Chapter 16
The Teacher's Role in the Blended Classroom ... Or When 1 + 1 > 2

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that schools have undergone many changes, there are still those who believe that classrooms and the activities that take place in them have not changed. Some insist that modern classrooms still mirror the structure of old. In this chapter, the author argues that it is time to put this myth to rest. At the same time, he points out what today's teachers can achieve if they exploit the potential that the modern day classroom has to offer. With technological development, learning can occur in a variety of settings: either in a virtual classroom or in a physical space. When learning takes place in the combination of these two learning environments it is referred to as blended learning, and teaching that applies both modalities is referred to as blended teaching. The two classroom formats offer different characteristics that teachers can utilize for different purposes. A well-balanced blend will provide both teachers and students with great opportunities to experience visible teaching and visible learning.

INTRODUCTION

Look into any classroom and you will quickly discover a difference in how students learn and master content. Some students are very independent and need very little instruction in order to understand what they should do when the teacher gives them tasks. These students may also understand when they have completed the learning goal and not just completed the task given. Other students need very concrete instructions and just-in-time feedback in order to understand where they are at in their learning, where they should go, and what they

need to do in order to attain the desired learning outcomes. A look into the classroom will also reveal how confident some students are and how insecure others can be.

For a long time, education researchers, such as Hattie (2012) and Wiliam (2011), have been pointing out important and necessary changes that need to be made in order to raise achievement for all students in schools in spite of who they are and what they are able to do. Hattie's main point is that teachers need to understand how students think in order to teach them. Students need clear learning expectations and a clear understanding of what success looks like (Hattie, 2012). Students need

to understand content and be given enough time to reflect on their learning. These recommendations may appear to be obvious. However, they demand a lot more work from teachers especially as teachers are faced with bigger class sizes and a diverse population of students. Teachers are expected to do more and in order to keep up with the expectations, more and more teacher are turning to the use of technology.

In this chapter, I document how one school in Bergen, Norway and in particular, one elementary school teacher at the school, integrated technology in her traditional classroom to meet 21st century expectations. The teacher used blended teaching and learning techniques in the conduct of her sixth grade history lessons. Student outcomes and teacher experiences were gathered through classroom observations and interviews with the teacher. Through this process, I gained an insight into this teacher's practice which reveals how the traditional and online classroom can be combined to teach grade school lessons. First I begin with a description of the classrooms and how the online mode was integrated with the traditional classrooms and also by the teacher to teach the subject of history in a blended environment. Indeed this description shows that the role of the teacher in the modern day classroom as we know has changed considerably.

THE BLENDED CLASSROOM-TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM INTEGRATED WITH TECHNOLOGY

The school under study has approximately 300 students with about 20 students in each class. The physical space in each classroom bears similarity to the physical layout of classrooms that many of us are accustomed to. Each classroom contains desks and chairs organized in rows with a blackboard hanging on the wall. Placed near the blackboard is an interactive whiteboard. At a glance one might think that teaching and learning

in these classrooms is typical and has remained unchanged for decades. That would however be a false assumption as the teaching methods in each of the classrooms are now combined or blended with the use of technology, virtual teaching and learning methods, and "driven by electricity", to quote University of Bergen professor Rune Krumsvik (2007) .

THE 6TH GRADE CLASSROOM

The sixth grade classroom, as other classrooms in the school, included a typical traditional classroom with physical space as well as a virtual space. Figure 1 is a screen shot of virtual classroom or space. In this virtual classroom, the teacher provides the students with learning activities to complete before meeting in class. Some examples of activities include videos and polls to respond to after completing reading assignments, as well as upcoming lessons with activities connected to learning objectives and national standards.

The virtual classroom in addition to the physical classroom make up the blended classroom. The two settings, traditional and online classrooms, have different characteristics that teachers can utilize for different purposes. In order for the combination of teaching and learning in online and traditional classrooms to be successful, the teacher must be familiar with the characteristics and benefits of the two classrooms. In this case, it is not just about expertise in order to connect digital tools and learning strategies (Krumsvik, 2007) but the need to be in possession of a system of concepts that makes it possible to describe and exploit the interaction between the two classroom environments. Krumsvik's thoughts are supported by Kanuka and Garrison's (2004) definition of blended learning. That is "blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences". The dimension of thoughtfulness is crucial as most teachers look at

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