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METHODS FOR ACHIEVING A BLENDED LEARNING APPROACH INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

As technology becomes ever more present in our lives, it makes sense for education to incorporate it into course structures and the more traditional physical education. Blended Learning offers students the benefits of both a digital and physical education. They can learn in their own time as well as benefiting from the social interaction of a classroom. Here are 5 methods educationalists can embark upon to incorporate blended learning into their curriculum.
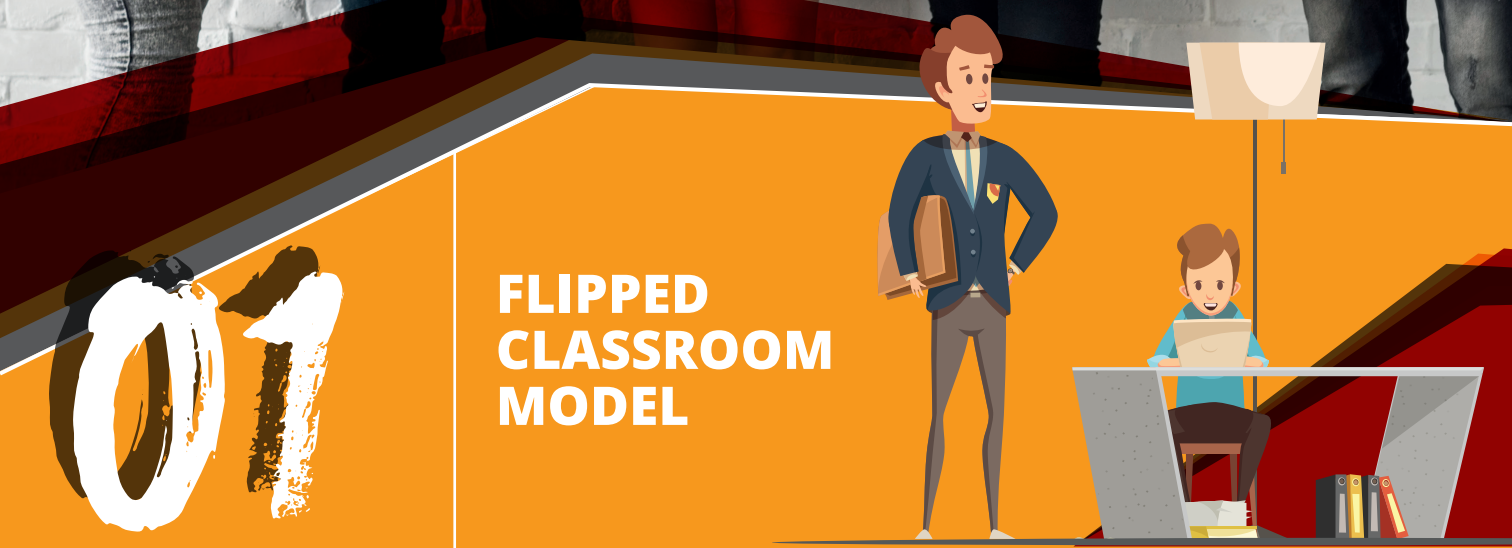
01 FLIPPED CLASSROOM MODEL

The flipped classroom model 'flips' the traditional role of the learning space. Students complete lectures and tutorials in their own time online before doing the 'homework' in the classroom, engaging in group discussion and completing exercises with the help and guidance of the teacher.

"In short, flipping a classroom means scheduling two types of activities: those taking place before a face-to-face session, and those taking place in the classroom. In principle, the former are conceived as to pave the way for the latter" explains Dr Abelardo Pardo Associate Head of Teaching and Learning and Senior Lecturer at the School of Electrical and Information Engineering, The University of Sydney. "The main change proposed by this new setting is that instead of having students sit passively in class hearing some material about a new topic, they now work with some sort of resource related that topic before coming to class."

This model allows teachers to maximise the social value of classroom time but the students also don't miss out on learning new information.[1] "The bottom line" explains Dr Abelardo Pardo "is let's get some preliminary work done before the class and reserve the time in class to more participative activities."

02 SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Although similar to the flipped model, in self-directed learning the roles of online learning and physical teachers changes and there are no formal online courses to complete. In self-directed blended learning, students use a combination of online and face-to-face learning to guide their own personalised investigation, achieve learning goals and connect with mentors both physically and digitally.[2] Online learning platforms such as the Khan Academy allow students to pick courses, read and watch online materials and take part in quizzes to test knowledge.

For teachers the challenge is to judge the end success result of the learning experience without de-authenticating it. For students the challenge is to find out which models of learning work for them to be able to sustain interest. Some students are very apt to work independently; others need very clear pathways to be autonomous.[3]

At the Singapore Management University, the School of Accountancy (SOA) is promoting self-directed learning. The teachers of core courses such as Financial Accounting and Management Accounting have worked with the Centre for Teaching Excellence to co-develop self-paced digital resources. Using interactive visuals and self-check quizzes these resources deliver content for the students to learn at their own pace and preferred time. This gives students time to go through ideas and concepts before any face to face sessions.[4]

03 PROJECT BASED LEARNING

Blended Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a model in where students combine both online learning and face-to-face instruction to design and publish project-based learning assignments and products. The online learning is usually in the form of courses or self-directed access. This approach is designed to give students the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills through engaging projects set around challenges and problems they may face in the real world.[5]

PBL students "investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex problem, or challenge" with deep and sustained attention. PBL is essentially "learning by doing." The reasoning behind this concept is that as we live in a project-based world it makes sense to educate students within this model for preparation for after their education. "Solving real-world issues that matter is important to us as adults—and it's important to our students," explain Lathram, Lenz, and Vander Ark in their ebook, Preparing Students for a Project-Based World.[6]

One example is a Business Incubator class at an American high school. Teams of students propose and design a product based upon a challenging need or problem. The young entrepreneurs then pitch their ideas to business and community leaders to gain support for launching their product. One such idea from a team was the design of a mobile app providing real-time air quality readings at locations around the world.[7]
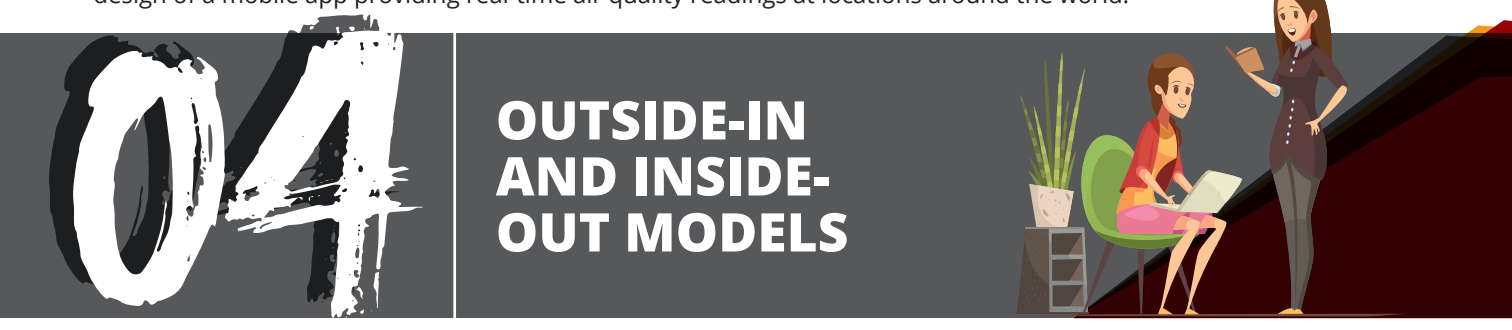
04 OUTSIDE-IN AND INSIDE-OUT MODELS

In Inside-Out blended learning, the concept is to 'finish' or 'end up' beyond the physical classroom, but still benefit from the advantages of utilising both the physical and digital spaces.

In Outside-In blended learning, the idea is to 'start' in the non-academic physical and digital environments students use on a daily basis, but finish inside a classroom.

In both these models, the 'online learning' aspect is less critical than the focus on platforms, spaces, people, and opportunity beyond the school. The 'online' elements could be self-directed inquiry and/or formal eLearning courses and curriculum.[8]

For both these concepts, there is a need for expert guidance, learning feedback, content teaching, not to mention psychological and moral support from face-to-face interactions on a daily basis.[9] As long as the models are well-designed, all of the differing 'areas' plays to its strengths and complements the other two.

05 SOCIAL MEDIA BLENDING

There are various ways to integrate social media into your blended learning initiatives. By using social media, students can deliver content through digital tools such as blogging, Skype, Edmedo or video conferencing. It also allows for online discussions and engagement outside the physical classroom.

Some teachers and parents might have hesitations about using social media for education but it can help in a variety of ways. For example compiling and producing useful content for research, broaden perspectives on various subjects and the opportunity for engaging experts.[10]

Research has shown how beneficial social media can be in terms of learning. Through these various platforms, teachers can connect with students and incorporate social media into their lessons, making them more interesting, relatable and engaging.

Social media can be especially useful in higher education blended learning. David Altounian, marketing professor in Digital Media Management at St Edward's University taught his students how to combine traditional marketing techniques with digital components. His students created a blog on Tumblr on anything they were interested in and then marketed it as a product. They were then required to conduct market research about customer segmentation at the same time as finding appropriate audience distribution channels.

Aside from marketing, other disciplines can also incorporate social media learning. Richard Ng and Latifah Abdol Latif at the Open University Malaysia (OUM), use social media to improve the teaching of mathematics in a distance learning course.[11]

As digital becomes more and more prevalent in our lives, it was only a matter of time before blended learning become a normal fixture in education. They are many ways to incorporate blended learning into your curriculum and hopefully these methods have provided you with some inspiration.

To find out more on this and other aspects of future learning spaces, join us at the 5th Annual Next Generations Learning Spaces to explore some innovative ways to redesign and revamp learning spaces effectively and efficiently.

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5. www.schoology.com/blog/project-based-learning-pbl-benefits-examples-and-resources
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11. www.studyinternational.com/news/the-important-role-of-social-media-in-higher-education

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