

THE ROLE OF BLOGS IN A BLENDED LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Сургай Світлана Олександрівна,

кандидат педагогічних наук,

доцент кафедри української та іноземних мов,

Національна академія керівних кадрів культури і мистецтв

Introduction. Nothing is more constant than change. We as teachers know this, and strive to incorporate new techniques of teaching into our daily work. Obviously, with the plethora of technologies being accessible today, it would be downright impossible to neglect a broadening of the teaching experience without examining some of the advantages these techniques offer to both, teachers and students alike.

Purpose and problem statement. One of the phrases we hear a lot about recently is “blended learning” [1]. What had once been thought as phrase to describe efforts of employees in the workplace to continue learning while being actively working in their respective fields, the principle of blended learning is easily transferable into the more traditional setting of higher education. Let us examine this closer:

The main material. Blended Learning, often commonly referred to as just “BL”, seems to be a buzzword in teaching, and in particular in teaching languages. The phrase first appeared in the corporate environment when referring to a combination of traditional work with a continued academic experience enjoyed by employees. Rather than simply taking a proverbial ‘sabbatical’ for broadening one’s knowledge, in-house training –often delivered via videos, the web, or self-teaching literature – became the key to the enhanced learning experience for many. The tremendous cost efficiency for employers’ added value without diminishing the overall productivity.

In the educational sphere there are three distinct definitions for blended learning [2]:

1. A face-to-face approach, often delivered via web-based classes. This method is closest to the traditional classroom environment, though incorporating the modern means of communication available today. This method is usually enhanced by the use of traditional tools, such as textbooks.

2. A pure “e-learning environment”: This is the case when no face-to-face activity occurs. The sole communication between the student and the teacher is tech-based. Technologies that may be used include eMails, internet phone/chat, etc.

3. A goal driven combination of several pedagogic methods that does not take into consideration any chosen technology. Any classwork would be described by this category that combines the ‘constructivist’- and ‘transmission’ approach. (e.g. Any coursework that showcases elements of a so-called ‘present-practice-produce method, and/or task-based learning)

With the rapid growth of new technologies, the term ‘BL’ is undergoing constant development. However, a key factor that must be addressed in the development or implementation of any new medium for the purpose of teaching is the appropriateness of said medium in relation to the desired goals. That is to say that the tools utilized must benefit the teaching and learning activity. To cite one example here: A student will greatly benefit from a more traditional face-to-face encounter with a teacher, particular when looking at the oral abilities of speaking a language. However, abstract thought processes that are a key to understanding a new language are oftentimes best delivered via online tools rather than live discussions. Students, however, oftentimes express a preference for one or the other method of delivery.

As mentioned in the beginning, there is a plethora of approaches for incorporating BL into the learning experience. Blogs offer one of these approaches, as they can be used across the board, offering a sheer limitless interaction between students and teachers. Students can be encouraged to become active as well by blogging their own contributions, providing a faster and more gratifying learning experience through cooperation and self-expression. Motivation of the students becomes enhanced, as they are more actively engaged.

Blogging is an important component of the English learning course. Posts and comments are a graded requirement. Students benefit from having specific guidelines

for blogging and commenting, and these vary according to course goals. Guidelines help students to understand not only the most important aspects of the assignment, but also how writing on the blog benefits their learning. Students are assigned a specific number of mandatory posts and comments, although some students enjoy the blog so much that they often exceeded these requirements.

Instructors recommend giving students specific guidelines for writing on a blog by explaining the key elements of a good post or comment. A teacher sometimes may join the conversation in the comments section, which serves to model scholarly discourse and to clear up confusion. Moreover, this practice helps students to understand that the instructor cares about their learning.

One of the reasons why it is so important to look at the benefits offered by BL nowadays lies in the question for the search of 'best practice': The identification of the best mix of delivery of knowledge, providing the most effective learning experience. Blogs can add flexibility to the lessons if the teacher highlights exceptional blog postings during the class time.

The successful implementation of blogs as teaching tools require a number of fundamentals: the teacher has a larger presence and involvement, he/she is seen as a guide in building the framework of the desired activity. As such, a teacher will set the platform in terms of overall activity (such as frequency, initiative by the students, etc.), while providing accompanying input, such as additional reading and additional information on the subject at hand.

Conclusions. While the overall topic of BL is too vast to be dealt with in a sole document, it should suffice to state that the new technology offers a tremendous opportunity of the improvement and enhancement of the learning experience overall. It is the suggestion here to investigate further options for the implementation and subsequent integration of teaching models based on the usage of blogs in the overall educational experience. Key factors are: the interaction between students and teachers and the relation between content and blogs.

REFERENCES

1. Conole G. 'Stepping over the edge: the implications of new technologies for education' / G. Conole, M. J. W. Lee, C. McLoughlin / Web 2.0-Based E-

Learning: Applying Social Informatics for Tertiary Teaching. — Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing, 2009 – 483p

2. De Freitas S., Conole G. 'Learners experiences: how pervasive and integrative tools influence expectations of study' / R. Sharpe, H. Beetham, S De Freitas / Rethinking Learning for a Digital Age. — London: Routledge, — 2010 — 406p. – pp. 15–30.

3. Dudeney G., Hockly N. How to teach English with technology / G. Dudeney, N Hockly — Pearson Education Limited, 2009 – 386p.