



SUPPORTING BLENDED LEARNING: FROM IMPLEMENTATION TO ASSESSMENT

“Blended learning” is an expression of our times, alongside “the new normal”, although blended learning has been around for a little bit longer than just in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both terms are being used to explain how education is being adjusted, changed and flexed to meet the needs of both teachers and students working in environments that have new and unique challenges.

To start with, let’s look at the definition of blended learning, and how that differs from another term rising in popularity - “hybrid learning”. Depending on who you speak to, blended and hybrid can be used relatively interchangeably¹. So, what do we mean when we use them?

According to definitions created by technologists, blended learning is a combination of offline and online learning: classroom instruction with asynchronous exercises and content that are consumed outside of the classroom.

Hybrid learning, on the other hand, focuses more on the most effective way to deliver content. It’s the method of teaching remote and in-person students at the same time via virtual learning solutions.

Blended learning is a combination of offline and online teaching, where students interact with their teacher, the content, and other students through both a physical classroom and online platform. Whereas, hybrid learning replaces most of the physical work with online interactions - although these can still be interactive whilst being virtual, so not necessarily reduced to just watching online recordings.²

You can see how they could be used interchangeably, and for many educators who are starting to explore these new paradigms, the terminology is as important to understand as the technology that is available to support the transition.

¹Attune, [Hybrid Learning vs. Blended Learning. What’s the difference?](#)

²Cloudshare, [What Is the Difference Between Hybrid and Blended Learning?](#)



Creating your blended vision

For everyone involved in creating a digital strategy for your school or Trust, particularly for teachers and ICT technologists, this is a time when getting the right strategy feels the most difficult. The boundaries and regulations are constantly changing - or being moved - by those who are not on the ground every day with the students. In the simplest terms, when it comes round to September, we're not sure if everyone will be able to attend school at the same time. Or indeed when that will be possible again.

No matter your role, right now you're likely trying to create a new normal that is going to provide everything that your students require. To enable you, as educators, to get the most out of them and to ensure they go on to develop as they should, and in line with curriculum standards.

Research has shown that those with high learning outcomes, resulting from reported EdTech capabilities that are well developed, have detailed technology visions and plans, involve the teachers and students in the technology planning, and formally evaluate their technology's effectiveness³.

With this in mind, creating your own vision and digital strategy is dependent on understanding what the Trust or your individual school wants to achieve and attain. There are concerns that need to be factored into any strategy - from access to the internet and available devices to support at home and individual students' needs - that all need to be considered.

³ SMART, *EdTech Capabilities and Learning Outcomes - Global Survey, June 2018*

Accessibility and connectivity for all

The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has truly highlighted the gaps in accessibility and at home support available to students throughout the UK, and worldwide. Many schools are considering how digital offerings ensure that blended learning can continue or be developed for a longer-term strategy as a phased return seems more likely to be stretched out beyond September.

Action to reduce the digital divide will be paramount to ensure that virtual classrooms, downloadable resources and online support are available for all students. Understanding the degree of connectivity that is available is another consideration, as is the level of support available outside of educational environment.

There are examples⁴ of Trusts who have balanced inequalities by loaning laptops to pupils, or providing downloadable activities to reduce the broadband burden - whether financial or due to unstable access. Providing needed support and an IT helpdesk is another way to ensure students and parents don't face these challenges alone. Making the digital resources accessible from any device - mobiles included - also reduces

accessibility concerns and ensures that students remain connected to their school community.

It is this adaptability and flexibility that can lead to meaningful, sustainable change.

Part of that change is enabling synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Classrooms won't look the same for some time, if perhaps ever again, and being able to untether learning will allow students to engage with their education at the right time for them - whether that's because they can't be in school at the same time or need a different schedule to fit in with family responsibilities. Blended learning with tools such as SMART Learning Suite Online, allows teachers to move between teacher-paced to student-paced anytime, and students can engage with content and complete activities, collaboratively or independently, synchronously or asynchronously.

⁴ Education Technology, *A digital strategy to support pupils and staff during COVID-19 and beyond*



The new school routine

We know that routines are important. The absence of structure and routine in a young life can have a devastating impact.⁵ It's also been important to focus on the wellbeing of students over their academic success during lockdown. The time to "return to school" is upon us, but it's important to realise that the home learning environment will continue to play a crucial role going forwards, with a recent NFER report⁶ predicting that when schools open more fully, 46% of families, on average, will keep their children at home. This may be because their families need to self-isolate or because they have concerns about their children returning to school.

Creating a new routine is going to be part of the new normal, wherever and however it is developed, and blended learning can help create that. Where schools have really thrived with the virtual reality of lockdown, is being able transition from their routine from the page to the screen. The key part of this transition has been to use [recognisable and trustworthy resources](#) - whether that's the platform you run your lessons

on, or down to the simplest tools like using familiar formatting that students will recognise and connect with their pre-COVID learning⁷.

Recognisable and trustworthy often go hand in hand. By using recognisable platforms, you gain the additional advantage of ingrained trust which supports the engagement of the students, parents and teachers alike. Whether you choose Google or Microsoft as your main platform, you know what you're getting, how it will work, and how you can use it. You know it's secure, that the data held for your students will be in line with regulations such as GDPR, and it's easy to use. Then, with solutions like SMART Learning Suite Online, you can incorporate that learning and trust into the next steps of delivering because it's all interconnected, with just a click of a button.

⁵ Princes' Trust, [Youth Index 2012](#)

⁶ National Foundation for Educational Research, [Return of pupils to school: Schools' responses to Covid-19](#)

⁷ Pheasey Park Farm Primary School Testimonial Webinar

Engaged by quality content

Right now, keeping students engaged, differentiating instruction, and preventing learning loss is harder than ever. And because time with students is more limited, teachers are under pressure to make every moment count. Pre-COVID, teachers spent, on average in their 50 hour weeks, 7.3 hours just on lesson planning⁸.

Some schools have only had the opportunity to provide material packs and manually send these out to students. Others have developed online resources, or transitioned from a blended approach that was already in place. Either way, lesson planning now more than ever has to include time and resources on how it will be delivered.

For students, engagement is not found in static PowerPoints or recorded video resources. Yes, static content still has its place, but it can't be the only form of delivery.

By working with tools, such as Smart Learning Suite Online, you can deliver engaging lessons and interactive content without additional time required.

One example of this is being able to transform existing static content (PDF, PowerPoint, Google Slides, Docs, Sheets etc. etc.) into dynamic learning experiences on students' devices. By taking this step, you can make any lesson a collaborative interaction for and with students. There's also the opportunity to easily add games, digital manipulatives, and activities that make assignments interactive.

⁸ Education Policy Institute, [What is happening with teachers' workloads?](#)





Real-time assessment

When we're in the classroom, we can see how students are doing. There are formal assessments, and then there are the informal gradings that teachers make every day with their pupils. When we're out of the classroom, in a digital environment, it's important to make sure that teachers still have the opportunity to check in with students and make the informal assessments at the same time as providing teaching. The attainment gap is ever present at the moment when you consider that The Sutton Trust found that 22% of state school secondary school students were accessing online learning every day, versus 57% of those in private schools⁹.

By moving to blended learning going forwards, there is the opportunity for real-time feedback that can benefit everyone. Developing content to be dynamic will require students to actively participate and provide feedback throughout the lesson, teachers can gather almost as much as they would in the classroom. Students can look at each other's responses, or can provide their answers just to the teacher or even anonymously. This way, everyone has a chance to voice their opinion or have a go at answering questions in a way that they might have found more difficult in the classroom setting.

With SMART Learning Suite Online, teachers can engage students with a variety of question types. The feedback can be individualised or can even be applied to collaborative work.

Progress can be monitored and instructions driven by the clear insights into students' work wherever and however it's taking place.

Better yet, using technology can ensure accountability and that marking policies are met no matter how the learning takes place. As a teacher, you can provide the feedback in real-time, without having to do the marking overnight. Now more than ever, it's important that teachers use technology well and with a clear purpose for all involved.

⁹ The Sutton Trust, [COVID-19 Impacts: School Shutdown](#)

SMART Learning Suite combines lesson delivery, collaborative workspaces, game-based activities and formative assessment in one ultimate education suite. Teachers can access the suite anytime, from any computer – including at home – and send lessons to student devices.

Used by over
60 million
teachers and students
around the world



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WORKING WITH SMART® : WE SEE YOU

We believe that true change is occurring. Access for students and teachers, whenever and wherever will become the new normal. It's about preparation at home, access from anywhere, and the flexibility you need in a solution that allows your community to dip and out whilst staying connected.

Our solutions are three-fold, and consistently updated to reflect the changes required by our community. From the **SMART Learning Suite Online**, the one software for educators with interactive lesson delivery, collaborative workspaces, game-based activities, formative assessments and more. To our **iQ Android™** embedded computing, which via our **SMART Board** lets teachers switch with a tap, from delivering a lesson to writing on a whiteboard to surfing the internet. And finally, with **SMART Notebook**, our free learning software to help your teachers create dynamic, interactive lessons.

SMART's professional development and training options can provide a blended approach of face-to-face, online flexible pedagogical training to meet the requirements of individual teachers as well as be personalised to meet the requirements of schools, MAT's etc.

Your community is our community. We're here to listen and have designed our **SMART Exemplary programs** to provide opportunities for teacher-to-teacher, school-to-school and student-to-student conversations, widening the discussion of education's future beyond your Trust or area.

To the tireless teachers, students, parents, leaders, and communities adapting to new learning environments and navigating an uncertain future, we see you and we're here to work together.



Find out more: smarttech.com/education

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