



Indicator: All teachers employing blended learning methods make sure that technology and data enhance relationships, but do not pretend to substitute for them. (B6)

Explanation: Blended learning uses a combination of in-person and virtual learning to personalize instruction. The role of the teacher in providing a strong blended learning program is key, though the role is different than a traditional teaching role. In blended learning, teachers become designers, facilitators, coaches and researchers. They must choose instructional tools, implement them, adapt them, monitor their effectiveness and make adjustments to instruction.

Questions: How is technology used in blended learning? What is the teacher's role in blended learning?

How is technology used in blended learning?

Blended learning is the strategic integration of in-person and virtual learning to personalize instruction (The New Teacher Project, 2014). The aim of blended learning is to allow implementation of personalized and competency-based learning at scale. Differentiating instruction for every child is difficult, if not impossible, without the assistance of technology. In a given classroom there are many students (each, potentially, at a different skill level) and typically only one teacher to try to meet each of those student's unique learning needs. Online learning, delivered via technology solutions, allows student to learn "any time, in any place, on any path, and at any pace at scale" (Horn & Staker, 2015, p. 10).

Technology-based solutions allow for programs that adjust, automatically, to the level of each individual learner. The program advances more quickly for students who demonstrate mastery; the program remediates performance for those students who make errors. As Horn & Staker (2015) point out, "It provides a simple way for students to take different paths toward a common destination" (p. 10). In addition to the instructional role fulfilled by technology-based solutions, these solutions also generate a great deal of student performance data that are then available to the teacher. Technology-based solutions are more and more frequently being implemented in classrooms as part of blended learning.

What is the teacher's role in Blended learning?

As The New Teacher Project (2014) points out, Blended learning "doesn't replace good teaching; it demands it" (p.1). Instead of being one-size fits all, teachers are now freed up and required to become "learning designers, mentors, facilitators, tutors, evaluators and counselors to reach each student in ways never before possible" (Horn & Staker, 2015, p. 11). In short, teachers are more important than ever before as they work to design and support more sophisticated and personalized approaches to instruction.

The New Teacher Project (2014) outlines teachers' roles in blended learning as the following:

1. Researcher & Developer:

- a. Leads the design and evolution of blended learning systems by piloting and vets new approaches and tools.
- b. Designs, tests and refines curriculum, along with instructional approach and delivery, based on student needs.
- c. Identifies and documents strengths, weaknesses, limitations & appropriateness of technology tools.

2. Integrator:

- a. Utilizes existing instructional content approaches and data to create best-fit learning pathways.
- b. Codifies the approach to planning/integrating content and instructional approaches.
- c. Proactively shares knowledge and instructional approaches with colleagues.

3. Guide:

- a. Executes an instructional approach defined and designed by another party, differentiating and adapting as necessary in real time.
- b. Uses data to select or adjust student learning pathways; may partner with students to select/develop the pathway.

No one individual is likely to have all of these skills, so working as a team and ongoing professional development is critical to implementing a strong blended learning program in schools. The latter is especially important so that on-site teachers who have fewer of these skills at the outset of a blended learning program do not feel marginalized. Good teachers have a lasting influence on student outcomes (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2013) and they are requisite for the success of blended learning. The goal for administrators is to ensure that teachers are trained and supported for their new roles.

References and resources

- Chetty, R., Friedman, J.N., & Rockoff, J.E. (2011). *The long-term impacts of teachers: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood*. National Bureau of Economic Research. Cambridge, MA.
- Horn, M.B. & Staker, H. (2015). *Blended learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- The New Teacher Project (2014). *Reimagining teaching in a blended classroom*. (Working paper.) Retrieved from http://tntp.org/assets/documents/TNTP_Blended_Learning_WorkingPaper_2014.pdf

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