

Blended Learning

Context and Definition

Up to now, most blended learning approaches have taken place in higher education settings and for work-based training. However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools from nursery to sixth forms and colleges, have had to adapt to provide learning materials from a distance, using a mix of digital and paper-pack resources. With schools partially reopening from June, school staff are going to find themselves in a blended-learning situation; that is, supporting and working with pupils face-to-face in school and continuing to provide learning activities to pupils remotely for when they are at home.

“Blended learning is an approach to learning that combines face-to-face and online learning experiences. Ideally, each (online and off) will complement the other by using its particular strengths.” TeachThought [\[1\]](#)

A rapid evidence review from the Educational Endowment Fund (EEF) underlines the concerns that many pupils will have fallen behind with their studies since the lockdown, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. EEF evidence review, [\[2\]](#), provides three key findings and implications, which are:

1. School closures are likely to reverse progress made to narrow the gap in the last decade
2. Supporting effective remote learning will mitigate the extent to which the gap widens
3. Sustained support will be needed to help disadvantaged pupils catch up

In addition, in their initial rapid review, Impact of School Closures on the Attainment Gap [\[3\]](#), they highlight:

1. Teaching quality is more important than how lessons are delivered
2. Ensuring access to technology is key, particularly for disadvantaged pupils
3. Peer interactions can provide motivation and improve learning outcomes
4. Supporting pupils to work independently can improve learning outcomes
5. Different approaches to remote learning suit different tasks and types of content

Overall, the quality of teaching and access to technology, delivered through blended-learning approaches, will be essential to support pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blended-Learning Approaches

Blended learning will consist of a range of approaches that can be broadly categorised as:

1. Face-to-face time with pupils
2. Online learning
 - a. Asynchronous learning
 - i. Resources and activities delivered online (e.g. through Teams, Google Classrooms, HWB email etc.)
 - ii. Recorded lessons
 - iii. Flipped learning (pupils engage with the material before discussions in class)
 - b. Synchronous learning
 - i. Live online pastoral & learning check-in sessions
 - ii. Live online lessons
3. Hard-copy & physical resources
 - a. Paper packs & work booklets
 - b. Textbooks
 - c. Resources needed for projects, games & activities (e.g. play, music, art, DT, PE etc.)

Asynchronous and synchronous are new terms that teachers are quickly coming to terms with. Doug Lemov, of Teach Like a Champ fame, provides a useful explanation of these in-vogue terms in his blog, Mastering Remote Teaching – Intro: Two Types of Learning, [\[4\]](#).

Face-to-Face

Schools will need to consider how best to use the face-to-face time with pupils to support pupils' wellbeing and to identify and support their learning needs. Time is likely to be limited. Therefore, more than ever, schools will need to plan carefully on how best to use this time.

It is envisaged that the time will be used to:

- i. Support pupils' wellbeing
- ii. Identify any significant gaps in pupils' learning
- iii. Support pupils with their distance learning

Swansea's Educational Psychology Team has produced guidance to support staff's and pupils' transition back into school. The guidance can be found here – [Guidance](#)

If significant gaps in pupils' learning are identified, schools will need to consider how to support pupils in these areas through their blended-learning offer. Also, schools might discover that pupils have had difficulty accessing digital resources. If this is the case, teachers will need to consider how best they can support pupils to access online materials or provide alternative resources.

As well as the issues outlined above EAL learners and their families may have the added challenge of language barriers. Swansea's EMAU team have produced guidance on supporting the continuity of learning for EAL learners. A copy of the document can be found [here](#).

1 Online Learning – Asynchronous

Online learning, sometimes referred to as e-learning has often been trumpeted as the next big thing in education. However, despite the fanfare and the wizardry of modern technology, research indicates its impact has been underwhelming. Research from Reading University, A Conceptual Framework Highlighting E-learning Implementation Barriers, 2016, [5], notes:

“E-learning has gained much focus from educators and researchers, with many extolling e-learning over traditional learning. Despite this focus, implementation of e-learning systems often fails.”

From their research, they identify the four barriers to success:

- i. Technology
 - Includes access to hardware and software, and related issues.
- ii. Individual
 - Includes students' prior knowledge, motivation, digital skills, home/social support, home environment etc.
- iii. Pedagogy
 - Includes teachers' digital skills, quality of planning, teaching & assessment, the efficacy of support/tutorials.
- iv. Enabling Conditions
 - Includes policies, culture, and administrative support.

Access to hardware and software has improved enormously over recent years, and the Welsh Government's investment in Hwb has provided schools and pupils with a digital platform suitable for learning to take place online. Nevertheless, in the current lockdown situation, access to digital hardware has created significant challenges for families and their children. The Welsh Government's continuity of learning plan, in conjunction with the work of schools and local authorities, has helped to equip digitally-disadvantaged families. However, consideration also needs to be given to those families who lack the digital know-how to use the technology and digital platforms. Therefore, challenges remain, and it is fair to say, it is certainly not a level playing field for children.

In addition to the technology barrier, pupils' digital skills and personal motivation will have a significant impact on how well they engage with online material. Equally important is the strength of pupils' prior knowledge and skills as new topics are introduced; evidence highlights that pupils with significant gaps in their knowledge and skills will, more than likely, struggle to learn new material. Some pupils from EAL backgrounds, particularly those who are more newly arrived, may be experiencing language barriers, may lack

digital experience and lack knowledge of the curriculum. Teachers' planning and quality of teaching and assessment are vital to ensure pupils are generally ready to progress to new content. This, of course, is strongly linked to teachers' pedagogy and their pedagogical understanding of the subjects they teach.

Irrespective of the means of delivery, in class or remotely, pupils' success in learning will depend on the quality of teachers' planning, teaching and assessment, and the use of well-designed activities including differentiation for learners with ALN or EAL. It is worth noting that technology, when used badly, can inhibit the learning process; evidence to date would suggest that this has often been the prevailing case. Therefore, teachers need to ensure they use technology to support well-established, high-quality pedagogical practice. The Educational Endowment Fund's report, *Using Digital Technology to Improve Learning*, 2019 [\[6\]](#), provides an important overarching message:

“technology itself is unlikely to improve young people’s learning, but the pedagogy behind it can. Put simply, this means buying a tablet for every pupil is unlikely to boost pupil attainment. However, if those tablets are used purposefully – for example, increasing the quality or quantity of practice pupils undertake through a quiz app or the precision with which feedback on misunderstandings is provided – they stand a much better chance of doing so.”

The report provides four recommendations for teachers to adopt:

- i. Consider how technology is going to improve teaching and learning before introducing it
- ii. Technology can be used to improve the quality of explanations and modelling
- iii. Technology offers ways to improve the impact of pupil practice
- iv. Technology can play a role in improving assessment and feedback

All recommendations are relevant in the lockdown predicament schools are in. With recommendation 1, due to the lockdown, teachers have been forced to use technology with insufficient time to consider how best to deploy it, and, indeed, with limited training. However, teachers are learning fast! Recommendations 2, 3 & 4 are key ingredients of high-quality teaching. These aspects are vital to support pupils' progression in learning, and indeed, pupils' motivation to carry on learning; research evidence informs us that if pupils do not achieve a decent success rate, they are likely to become disillusioned in their work. Therefore, teachers must keep to the forefront of their minds the importance of:

- Building on previous knowledge & skills
 - Do pupils have the prerequisite knowledge and skills ready to support their learning in this topic? If not, what do I need to do to prepare pupils for this area of work? What consideration do I need to give to differentiating work for learners with ALN and EAL?
- Providing clear instructions

- Are pupils clear about what they are being asked to do?
- What equipment and resources do they need; have they got access to them?
- Modelling and scaffolding
 - Am I explaining, demonstrating and scaffolding the work to pupils well enough?
 - Are my examples and explanations chosen well to uncover key learning points and to identify common misconceptions and pitfalls?
- Activities & Resources
 - Are my activities well designed to allow for consolidation and progression in pupils' learning?
 - Am I using a multimodal approach, that supports access for different learners e.g. those with EAL or ALN?
 - Do pupils have sufficient opportunities for well-planned retrieval practice (spacing and retrieval strategies deployed to strengthen learning over time and to prevent forgetting)
 - Do I ask pupils to demonstrate what they have learnt, done, made?
- Assessment & Feedback
 - Do I provide pupils with opportunities to check their work, see different solutions and view exemplar work?
 - I am monitoring pupils' engagement and progress in their learning well enough? How do I know they know – use of show-me/questions/assessments/quizzes etc?
 - Do I provide pupils with helpful feedback to support their learning?

The Education Endowment Foundation has developed a range of planning and reflection tools, [\[7\]](#), which schools and teachers may find useful when developing their remote learning practice. The planning framework sets out a learning sequence with five approaches to learning – activate, explain, practise, reflect and review – and provides example tasks and activities within each approach.

Multiple choice assessments, when designed well, can be a helpful online mode of assessment. Evidence Based Education [\[8\]](#), in its Making Great Assessment guide, provides very a helpful checklist to assist teachers with designing multiple-choice assessments. The checklist includes:

1. Each question assesses one clear learning objective
2. Questions are phrased in the simplest way – no difficult vocabulary (unless testing it) or irrelevant information and avoid negatives
3. Easier questions are placed at the start of the test
4. No opinion questions
5. Letters are used to list answers and arrange vertically, i.e.
 - a. Answer 1
 - b. Answer 2
 - c. Answer 3

- d. Answer 4
6. Answers are distinct (i.e. do not overlap)
 7. All answers are presented in a similar manner
 8. All answers are plausible and are based on common misconceptions/mistakes

Recorded lessons are powerful resources for asynchronous learning. They allow teachers to introduce new content by providing clear instructions, explanations, modelling and solutions. Pupils also have the benefit of pausing recordings to carry out activities at their own pace. They can also rewind and revisit lessons to further support their learning. Recorded lessons can be workload-heavy to create as lessons usually need to be re-designed and then recorded and edited. However, the Internet is a great resource for pre-made recorded lessons that teachers can use to support their planning.

Useful examples of recorded lessons can be found at:

- i. Oak National Academy – <https://www.thenational.academy/>
- ii. Reach Online Learning – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiai-MqUoEe-IQ2FbApQChw/videos>
- iii. Swansea Virtual School – <https://swanseavirtualschool.org/daily-lessons/>
- iv. ERW Dolen Repository – <https://thinqi.erw-rhwyd.cymru/Repository>

Tips for Recording Lessons

Guidance for filming lesson content and sharing for improved the engagement of pupils can be found in this document – [Recording Lesson Guidance](#)

Flipped Lessons

Asynchronous learning can take the form of the ‘flipped classroom’, where students engage with online materials, work booklets, music-tutor books and textbooks at home, before participating in discussions and further work in class. Activities might include ensuring pupils have the prerequisite knowledge and skills before new material is introduced in face-to-face sessions. Alternatively, the flipped approach might require pupils to carry out background research into topics before they are introduced by teachers.

Alistair Hamill, a geography teacher from Northern Ireland, sums up everyone’s feelings by drawing on a punchline from an old Irish joke:

When a visitor, who has lost their way in Ireland, asks how to get to a certain location, the response is *"I wouldn't start from here!"*

This neatly sums up where we currently find ourselves. In his YouTube blended learning playlist, [\[9\]](#), Alistair highlights the importance of placing pedagogy before technology, and on building pupils’ knowledge and skills systematically, as well as many other key aspects of blended learning that teachers need to consider.

2 Synchronous Learning (live sessions)

Whilst it is recognised that, initially, asynchronous sessions will be the predominate medium for online learning, in a few instances, schools are starting to use live sessions. These can be used to support pupils' wellbeing, engagement and learning.

As in the previous section, the importance of the teachers using strong pedagogical approaches is paramount. Importantly, live sessions will create more opportunities to find out what pupils have learnt and what misconceptions or gaps still exist in their learning.

When undertaking live sessions, schools need to ensure that they apply robust safeguards to protect both staff and pupils. Further guidance on safeguarding protocols for live streaming can be found – [Live Session Guidance](#).

3 Hard-copy & physical resources

Despite the wizardry of modern technology, there is still an important role for hard-copy and physical resources. Schools can deploy these to complement face-to-face and distance-learning strategies or where learners/families have multiple barriers to accessing digital learning. For example, well-designed work booklets can provide a rich source of information and activities for pupils to complete after face-to-face sessions, or to complement online lessons. In addition, textbooks, reading books, newspapers and magazines can be used or recommended. These resources will allow pupils to use different methods to support directed and self-regulated learning. Furthermore, and importantly, some learning activities will still need to be developed through physical means, for example, handwriting, instrumental/vocal music practice, artwork, motor skills, fitness and exercise, and making things.

When providing paper-pack resources, it is helpful to include clear instructions, model explanations and solutions to assist families in supporting their children's learning. Resources without these will be less helpful. If schools email worksheet based activities that require printing, it would be beneficial to have hard copies available at school or posted, as some parents will be able to print them.

Useful Resources, Webinars & Tips

Various organisations, schools and teachers are creating useful resources and approaches to help schools adapt to delivering remote and blended learning. A few are listed below to provide examples of how remote learning is developing across the United Kingdom.

1. Effective Teaching using Meetings and Assignments, Danes Primary School, London

This webinar will inform teachers how to effectively set up and run meetings as well as creating and managing assignments for the children to complete.

<https://lgfl.planetestream.com/View.aspx?id=4133~4l~LsqhFhRd&ajax=1>

2. Blended Learning, Alistair Magill, Geography Teacher & Senior Leader, Lurgan College, Northern Ireland

"I wouldn't start from here!"

What is a good starting point when considering blended learning? Alistair provides a rationale for three knowledges that will need to underpin teachers' planning as they adapt to delivering lessons in a blended manner.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpF4P0xerwVBRK99o-A1nfiup-21-NASO>

3. Flipped and Blended Approaches, Basingstoke College of Technology, Basingstoke

In this webinar, staff from Basingstoke College of Technology share how they have integrated Flipped and Blended Approaches over the last five years, and how staff and students have responded to the challenges of remote learning.

<https://lgfl.planetestream.com/View.aspx?id=4130~4i~hhwDA7j6>

4. Starting Up a Virtual School from Scratch, Broadclyst Community Primary School, Exeter

In the school's first-ever EdTech Demonstrator live event, staff discuss how to set up a virtual school from scratch. The broadcast features lessons that staff at Broadclyst Community Primary School have learnt about setting up a virtual learning environment using Microsoft Teams, as well as much more...

<https://vimeo.com/414007142>

5. Teach-Like-A-Champion Blog, Doug Lemov

The blog features regular articles on effective pedagogy through remote learning.

<https://teachlikeachampion.com/blog/>

6. Unity Research School, Unity Schools Partnership Trust, West Suffolk

The unity research school has conveniently packaged together useful guidance and research from the Educational Endowment Fund in a poster. EEF's resources are divided into five areas:

- Metacognition and self-regulated learning
- Working with parents to support children's learning

- Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools
- Putting evidence to work – A school's guide to implementation
- Making the best use of teaching assistants

Link to poster:

https://researchschool.org.uk/public/docs/5-5-EEF-guidance-reports-and-associated-tools-to-support-planing-and-practice-LEADERS_TEACHERS-TAs.pdf

7. Seeing it from their perspective, Barri Mock

Barri's blog highlights the need for teachers to think about the challenges that pupils face when receiving learning materials remotely, particularly through multiple platforms.

<https://blogbjmock.wordpress.com/2020/06/11/see-it-from-their-perspective/>

8. Remote Learning - Tips For Teachers, Barri Mock

In this blog, Barri presents a useful set of tips for teachers to consider when delivering remote learning.

<https://15mfcymru.blogspot.com/>

9. Self-Regulation at a Distance, Durrington Research School, June 2020

Teachers at the Durrington Research School provide information and supporting video clips to help pupils develop good self-regulation and learning habits for home learning.

<https://researchschool.org.uk/news/self-regulation-at-a-distance/>

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