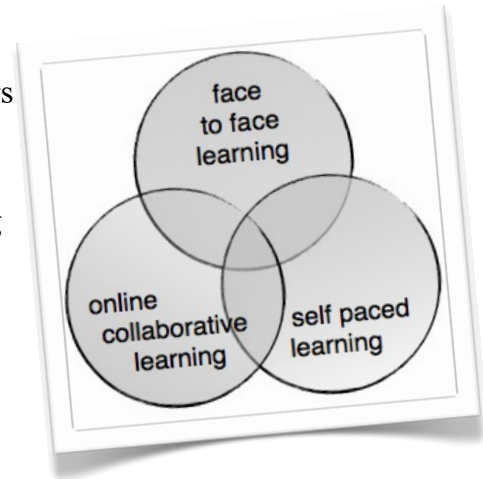


How to do blended learning—the role of the instructor

Literacy instructors and learners find that using a blended approach to learning may involve changes to some of the ways they are used to learning and facilitating learning.

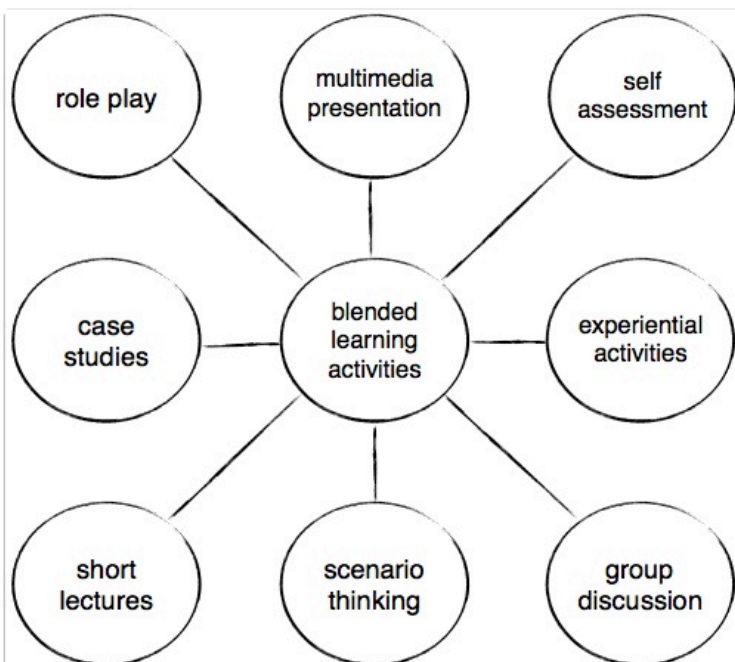
Blended learning can make learning fun, accessible, flexible and encourages independent learning. As learners become comfortable using computers and the internet, they click on what interests them and stay where they become engaged. This access to a wide range of learning spaces means that learners can develop their own bibliographies, indexes and resource lists. These self-directed routes to knowledge and understanding may seem unpredictable to the instructor, especially at first.



For learners who are accustomed to having instructors give them information, being active participants in deciding where to learn and what resources work best for them will be new. For instructors who are accustomed to being able to control the flow and sequence of information to learners, this way of sharing decisions about the learning process may be new.

At times instructors embrace what can seem like chaos because of the creativity and innovation it fosters but they may also feel concerned because they find it challenging to see what is happening in terms of learning outcomes. Learners have a clear idea of the path they are on and how the different things they are exploring are connected but how

what they are doing is helping them meet their educational goals may not be as clear.



A recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*, found that online learning works best when learners are able to adapt activities and materials to meet individual learning needs and styles and when the curriculum provides opportunities for reflection and self monitoring of learning.

Even though using the internet for learning supports self-directed learning in different ways, the role of the instructor is still very important. The same study showed that the simple inclusion of video or online quizzes does not necessarily improve learning. Online learning is most effective when the curriculum includes blended learning elements (e.g., face-to-face interaction, online collaboration, independent practice, etc.) and the online learning includes a wide variety of learning activities.

It is the instructor's role to figure out this mix. The instructor must determine how much structure learners need and want at different points in the course, what the pace of learning should be, who controls the flow of learning at specific times in the course, and which components will take place face-to-face in groups, individually, or online. Instructors still help students sequence tasks, decide what level of task to practice, and how to self-assess their progress.

It is also the instructor's role to assess a learner's readiness for online learning. Each learner brings a unique set of skills, experiences, and expectations to the learning environment. Instructors need to find out about each learner's access to and familiarity with the technology required, and how their individual learning style or learning preference and educational goals will be met in different online environments. Some learners will need to learn some computer skills while others will be teaching the instructor about emergent technologies.

For learners who need to learn some basic computer skills, the tutorials at www.bbc.co.uk/webwise are helpful.

For introductions to using new media tools, check out the technology videos at www.commoncraft.com.

In a traditional classroom, the instructor decides upon the materials activities and other resources to be used and assesses them in terms of such things as bias, accuracy, appropriate content and suitable level. As noted above, when learners are online they are discovering resources for themselves and will need the digital literacy skills in order to assess the reliability, bias and suitable content. In a blended curriculum the instructors role in relation to resources starts to shift from doing the assessment themselves to facilitating an understanding of critical digital literacy and acting as a guide as the learners acquire these skills.

