12 point for sub-headings; bold for all headings)

- Use 12 pt Times Roman font throughout for text

- Use APA referencing in-text and for reference list at the end of the chapter

- Keep within the word limit of no more than 3,500 words

We will send separate emails regarding the abstracts you sent in when we have received responses from all contributors. If you have not already sent us an abstract we would appreciate receiving it soon, so that we can check for any possible overlap among chapters.

We will be sending a TOC including author names as soon as it is finalised. Of course, as with our previous Cambridge Guide, the first draft of this volume will be submitted to CUP for review and we envisage that some revision will inevitably be necessary. We will forward review comments to individual authors, plus our own suggestions for any revisions.

We are very much looking forward to receiving your contribution. Please don't hesitate to contact Becky with any queries.

With best wishes and thanks
Anne and Jack

Abstract

Blended and online courses involve the use of technology for the delivery of language instruction. Whereas in online teaching all instruction is done with technology, in blended teaching some instruction is done online and some in the classroom. What all forms of blended and online learning have in common is that they have been shown to place considerable practical and pedagogical demands on teachers. One obvious difference with classroom teaching is the (increased) use of technology. Teachers need to master the tools for communicating with students online, developing electronic materials, and assessing students' online work. Perhaps more importantly, at the pedagogical level online instruction requires the ability to observe and direct classroom interaction and group dynamics from a distance. Monitoring student engagement, placing students in virtual pairs or groups, and giving feedback, are only some of the aspects of language instruction that can be quite different, and challenging, online. More broadly speaking, blended and online instruction offer potential for a greater focus on the learner, and a change in the role of the teacher to one of a facilitator of learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Online and blended instruction can increase opportunities for flexible learning, with the delivery of instruction and further learning opportunities at any time and the potential for increased self-directed learning. But the realisation of this potential depends on the ability of teachers to draw on the pedagogical advantages of these particular learning contexts, while avoiding their pitfalls. In this chapter we look at current thinking and best practice on how to do this.

1-2 paragraphs that overview the scope of the chapter

Use the abstract
Mention mobile learning

3-4 paragraphs providing a brief overview of major/noteworthy trends in the development of the area up to the present

Key issues

this section will be the main part of the chapter. Please use sub-headings within this section appropriate to the scope of your topic

rounding off your chapter – this section could include future trends, challenges, questions for research/practice, etc.