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INNOVATIONS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

In today's modern world, technology has an ever-changing effect on many things – and this includes English language learning and teaching. Computers have become extremely valuable teaching tools and have opened up a whole new world of online learning. Some of the most effective educational establishments are using dynamic digital tools such as **elearning software** alongside more traditional classroom practices to create blended learning models.

Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home. The modalities along each student's learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. When designed and implemented appropriately, blended learning supports some degree of personalized learning (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). Blended learning embraces the use of online environments to offer complementary learning experiences that allow face-to-face time and space to be used more efficiently and effectively (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Glazer, 2011; Hoffman, 2006; Johnson et al., 2015; McGee & Reis, 2012; Murphy et. al., 2014; O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015).

The challenge for teachers is learning how to design and implement an effective blended learning course that is both efficient and effective. Teacher preparation programs have the opportunity and obligation to meet this challenge by

offering formal training in online and blended instruction paired with occasions for experiential learning and reflection (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). [1, p. 8]

There are different types of blended learning. In general, this type of instruction empowers the teacher to work in a more collaborative manner during class time, which allows for a more efficient study with the intent on greater student learning.

A flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the lecture and homework has actually been reversed. The classroom lecture is viewed at home either through online videos or video podcasts. After viewing an online lecture, the students have the ability to chat with each other through a discussion forum and to note questions that they have from the lecture. The homework is then completed in the classroom and will typically include some type of activity such as collaborative work with a team or a hands-on lab.

Alternative Credit Recovery. PLATO is an example of an online learning option outside of the realms of traditional schooling. High school students can remain in school and earn the credits necessary for graduation. The PLATO classroom offers self-paced courses which students can work on completing both inside of the school and at home. There are pre-tests given to place students in the appropriate courses, and they have the opportunity to master the content and meet the rigorous academic standards set by the school district. The course is facilitated by a credentialed teacher, and upon completion the student can earn course credit.

Social Media Blending. There are many ways to integrate social media into the classroom setting. By integrating social media, students can show mastery of content through a variety of digital tools such as blogging, Skype, Edmodo or video conferencing. Classmates have the option to constantly share knowledge and interact with each other well beyond the hours spent in the classroom and online discussions can become engaging.

Project-Based Learning. PBL is hands on inquiry and collaborative based learning model in which students seek answers to a real world challenge or problem. It is a relevant and student-driven project completed in the classroom with presentations given to an audience. If students access content at home—e.g, researching, compiling data, and general independent work—the majority of their class time can be spent working collaboratively with their teams at school or university.

Moodle is a course management system that gives teachers options to post assignments, lectures, videos, and much more. Students can interact with each other through discussion forums, private messaging and chat rooms. Students have the ability to upload completed assignments by attaching files. Grades are added to the gradebook on the same site and students can also view feedback given by the teacher. Moodle performs well when used in addition to face-to-face meetings.

Blended learning offers many opportunities for both the teacher and the student that a traditional brick and mortar classroom may not. With the increasing demands of state standards and busy school days, blended learning permits students to learn a portion of the academic content at home and gives teachers the ability to engage students in a richer, deeper, and more meaningful context in the classroom.

In conclusion, blended learning enables the teacher to become more of a participant in student learning and can help facilitate student mastery of content with enriching learning activities introduced and completed when the class meets face to face.

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