Blended and Online Learning

MARKUP allows me to mark student papers and return the digital copy via email ...quickly and efficiently.

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Here’s how it happens:

1. My students submit double- or triple-spaced paragraphs/essays (in order to give me room to mark) to my-name@markupsync.com as email attachments, which usually arrive on my iPad within seconds.

2. I use a digital pen (a finger will do) to do my corrections and comments, and then press “send” to email back annotated PDF versions of their writing assignments.

3. There is no “3.” (Gone are the days when I download an attachment and print it out.)

On assignment day, I can often mark and return a paper-a-minute on the evening of submission, and this often allows students to submit their subsequent draft the next day. Imagine this 12-hour turnaround (compared to collecting on Monday, returning on Tuesday, and getting the rewrite Wednesday: a three-day chore).

Markup is not perfect, however. Usually there is one email or two that Markup refuses to accept, leaving that students thinking that they’ve submitted, but their .doc is nowhere to be found. My workaround for this has been a resubmission to my work email, rather than to the markupsync.com address.

Longer writing assignments like essays work well, as long as students have learned how to line space using double or triple space settings, rather than just hitting the Return Key multiple times. An over-exuberance of the Return Key on an assignment can pose a problem to mark up a paper, for sure.

You can easily pause marking and come back to it later by hitting the close button. Writing comments can be a little clumsy with a stylus, but when you are ready to send it back to the student, just hit Send. An email window pops up that allows you to type with iPad’s keyboard, so I put my comments there. In fact, with the newer iPads, you can use the microphone and dictate your comments into the email. Once you hit send from the email, it is returned to the student.

Markup is available as an iPad app for $1.99.

Further Reading:
http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1834203895/markup-paperless-grading-for-teachers

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I think we are all pretty comfortable with the style of our own post-secondary training. For most people the old alma mater was a bricks and mortar college or university. The majority of the courses were delivered in traditional face-to-face (F2F) lecture style and, while we might have slept through the occasional class, we finally graduated and moved on to the world of work. Although the traditional F2F lecture style of teaching hasn’t changed much in hundreds of years, some other things have. Class sizes have grown. The cost of delivery has increased. Student tuitions have gone up. And almost one third of students do not complete their post-secondary education. The OECD iLibrary reports: Among the 18 OECD countries for which data are available, some 31% of students who enter tertiary education leave without a tertiary qualification. Well, that’s not a great statistic to hear about F2F education. So how do we feel about this new alternative, the online education? The controversy about online learning continues to centre on the question: Can online learning really be as effective as traditional F2F learning? Let’s take a look at some of the attributes of good online learning. It can be more affordable; while the upfront cost of developing the courses is high, the continuing cost of delivery is not. Online learning can be more accessible for people who are geographically remote or working during traditional class times. Well-designed programs can be more collaborative and interactive with the inclusion of learning teams. Students who may not have participated in a F2F classroom now have the time to think, share their ideas, and compose thoughtful questions and answers. But the question still remains: is it as effective as F2F learning? Let’s see what research is showing:

The US Department of Education, in a 2010 study titled Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies, found “on average, students in online learning conditions performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction.” The US Department of Education report also declared that instruction combining on-line and F2F elements had a greater advantage for the learner.

I feel that there will always be a need for F2F learning. Online learning is not meant to replace it, but rather to enhance it. The solution to the online learning controversy may be the blended-delivery model. Combing traditional F2F learning with online learning creates a powerful combination that allows the learner to experience the best of both worlds.

The term blended learning has been in existence for the past decade but like many terms in academia, there is sometimes a lack of clarity and much derision over what terms actually mean. Some define blended learning as a combination of instructional modes (Orey, 2002a, 2002b, Singh & Reed, 2001 Thompson, 2002). Others define blended learning as combining instructional methods (Driscoll, 2002, House, 2002, Rossett, 2002). There has also been recent discussion on blending formal learning experiences with informal learning experiences (Lai, Khaddage & Knezek, 2013). The fourth combination is online + face-to-face instruction (Reay, 2001, Rooney, 2003, Sands, 2002, Ward & LaBranche, 2003 and Young, 2002). Although mobile learning is strengthening the relationship between formal and informal learning (Lai, Khaddage & Knezek, 2013), it is the latter definition that most pertains to the current climate in post-secondary education.

As online learning becomes further embedded in our school systems, blended learning will continue to grow. Although implied, the synchronous (same time) and asynchronous (different time) nature of blended learning should be emphasized in the definition with the realization that both can be accomplished online. For example, if a course has a weekly web conference (synchronous) complemented by asynchronous learning activities in a learning management system, then this is a blend. Virtual worlds also offer a unique synchronous environment (online), and combined with online asynchronous learning activities, this blended model could be impacting and effective. A flipped classroom could also be considered a blend because the asynchronous part is the lecture (online) and the synchronous is the face-to-face learning activities. Other synchronous technologies will emerge in coming years to add even further diversity to the synchronous/asynchronous mix.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the many standards of online learning quality apply to blended learning, whatever definition is used. For example, solid instructional design should flow from the learning objectives and must keep the learner’s characteristics in mind. When designing a blended leadership course that includes physical team exercises, the objectives are best accomplished by a face-to-face environment/online blend. If it is theoretical knowledge and practical application, then this can be accomplished with a synchronous information exchange (online) and a practical application. This is done quite nicely with some trades; second year apprentices can learn online and apply their skills in the community without having to visit a school environment. In deciding the blend, it is always important to remember the learners and the different barriers to learning they might experience such as time, financial, social, and geographical. Learning online can minimize these barriers, but they could be represented if there are face-to-face events in a blended learning design. Getting the balance right is the key.

In conclusion, there are many definitions of blended learning—from blending instructional modes, instructional methods, and instructional contexts, to the online + face-to-face blend. In this emerging field of online learning, different trends rise and fall, but it is likely that blended learning will be relevant to post-secondary learning because of its perceived balanced approach. As with any learning innovation, the quality standards must be adhered to: solid instructional design leads to high-quality learning. At the confluence between design and technology sits the learner, who must drive the innovation.
Effective learning and teaching at the post-secondary level requires that instructors know their content, know how to create learning situations based on how people learn (pedagogical content knowledge), and of equal importance, know how to weave the content within a socially welcoming, safe, and supportive environment.

Investigations on how to create such an environment in the traditional classroom have pointed to the construct of instructor immediacy, which can be defined as the degree to which students perceive an instructor to be welcoming and approachable. Immediacy can be established through non-verbal behaviours (making eye contact, smiling, body position and movement (or lack thereof)) and verbal behaviours (addressing students by name, inquiring about students’ lives, using humour, including personal examples). Research over the last three decades has shown instructor immediacy to be highly correlated with student motivation, positive affect, resilience, and academic achievement. To a large extent, an instructor can manifest immediacy in a traditional classroom through their way of being - that is, by being kind, patient, personable, respectful etc.

Although the term “immediacy” may seem to be at odds with online courses, given the obvious physical separation and often asynchronous nature of such courses, the concept of instructor immediacy is also important for the online teaching environment. In fact, given that retention in online courses has historically been lower than traditional courses and that the most cited reasons for student dissatisfaction are related to feeling disconnected to the instructor and other students, it is paramount that online instructors find strategies to create positive connections with students. But how to do this?

An emerging research area for online instruction is related to the concept of instructor presence - “the virtual visibility of the instructor as perceived by the learner” (p. 5, Baker, 2010). This concept includes, but goes beyond, instructor immediacy. Because an instructor in an online environment cannot create immediacy as readily through verbal, and in particular through non-verbal behaviours, the instructor must establish interpersonal connection through instructional design, facilitation of discourse, and direct instruction. From this perspective, instructor presence (and therefore immediacy) must be manifested through explicit and intentional action.

Instructional design begins before the course has started. By creating valuable activities which facilitate and promote online discourse, by establishing clear procedures and guidelines, and by structuring opportunities for flexibility and choice for the learner, the instructor can institute a positive presence which will be perceived as supportive of the students and their learning.

In facilitation of discourse and direct instruction, the instructor must strive to provide affective support to help encourage learner motivation and engagement, but also to guide the learner in achieving the targeted educational outcomes. Similar to immediacy in the traditional classroom, the instructor can use verbal cues such as addressing students by name, using inclusive personal pronouns (us, we), responding promptly and respectfully to students’ inquiries, and offering constructive praise for quality work. In their role as content expert, instructors can analyze student comments for misunderstandings and provide formative feedback. Further, instructors can inject new ideas to stalled discussions, point to relevant resources, and make links between the contributed ideas. These strategies will all serve to augment instructor presence and immediacy.

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References

http://ilt.okanagan.bc.ca/
When our group began work on a plan to offer an open online course on Applied Sustainability, we carefully considered the format, audience, and content that we would offer. We settled on the idea of offering a “LOOC”. What is a LOOC? To answer that question our group found itself dipping into the “alphabet soup” of open online learning. We knew, for example, that higher education has been rocked by the appearance of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses). MOOCs are large-scale, open, free courses of study usually offered without credit. As established universities and colleges began offering these courses with startups like EdX, Coursera, and Udacity, MOOCs sparked a heated debate among educators around the implications for philosophies of education. Confronted with an alphabet soup of possibilities, educators have been both excited and dismayed by some of the developments.

Some platforms, termed “xMOOCs,” differ little from the traditional delivery model. Courses are organized around video lectures focused on the professor, while the interaction among participants forms a secondary activity. Other variations of MOOCs, however, attempt to leverage the pedagogical possibilities of the open online learning platform by applying a “connectivist” educational philosophy. cMOOCs (as they are termed) emphasize connected, collaborative learning in which the focus is on the learners’ social and cultural experience rather than on the drill-and-grill instructional methods featured in xMOOCs. We saw the potential of a LOOC to create new, innovative outlets for exploring sustainability education. We noted that the technological potential of open learning harmonized well with the connectivist philosophy that underlies education for sustainability. Bringing together the strands of connectivism, learner-centredness, and place-based educational pedagogy, we sought to create a LOOC that would be geared to the interests of those living in or connected with our community, as opposed to a massive, and perhaps, unwieldy MOOC.

When one eats alphabet soup, each spoonful reveals a surprising new set of connections and meanings. In a similar way, learners in Applied Sustainability will find that each engagement with the course will deliver a distinct and individual set of experiences. The course is based on a connectivist learning philosophy that values and builds upon the social interactions created among learners, and is made possible by educational technologies like Moodle. Learners will be free to choose from a variety of learning pathways and various levels of achievement recognition. Learners will be able to discover and engage with issues that matter to them: Food Systems, Human Health, Nature and Outside, Green Living, and Local/Global Linkages. Delving deeper, learners can explore employment issues, climate change, water management, energy, human health, transportation, consumption, activism, inequality, and many other topics. By earning badges, learners will be able to act as Connection Facilitators, Change Agents, and/or Resource Specialists. The course will offer reflective, accessible, and informative reading materials and virtual field trips with people and organizations working on sustainability solutions right here in the valley and globally. The course will be designed to encourage connections between learners, to support action through grounded sustainability education, and to foster imaginative thinking on positive solutions to problems.

As we move from planning to implementation, our committee has stayed focused on the importance of quality while staying aware of the potentials and pitfalls that lie ahead. We anticipate that our own version of alphabet soup will be as nurturing and satisfying for learners as the process of cooking it has been for us.

References
Further Reading:
Computer-based materials, e-books, and computer-mediated language learning environments now form an integral part of the pedagogical resources available to language educators, and so we are challenged to develop the skills necessary in using technology as a pedagogical tool to address our learners’ needs and provide a stimulating and motivating environment for them. Although the combination of face-to-face and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to create blended (or multimodal) learning environments (BLE) may provide unique opportunities to develop 21st century skills in our learners, there are challenges for them and for us in BLEs. As our learners are changing and our environments are changing, so too is the role of the language educator as we act as guides, facilitators and now, filters in the information age. Here I would like to share my experiences in dealing with some of these challenges and changes, and share some strategies that I have found useful for assessing and using task-based materials in the Spanish language “classroom.”

As an early adopter, I embraced technology as a tool for learning and teaching. Needless to say, it soon became clear to me that my learners needed much more support in the online environment than I had anticipated. Some felt very comfortable and confident, others were resistant, and still others were inexperienced but curious to learn more. While many were more technologically competent in informal social settings, they were not necessarily experienced in applying their online knowledge and experience to a learning context. In order for them to successfully navigate through extensive materials, develop the language skills they needed, and achieve their learning goals, they required strategies and direction. As an instructor I also realized that in order to form a pedagogically-sound partnership between the online learning experience and the face-to-face classroom learning experience, I needed to pay close attention to their integration in order to “facilitate interactive and reflective higher-order learning” (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p.163).

By giving explicit instructions, communicating the pedagogical objectives (why am I doing this? or Why are we doing this?) and connecting online learning materials directly to classroom practice, the learners were better prepared to complete the tasks and become successful in their learning. Furthermore, by creating an online environment in which learners could experiment, make mistakes, try again, discover and figure things out, they had an opportunity to become more autonomous. I encouraged learners to contact me with any questions, frustrations, and problems, and I made a commitment to respond within 24 hours. I also monitored responses and gave feedback on a consistent basis.

Increasingly, importance has been given to task-based approaches to language education globally and the centrality of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) tasks to the process of language learning and teaching generally (Thomas & Reinders, 2010). Studies in CALL environments also demonstrate the central importance of social interaction, collaboration, and co-construction of knowledge through task-based activities to the language learning process (Blake, 2008; Chapelle, 2007, 2009; Senior, 2010). Task is defined by Van den Branden as “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” (2006, p.4). The question becomes: How do I decide what type of task is going to engage the learner and achieve the desired learning outcome? One six-question framework that I adapted for evaluating CALL task materials comes from Jamieson and Chapelle (2010): What is the learning objective? What is the language learning potential? Is the amount of engagement appropriate for the learners in my context? What is the correspondence between the learning activity and the language interest out of the classroom? How practical is it given my context? What are the benefits for learners and teachers? I think that these questions could be applied to many kinds of learning contexts.

Space does not allow for further expansion, but just a quick note to say that I have been using a partly flipped classroom model by having students view grammar tutorials and movies before the class in which we are going to be working with the structures. When students come to the classroom, I can then use that time for interactive and collaborative tasks that integrate the online component with the face-to-face interactions that are so central to language processing and acquisition. In addition, I have integrated both pedagogic and real-world tasks into the language syllabus through the many open online educational resources that are now available. As the title states, “to blend or not to blend is no longer the question.” The question is how to integrate technology in ways that will engage, motivate, and guide our learners to being prepared for the real world.

References
Hybrid learning, blended learning, and interactive online learning are just a few of the terms used to describe a system of instruction that is more than just online, but also involves a synchronous teaching component, and may or may not include a physical classroom session (Bacow et al., 2012). I believe hybrid learning can provide a successful alternative teaching environment for students who aren’t able to physically attend class and who do not feel they will be successful in more traditional distance education courses. In addition, by combining sections into a hybrid learning format, it offers an opportunity for Okanagan College to deliver a wider selection of courses to students in dispersed locations where enrolments in classroom courses have been very low. For the last four semesters, I have piloted courses offered synchronously in both a physical and a virtual classroom to business students in Penticton and Salmon Arm. There are two key components in the delivery and design of these hybrid courses that have enabled me to make them successful: First, classroom management; and second, scaffolding assessments.

The classes have been offered either over the lunch hour or late in the day, and students can decide for each session whether they would like to attend virtually or in person. To manage the combination of attendance methods, the first 10 to 15 minutes of class time is spent just engaging each participant to ensure everyone feels equally included in the classroom. During the class, students attending virtually will readily ask questions and contribute to the discussion but prefer to just send a text message through the chat, and hesitate to use their microphones unless specifically asked to speak. Consequently, as the instructor, I must simultaneously monitor and respond accordingly to students both in the physical classroom and in the virtual classroom. The best classes, where the boundaries are the least evident between the two attendance methods, are those in which I lecture less and incorporate classroom activities that require interaction and participation.

The second component of designing a successful hybrid course is scaffolding assessments. Scaffolding means creating assessments that build on one another to enable students to progressively learn and apply concepts. (Means, 2012). In the online environment, scaffolding can ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning as they cannot rely on others to construct the final product, whether that is a report, project, or completion of an exam. If used effectively, scaffolding can eliminate concerns over cheating on assessments as tasks can be assigned in such a way that students must have intimate prior knowledge of their particular topic in order to proceed.

A challenge with implementing hybrid learning is class size. The maximum class size I have taught is 12 students. This class was near the upper boundary of my ability to effectively monitor and engage the students in the classroom and to effectively individualize and scaffold assignments. Nevertheless, by combining sections, the hybrid method has enabled courses not to be cancelled due to low enrolment in Salmon Arm and Penticton. In addition, students who participated in the courses acknowledged that they preferred the interaction offered by synchronous hybrid learning to the alternatives of taking the courses by distance education or travelling to a different campus for in-class instruction.

References
Nikos Theodosakis opened the Naramata Retreat with an inspirational and interactive keynote presentation on the importance of “Mattering” in Education. Nikos challenged the group to consider and define why education matters to students at Okanagan College in the modern world.

Three important themes emerged: making learning relevant to students, engaging students in their own learning, and giving a tangible purpose to education. Nikos gave examples of highly engaging experiential learning projects that he has done with middle-school students such as microloans for individuals in third world countries through the production and sale of note cards (InStill Life Project). The enthusiasm of the students who were involved in this global community project with a real-life purpose was inspiring and an excellent illustration of the impact of relevance in education.

Nikos also spoke on how powerful and empowering video production is in the classroom. The process of filmmaking engages learners and fosters creativity, personal and social development, planning skills, and enhances curriculum. Students of Okanagan College are increasingly using technology and video for class assignments and projects and a working knowledge of the process and benefits of video production would help all educators. Nikos briefly presented the process of filmmaking and has authored a stimulating book on this subject – *Director in the Classroom (How Filmmaking Inspires Learning)*.

Nikos led the Fellows through a thought-provoking workshop and set the tone for productive discussion and reflection on best teaching and education practices. In fact, Nikos explained that it was the process more than the end result that created the learning. The process promotes and practices planning and problem solving for the students. This becomes engraved in their future learning process.

**THOUGHT SPOT—JOIN THE CONVERSATION!**

The ILT newsletter committee is happy to announce a new feature in *Enhancing the Practice of Learning and Teaching* called “Thought Spot”. Frequently newsletter articles stimulate discussions amongst our readers. To help facilitate these discussions and add new perspectives, readers may now go to “Thought Spot”. Thought-provoking questions posed by authors of articles as well as ideas or questions noted by the editorial committee are now posted in “Thought Spot” as discussion threads under myOkanagan Groups.

Questions arising from the Fall issue—read what others are thinking! Add your own thoughts and join the conversation!

- What technology or apps have you found helpful in blending online and classroom learning? (Brian Rhodes)
- What factors need to be considered when comparing the effectiveness of online education to face to face education? (Rob Kjarsgaard)
- What is your definition of blended learning? (Ross McKerlich)
- What are some specific ways that you have achieved an instructor presence in an online environment? (Carl Doige)
- Are MOOCs revolutionary or just another fad? (Ros Warner)
- What do you feel is the ideal class size for hybrid classes? (Shei Seaton)

To access online discussions in Thought Spot:
- Log into myOkanagan then click on “Groups” in the upper right hand corner of the screen.
- Search the Groups Index for “Thought Spot” which will bring up the “ILT Thought Spot Group”.
- Click “Join”.
- Click on one of the “Thought Spots” which will take you to an online discussion on that topic.

If you have any difficulties contact an ILT Fellow.

Please feel free to start a new discussion topic that you think would enhance the practice of learning and teaching. Thank you.
One of the main ILT goals is to provide professional development opportunities for all employees at OC. In addition to this Enhancing the Practice of Learning and Teaching newsletter, Lunch and Learn sessions, a listing of upcoming seminars and events on the ILT website, curriculum advising and peer sharing opportunities; the ILT has developed three educational programs.

The Learner-Centred Instructor Certificate (LCIC) program is offered twice a year and has already been taken by over 50 OC employees who have learned and shared valuable strategies to make their classrooms more learner focused and actively engage students to increase their participation in their learning. The program is 60 hours in length and consists of 6 courses. Two face-to-face sessions are part of the program but most of the work is done online at the time that best suits the learner. The next intake of the LCIC program will be in the Winter 2014 semester with courses running from January 9th to April 13th. The tuition fee of $927 is waived for OC employees so the cost to employees is around $100 for text and administration fee. To apply for the January intake, please contact Continuing Studies at www.okanagan.bc.ca/distance or at 250-862-5480.

The Service and Support in a Learner-Centred Organization (SLCO) certificate program is also 60 hours and 6 courses in length with two face-to-face sessions. SLCO is a new program that was offered for the first time in Fall 2013, and the ILT hopes to offer it at least once each year probably in the October to February time frame. For anyone in a support or service role, whether to individuals internal or external to Okanagan College, this program will help them develop a people-centred approach to their work and provide useful strategies to follow. Complete program details are available at http://webapps-1.okanagan.bc.ca/ok/calendar/calendar.aspx?page=LCIC. Stay tuned for more information on future offerings or check with Continuing Studies at www.okanagan.bc.ca/distance or at 250-862-5480.

Another program the ILT hopes to launch next year is the Leading in a Learner-Centred Organization (LLCO) certificate program. LLCO will follow the same format as the other two certificate programs and will help participants at all levels of leadership, formal or informal, develop a people-centred philosophy of leadership and enhance their leadership skills. Full program details can be found at http://webapps-1.okanagan.bc.ca/ok/calendar/calendar.aspx?page=ServiceSupportLearnerCentredOrganization. Offering dates will be announced soon.

The ILT is pleased to welcome the new ILT Fellows for the Fall 2013:

- Angela Checkley, Fellow for Employees, Educational Focus (Except instructors):
  - Learning Centre Coordinators, Educational Advisors, HR Advisors, Counselors, Recruiters
- Chantale Hutchinson, Fellow for AACP, ASE, ESL: all employees in AACP & Foundational Programs
- Michael Orwick, Fellow for Business: all employees in Business and Office Administration
- Darrell Skinner, Fellow for Health & Social Development: all employees in Health & Social Development

Please go to the ILT webpage for more background on all ILT Fellows: http://ilt.okanagan.bc.ca/?page_id=260

ILT Newsletter production team is currently composed of:

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The theme for the Winter 2014 Newsletter: “Building an information literate learning environment”

Please submit articles to ILT Copy Editor & Distribution Michael Orwick by Feb 1, 2014 MOrwick@okanagan.bc.ca