

## Blended learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom (Book Review)

### **Reviewer:**

**Jesús García Laborda**

Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics  
Polytechnic University of Valencia  
E. P. S. Gandía, Valencia, Spain  
jgarcial@upvnet.upv.es  
Tel: +34 666 28 45 57

### **Textbook Details:**

Blended learning: Using technology in and beyond the language classroom  
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### **Overview**

Blended learning is the combination of delivery procedures in learning. In this century, blended learning has been defined as the combination of “face-to-face instruction with online learning using a learning management system” (Irons, Keel, & Bielema, 2002). However, with the new millennium, blended learning activities have been refocused and developed (Cooney, Gupton & O’Laughlin, 2000; Lim, 2002) although they had been present in the classroom almost from the beginning of the use of technology and computers in education. Today, when teachers are both aware of the importance of technology in the classroom and are also familiar with its use, blended learning has been approached with curiosity and interest (Donahue, 2001; St-amant, 2001). However, like any other activity in education, Blended learning becomes more attractive and increases its possible applications when teachers are well trained in its place in the classroom, and also when the teacher’s computer literacy improves (Kirschner, Clark and Sweller, 2006). In this sense, this book intends to cope with a necessity, especially of language teachers. Today nobody could deny that computer assisted language learning has been operational for over twenty years. However, although there is abundant literature that claims the benefits of blended learning because of the students’ satisfaction (Lai, Yeh, & Ho, 2005), many language teachers still fear approaching computers because they claim their lack of expertise especially when working with their students and that is the main reason why volumes that address computers abound in language education (a good range of them can be found in leading journals such as TESL EJ) (García Laborda & Magal Royo, 2007).

Overall, this volume is divided into nine chapters and also includes a not always accurate bibliography (check the mismatch in the sixth citation on page 8), two appendixes and an itemized index. The introductory chapter presents what blended learning is with a range of definitions but fails to give an in depth description of blended learning and its different models such as the skill-driven learning, the attitude-driven learning, and the competency-driven learning (for an extensive review of these model, please refer to [www.Blended learning\Blended Learning Models.mht](http://www.Blended learning\Blended Learning Models.mht)), the introduction is followed by a description of the book, a section on the benefits of using technology in the language classroom, factors that affect the implementation of blended learning and some general (but vague) guidelines of how to combine traditional teaching methods and teaching with technology. Although this section only intends to justify the use of technology in the classroom, from the authors’ individual perspective, these pages emphasize the need to incorporate communication technologies (and indeed the need of using technology in communication is emphasized throughout the book) in daily teaching. It also serves to motivate the readers who may hesitate to take a first step in the use of technologies in education and in face to face teacher-student interaction (p. 14).

The rest of the chapters in the book address the authors’ course contents on the same topics including:

- *The web as a source*: authentic materials, online activities, advanced search,

- *Evaluating the English Language Teaching (ELT) materials* found online,
- The use of online and *electronic dictionaries*,
- *The use of whiteboard* (this is an excellent chapter and I believe it is one of the few differences between this book and many others of its kind),
- *The use of portable devices* (a very well structured chapter and, in a way, very new even for those teachers who already use computers and ITC as a main component of their classes),
- *Computer mediated communication* (using both synchronic and asynchronous communication) such as chats, forums and so,
- *Web resources* such as podcasts,
- *Suggestions about the future* including the future use of web 2.0.

The last part of the book also includes two appendixes: a resource bank and some advice on how to get started, and the index and bibliography. Finally a well designed and welcome contribution are the three updates (between April 2007 and January 2008) [ <http://www.macmillanenglish.com/Course.aspx?id=28614&productypeid=28254>] that add valuable information on dictionaries (April 2007), updates in methodology and virtual worlds (September 2007) and an extension on whiteboards (January 2008) (readers who have little idea of what a whiteboards will want to take a look to this information). This addition also proves the dynamic relation between paper and electronic books today.

Although the authors state that this book is aimed at all, teachers who have some experience will benefit the most because they may not fear the powerful advantages of computers and the net in teaching (especially in language teaching). To achieve this goal the authors describe the necessary resources and technology in each chapter. Usually it is quite clear but some language teachers may still be reluctant to use technologies in foreign language, and thus clearer instructions would have been advisable. I think the section which provides better information is that one in which Shama and Berret evaluate the individual use of technology provided in each chapter by pointing out its drawbacks and implications. I certainly agree with Brown (2007) that authors establish well the link between reality through the use of case studies and certainly their implicit belief that technology is for all the teachers with certain differences according to their own computer skills and that use leads to mastery. Along these thoughts, the writers emphasize the idea that teachers should overcome their fascination for the new usually related to new technologies and make connections between their teaching and learning technologies and what the ICT can offer. Needless to say, that as most other authors in the field whose work can be found in this and other journals (such as CALL, TESL EJ, Computers and Education, Language Learning and Technology, and many more), teachers should not be suspicious about the computer taking their teaching role but complemented and implementing their own teaching.

Overall, this is a well written volume for “false beginners” in ICT and (language) educators. Although the lack of a well defined framework is self-evident, the information provided in each individual chapter facilitates the inclusion of the activities presented in the book in the classroom. The approach is equally valid for language and general practitioners. I really missed some information for the most advanced advocates of using ICT in teaching and learning but the text quality outcomes its drawbacks. Thus, this book may well deserve a place in the library of many teachers around the world.

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