

Chapter III

The Blended Learning Classroom: An Online Teacher Training Program

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Inside Chapter

This blended learning classroom (BLC) case study identifies and describes successful procedures and methodologies that widen the use of online tools in virtual environments. It provides a systematic and organized access to the plethora of free social software available online for the development of collaborative learning activities. The goal of this particular BLC professional development activity was to offer a face-to-face group of English teachers in Venezuela the opportunity to meet members of an international community of practice (CoP) and together review a packaged learning course material online. Blended technology, the mix and match of available tools, served to display the wide use of resources and each person's skills. By exploring online tools, participants gained an opportunity for learning about both educational theory and the use of technology. The experience described here shows a prototype of future pathways towards educational content use and development.

Inside Chapter

This chapter describes a spontaneous collaborative learning activity initiated by members of a virtual community of learners involved in the exploration of online tools for English language instruction. The procedures followed to carry this teacher training experience were instrumental to the thorough review of pedagogical theory that took place in terms of their applicability and suitability as technology enhanced learning approaches. This chapter addresses the following achievements:

- The blended course creates and facilitates expansive discussion of content adaptation for online delivery, aiding learners to become producers of knowledge while gaining functional computer skills.
- A North American educational curriculum served to highlight constructivist learning among English language teachers within a virtual environment, showing that a culture bound pedagogical content holds relevance in international online settings.
- This project showed a great potential, moving from the predictive review of established curriculum to offering educators an invigorating international instructional approach to professional development.
- The blended learning experience offers a glimpse at future educational trends in which learning materials are easily available from unlimited knowledge repositories and spontaneously used in virtual settings.

A review of educational theory and socio ecological models of teaching in virtual environments leads our description of a blended learning experience. Procedures are offered, used by members of a virtual community of English teachers and a group of teachers in a computer laboratory in Venezuela to meet online weekly for 13 weeks for the review of an educational curriculum. The learner-based approach to teaching and learning described here served to expand the limits of online tools and the application of existing educational materials beyond traditional methods as they held relevance in a virtual classroom.

This chapter describes a blended learning activity in which volunteers from distant countries and time zones gathered weekly for an hour in a virtual classroom to examine an educational unit from a pre-packaged K-12 teacher-training course. The group's weekly meetings are examined, illustrating how "The Learning Classroom: Theory and Practice" course materials gave structure and content to the teacher training, facilitating both substantial review of materials, and examination of its relevance to language teaching for adults. In this 13-week peer mentoring learning

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