The Role of the Teacher in a Blended Learning Classroom

Edgenuity™

where learning clicks

This document outlines ten research-based steps teachers can take to maximize student learning in blended learning courses:

Introduction

American schools are in an unprecedented time of change. Educators are working harder than ever to tackle some of the most pressing issues that have ever faced our students—higher standards, a challenging economy, and a fast-paced world.

As part of their new and challenging work, teachers nationwide are embracing blended learning models—a formal education program in which students learn, in part, through online delivery of content and, in part, in a brick-and-mortar instructional environment.

Online and blended learning instructional models are among the fastest growing trends in education today. In 2002, for example, there were approximately 222,000 high school students enrolled in online learning. In 2010, nearly 1.4 million high school students were engaged in some kind of online or blended learning program.[1] The popularity of blended learning is no surprise; it offers an alternative way to engage students with a remarkable array of learning experiences, particularly for students who struggle in traditional classrooms, all while giving teachers an opportunity to facilitate learning in innovative ways. What's more, research supports the conclusion that students can learn just as well from blended learning as from traditional classes.[2]

But the presence of technology alone is no guarantee that students will succeed. Strong, effective blended learning doesn't just *happen*. It requires the work of thoughtful, engaged teachers who leverage the best of technology and face-to-face instruction to address the unique learning styles of their students.

Across the country, teachers are changing students' lives with the help of technology in blended learning classrooms. Teachers are knowledge facilitators, mentors, and coaches in these environments. They assess, analyze, and synthesize student work and data to develop unique learning plans for each student, all while monitoring and working with small groups and entire classes. They identify learning opportunities for students, engaging them with complex activities and holding them to ever higher expectations.[3]

In short, these educators are "becoming true educational designers,"[4] harnessing the power of these online tools to make their curriculum resonate with students—from flipping the instructional day to allow for more one-on-one time assisting students with work, to developing impressive collections of on- and offline resources to support student inquiry, to delivering concept recovery and skill practice, to ensuring that students learn in an environment that respects their unique needs and their talents.

When educational technology is combined with strong, skilled teachers, it makes for a classroom where teachers are able to build powerful relationships and direct their attention where students need them most. They can spend their time communicating, connecting, facilitating, providing feedback, and ultimately helping *all* students learn.

Great teachers, equipped with great online learning tools, are changing the way students think about school, about their education, and about their lives.

They're making learning effective, efficient, empowering, and engaging.

They're making learning click.

Understand the Technology Students Will Be Using ①

How It Clicks

We're raising technology-savvy students in a technology-filled world, and teachers know technology is essential to keep kids excited about learning. This excitement about digital tools is part of why blended learning classrooms are so appealing to students . . . but it's not the only part.

Any great teacher knows that a tailored curriculum—one that matches the learning style, pace, and interests of a student—is essential to ensuring student achievement. Technology facilitates this kind of curriculum design, helping teachers track student progress and ensure that learning is happening.

> With Edgenuity, teachers are using integrated teacher tools to monitor student progress and provide instant, personalized feedback to each student, every day.

The success of any new technology in schools relies on teachers' knowledge of it. This is doubly true for blended learning environments; research tells us that when teachers are willing to adopt, are comfortable with, and embrace integrated technology in their classrooms, the success rate of these programs increases. It also tells us that when teachers and school leaders have a shared vision for technology use in the classroom, it provides them with an "avenue to coherently communicate how technology can be used, as well as a place to begin, a goal to achieve, and a guide along the way"[5]—all tools that facilitate student, teacher, and school success.

With Edgenuity, teachers are not only helping students excel using different types of technologies, searching the web, using e-mail, and chatting online, but they're also using integrated teacher tools to monitor student progress and provide instant, personalized feedback to each student, every day.

At Edgenuity, we do everything we can to help teachers get the most out of our online solutions—ensuring that they can answer any questions that might arise from students, all while using our innovative tools to tailor their support for each student. We offer a wide menu of options and professional development services to support teachers' primary goal of maximizing learning. And we ensure that teachers know as much as possible about our technology—so everyone in the class gets the most out of the technology that is there.
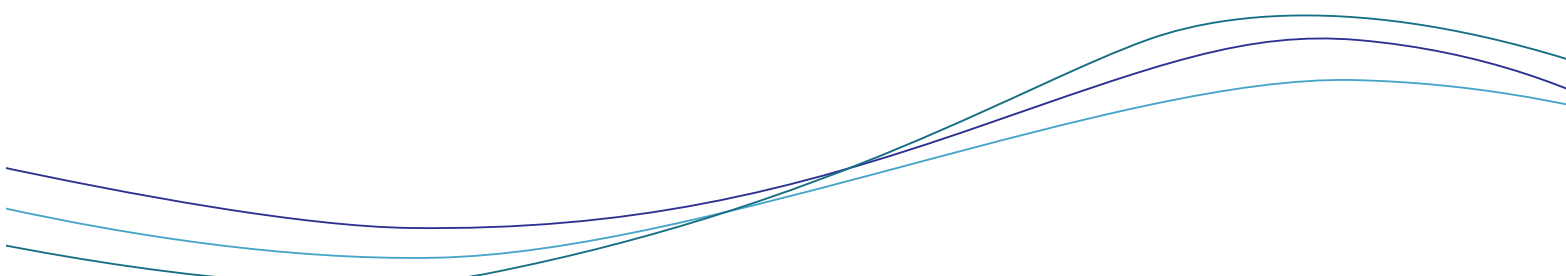
Making It Click

The Performance Learning Center
Richmond County School System, Richmond County, Georgia

Rosemary Vaughan, *District Race to the Top Program Manager*
Natalie Robinson, *Academic Supervisor for the Performance Learning Center*

Developed with a grant from Communities in Schools, the Performance Learning Center is a special program for at-risk high school students from across the Richmond County School System. The student population of the Learning Center includes teenage parents, students in foster care, students with anxiety issues, and students who have special circumstances.

The program serves between 80 and 160 students each year, with a strong focus on graduation for all. Students attend school from 8 a.m. to 12:50 p.m. daily, enrolled in two classes each day. Classes run for nine-week sessions, and are designed using Edgenuity in a blended learning model. Students are encouraged to complete most of their coursework at school, along with a minimum of two additional hours of work at home each day.

In class, students are mentored and coached by five subject-area learning facilitators. What does it take to make a great teacher in this blended environment? "The same qualities that we look for in students," says Rosemary Vaughn, the District Race to the Top Program Manager. "Highly motivated, self-directed, engaged."

What's more, Vaughn says, "The teachers have to believe in blended learning. They have to understand that today's kids are connected to technology, but they still need that human experience to help set goals. And they have to know that the most important thing in making learning successful is the teacher—the human—who helps you when you get stuck."

Getting stuck is something students at the Learning Center understand all too well. "These kids have been stuck for most of their academic life," Vaughn says. "And for them . . . when they get stuck, they shut down and quit." Programs like this blended learning center encourage students to take charge of their own learning—which is something few of them have ever had an opportunity to do.

The bulk of the content and information for students in the Learning Center comes from their computer. "These teachers do not have the old-school role of lecturer and information giver. They aren't there to keep knowledge. They are there to be co-learners—facilitators. They project-manage the students' work. They establish a learning goal and move students and the class forward. They're learning designers."

And just like project managers, teachers need to allow students to engineer their learning—particularly when it comes to technology. "You have to understand the program," adds Natalie Robinson, the Academic Supervisor of the Learning Center. "How to manage the program, how to assign grades, how to track data. But you also have to be willing to turn over the reins to the kids when it comes to technology."

Vaughn agrees. "Teachers can be incredibly successful when they're relinquishing control, allowing students to harness the power of technology to increase their learning, understand their successes, and pace their own work."

Technology Dos

Do set expectations. Set timeframes, establish goals, ensure that students have access to the dashboards so they can track their own progress. On average, 85 percent of the students in the Learning Center are on target to complete two credits in nine weeks.

Do have a subject area expert in the classroom. Technology is fantastic, and can help to access every student at every level every day. But it can't replace a skilled, knowledgeable teacher.

Technology Don'ts

Don't believe all programs are the same. The best technology engages students, includes clear, direct instruction, and is something teachers can believe in.

Don't be afraid to relinquish the reins to students. Students often have an innate facility with software and technology. And that can be a huge motivator for them.

Create a Data-Driven Culture

How It Clicks

In a technology-driven environment, data are essential. When implementing a blended learning program, it is critical to create a data-driven culture, ensuring that all participating educators work to keep data clean and well organized, supporting "a belief that good data are an integral part of teaching and learning," and that "we can create orderly information from disorderly settings."[6]

What's more, teachers' understanding of student data helps them develop a personalized learning path for each learner—ensuring that every student is receiving the best possible education.

Using data to drive instruction helps in all aspects of the school environment. In a technology-based environment, teachers have access to a remarkable amount of data on their students—and keeping that data organized is the key to keeping it useful. With training and support, all teachers can master their students' data and improve achievement, following these recommendations of the What Works Clearinghouse:[7]

> **Edgenuity partners with districts across the country to help them transform disparate student data into actionable information—enabling teachers to benchmark student success.**

- Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement.
- Teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals.
- Establish a clear vision for school-wide data use.
- Provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school.
- Develop and maintain a district-wide data system.

As is the case with all aspects of teaching, in blended learning programs, the quality of the data matters. The most successful teachers in this environment know how to track and process student data and use it to restructure and tailor their lessons for both group instruction and individual students—particularly those who struggle the most.

Edgenuity partners with districts across the country to help them transform disparate student data into actionable information—enabling teachers to benchmark student success. Additionally, Edgenuity implementation consultants are available to help teachers meet the needs of all students, with in-classroom coaching and one-on-one support on data-driven differentiated instruction.

Making It Click

Carpe Diem Schools
Yuma, Arizona
Rick Ogston, founder and CEO

Founded in 2002 as a public charter school in Yuma, Arizona, Carpe Diem adopted a blended learning model in 2003 and now serves 300 students in grades 6–12. In 2010, it was named to the Best High Schools list in *U.S. News & World Report*. At the Arizona campus, there are five full-time teachers in the program, all of whom are focused on student-centered learning and trained on Edgenuity.

"We start every student with two questions," says Rick Ogston, founder and CEO of the school. *"What do you know?* and, *What do you want to be when you grow up?* The first one is easy to get at. We give them an assessment of their learning, we establish a baseline for them, and we get them working. The second is more complex—but it's how we get them to think beyond the diploma, toward a dream."

Students at Carpe Diem spend their days on campus. From 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., they work with a mix of tools: 50 percent of their time is spent using Edgenuity's online courses in a computer lab, and the other half is spent in workshops, one-on-one tutoring, or collaborative projects with teachers. From 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., students receive personalized interventions and are able to catch up on missed work.

While in the computer lab, course managers use data from Edgenuity's learning management system and other sources to monitor student performance and inform teachers about the areas in which students are struggling.

"Personalized learning is messy," says Ogston. "There's a lot of data to be collected. One student might be at a different level, learning a different topic with different difficulty, in each of his classes. That requires an enormous amount of data collection, and it requires us to keep it organized."

Teachers look at data every day, modifying their instruction to meet students' needs. Because the data at Carpe Diem is so well monitored and organized, even high-performing students who are struggling with one small aspect of a lesson get personalized instruction from a teacher at the school.

Ogston does not prioritize the data over the personal relationships between teachers and students, however. Instead, he sees ways that data collection can enhance the teacher and student relationship. "We think of students first as students with names and lives. And then we look at data. Sometimes we see kids who do really well in the brick-and-mortar classroom, but are struggling with the online work. Or vice versa. When you add in the assessments, we have multiple data points to look at when we're considering a student and her work. And with a savvy teacher, we can make sure she gets just what she needs."

To keep these data points organized, Carpe Diem uses tools from Edgenuity, as well as additional tools the school itself has designed to ensure that teachers have all the information they need to personalize student learning. Teachers are able to see all 300 computers and students at once—aggregated in real time and analyzed instantly. They use the data to group students by need, give meaningful praise and recognition, and hold students accountable. They also use data to involve parents and guardians in their children's education.

Data Dos

Do be student-driven more than data-driven. Focus on relationships first and numbers second.

Do give teachers the tools they need to provide substantive intervention. Administrators must listen to teachers when they talk about needing extra resources and supports, and do their best to provide those resources.

Data Don'ts

Don't amass so much data that it's impossible to use. The instinct is to collect everything and use everything there is to see on a student, but that isn't always the best route to great personalized learning. The best teachers understand which data points are relevant to which child.

Don't assume all teachers know how to use data to inform instruction. Too often, administrators think teachers intuitively understand how to use data to change their instruction. It's a skill that is learned, and it is the administrator's job to make sure that learning happens.

Set High Expectations

How It Clicks

In a recent study, 96 percent of America's public school teachers agreed that high expectations for all students make a strong or very strong impact on student achievement.[8] All students require confidence and support to succeed in their learning—and this is equally true for those students in blended learning programs.

All learning communities "are defined by interaction, spirit, trust, and learning."[9] Setting expectations and holding students to them creates a collegial, respectful working environment for both learners and teachers—ensuring that students understand what is expected of them and that teachers are able to maintain control over their classroom and direct the lion's share of their work to instruction and feedback.

> Experts agree that communicating the content of the blended learning program, its process, and the clear, high expectations set for students are essential for success in these courses.

Researchers from the University of Birmingham[10] suggest teachers in blended learning environments:

- Establish academic and behavioral rules, roles, and responsibilities for all students
- Articulate how technology tools will be used and for how long
- Define the conditions under which students will receive whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instruction
- Set expectations regarding the evidence students must provide of their learning and parameters for asking for help from teachers and other students
- Establish standards for acceptable and unacceptable work
- Define the behaviors that will and will not be tolerated
- Articulate the support that is available and under what conditions students can obtain it

What's more, experts agree that communicating the content of the blended learning program, its process, and the clear, high expectations set for students are essential for success in these courses.[11] It is through this communication that students learn how to effectively participate in blended learning environments.
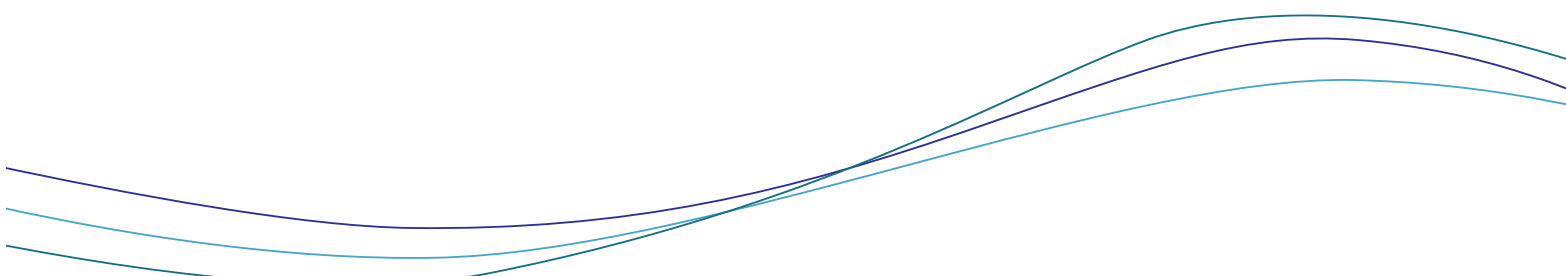
Making It Click

Goochland Prep
Goochland County Schools, Virginia
Tom DeWeerd, Director of Technology and School Administration
Liz Kuhns, Online Facilitator

Goochland Prep, in the 2,400-student school district of Goochland County Public Schools outside of Richmond, Virginia, is a special program for at-risk high school students designed specifically for credit recovery. The student population of Goochland Prep—15 to 20 students at any given time—is selected from the local high school, and includes students who require intensive coursework to graduate, students who are working toward their GED, and students who are on long-term suspension.

Goochland Prep establishes high expectations, both academically and personally. The five pillars of learning at the academy are: Excellence, Creativity, Courage, Ethics & Honor, and Optimism. Students are expected to work toward each of these pillars, all while aiming for their academic goals—which are developed in conversation with teachers. Students and teachers discuss pacing and workload, designing both to set an achievable pace for success while still pushing students to excel. "It's not about passing and getting by," says Liz Kuhns, one of the teachers in the program. "It's about succeeding. I won't accept Cs from B-grade students."

If students complete their coursework early, they are able to graduate early—something that can be a game changer for them. "When students set their own goals—including establishing a 'done date' for completion of their coursework and graduation—they take ownership of their learning," Kuhns says. "It changes everything for them because they can see the end, and they believe they can get there."

Students arrive at school at 8:30 a.m. They are enrolled in two classes at a time, working both online with Edgenuity and offline with two in-classroom teachers who constantly monitor their work and provide non-judgmental help so students can achieve learning goals. Goochland Prep has discovered that not all students want face-to-face feedback from teachers, so they welcome web-based communication by chat and e-mail from students during school hours, and often provide online feedback while the students are in the room.

"These are kids who want to succeed—they want to complete [high school], but they often struggle in more traditional environments," explains Tom DeWeerd, Director of Technology and School Administration for Goochland Public Schools. "To be selected into the program, they have to show responsibility and a willingness to be an individual learner. Their guidance counselors have to think they can succeed; their parents have to agree to the program. Only then are they allowed to join us. But once they do, they achieve because everyone believes they can."

The students who come into the program are usually motivated, Kuhns adds. "They're engaged in the program; they're excited about the freedom to work."

Kuhns and her colleagues have also built rewards into the program. "We treat our kids with respect. There's morning news on the television. We feed them breakfast and let them eat while they work. Students have the freedom to start working on Edgenuity whenever they like, and once they've passed a class, they can listen to music while they work. I host a lottery every week, and they're entered when they pass quizzes and tests."

But more than all that, the relationship with students is built on trust that goals can and will be met. This can change everything, says Kuhns. "I had a student who did not work well in a traditional school environment. He didn't want to go to school every day. He just wanted to complete. I let him work at his own pace, encouraged him to succeed, and he got an A or a B in all three of the classes he came to take."

When students have access to their own data and reports, they can become active participants in setting both daily and long-term expectations for their success. Once those goals are set, teachers and students can access the Edgenuity student Dashboard and ensure they are met. What's more, if goals are met too easily, the teachers can work with students to set more ambitious ones.

"It's more important to do well than it is to finish," DeWeerd adds, pointing to this as a critical component of setting high expectations. Students at Goochland Prep are required to do a review with the math teacher after every math topic area. In ELA classes, students have to write essays and conference with teachers to ensure they understand all their coursework.

"This may be the first time in a long time that they believe they're going to succeed; that they believe we are going to do it together," DeWeerd says. "They can't hide here. We see them. We're helping them."

High Expectations Dos

Do set unique goals and expectations for each student. That may mean encouraging some students to move faster while encouraging others to slow down and work harder.

Do establish a personal goal for teaching all students. Set expectations for all students, then hold yourself to those expectations as much as you hold the students to them. Recognize that you are all accountable for students' success, and the students will follow.

High Expectations Don'ts

Don't let your students coast. Setting and meeting goals is a cycle. The teacher motivates students; students meet expectations; the teacher sets new, higher expectations. If students get comfortable and start breezing through the work, push them further.

Don't allow unacceptable behavior. Post classroom expectations on the wall, including an honor code. Have students sign learning contracts to commit to strive for success. Establish dos and don'ts for classroom and learning behavior.

Carefully Plan Offline Activities

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How It Clicks

In a blended learning environment, teachers take on more complex roles, working with real-time data, assessments, software, and content from a myriad of sources to ensure that their students get the richest education possible.

Teaching in online learning is not a spectator sport. Research shows that "blended courses are most successful when challenging and engaging online learning activities complement face-to-face activities."[12] With the guidance of the teacher in these one-on-one interactions, students are "more motivated to participate and prepared for deadlines . . . and take more ownership of their learning."[13]

Once the scope and sequence of the online coursework has been laid out, teachers can identify the major areas for practice, challenge, and remediation that are a part of the program. They can proactively identify where students may have misconceptions about course material and develop offline activities that speak to those issues, clarifying learning goals, creating a collaborative learning environment, and modeling strong learning strategies.[14]

In planning and structuring offline activities to work in concert with students' online work, teachers are "supporting the development of students as e-investigators, e-writers, and e-collaborators,"[15] research tells us. What's more, with teachers giving advice, focusing content, brainstorming, and enhancing community, they're making face-to-face instruction as interactive as possible, and engaging students in learning both on- and offline.[16]

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When planned in advance by thoughtful educators, both informal and formal face-to-face activities that "include a set of coherent, interrelated features"[17] are the cornerstone of a successful blended learning classroom. Activities might include whole-group and small-group instruction, organized coaching and mentoring, and role play and simulations that engage students in critical thinking, debate, problem solving, writing, analysis, and reflection.

Making It Click

EPICC Blended Learning Academy
East Hall High School
Gainesville, Georgia
Lisa Sheehey, Co-Chief of Staff

The EPICC Blended Learning Academy serves a self-selected group of 64 students in grades 10 and 11, enrolled in East Hall High School in Gainesville, Georgia. Students typically enrolled in EPICC are performing at or above grade level and sign up for American literature, Spanish, and math. They spend three hours a day in the EPICC program.

Each day at EPICC is different for the students—they rotate in different teams for ELA (English language arts), foreign language, and math instruction on what Lisa Sheehy, the Co-Chief of Staff at the school, describes as "a skeleton schedule that is all about flexibility." Teachers meet each day after school to discuss and plan for the next day. Sheehy and her colleagues, John Hardison, Co-Chief of Staff and American literature teacher, and Spanish teacher Wes Vonier, work continuously to create and implement learning strategies and structures that encourage students to accelerate and enrich their own learning experiences by making choices about pace, depth, and presentation of knowledge. The students become partners in differentiating the curriculum.

All lessons at EPICC are a combination of online coursework from Edgenuity and additional digital resources culled from across the Internet and developed by the teachers themselves. Everything that is offered to the students at the academy is accessible online from both the classroom and at home. "If students chose to," Sheehy says, "they could get every bit of class content online and complete their work there. But they don't."

"They would miss out on so much!" She continues, "Every topic has four or five different entry points. We tell them: 'Before you come to class on Wednesday, you need to do the research on this topic.' They have the freedom to choose their own entry point to the lesson—the one that works best for them." Sheehy and her colleagues select these entry points based on the learning styles of the students they serve. "When we're teaching math, we try for five or six ways for students to access the content, depending upon how they learn—visual learners, aural learners, kids who prefer text, kids who love math. We do our best to give them a variety of entry points."

The class then comes together face-to-face for a "town meeting," where teachers have conversations with them, where students are able to share their learning with one another, and where real understanding and learning can be assessed. Students are required to present their knowledge in any way they like through an offline project. "They have the freedom to direct their learning, with me as their guide," Sheehy says. "They do all the pre-work on their own, getting the knowledge there. They're doing the learning in the classroom with me and from each other."

She adds, "Amazing stuff happens when they're in the classroom."

So what is the key to a terrific offline experience in a blended learning environment? "You have to be willing to give up control to the kids. To be able to trust kids. And you have to have a deep understanding of the curriculum," says Sheehy. "Sometimes, a kid finds out a whole new way to solve a problem, and I think, 'I've never seen that!' And I have to ask them to explain it to me. I relinquish control, but I'm still guiding them. I'm helping them take ownership of their learning and *how* they learn. They're learning it in their own way, they're discovering it in their own way. They are actually behaving more like research mathematicians. My job is to give them the tools to do it; making sure they have every tool they need to do this right."

Blended learning is making Sheehy's job exponentially more exciting. "It's incredible how much we have to choose from . . . how much freedom we have to build an interactive, online curriculum. I've been teaching math for 25 years, and this is a daunting task. Essentially, I've been told, 'Go. Make the class of your dreams, and do it so it's accessible to all kids using 21st century tools.'"

Offline Activity Dos

• **Do be passionate about your content.** Take advantage of the fact that students can come to class already knowing a fair amount about the content from their online work, and use face-to-face time to engage students in higher-order thinking activities that will engage them in the domain.

• **Do recognize that at the start, kids will be unsettled by this kind of approach.** When blended learning is done right, most students have never seen anything like it, and they're not sure about it. But after a few days, they never want to go back.

Offline Activity Don'ts

• **Don't be afraid to let the students take control.** You're there to facilitate learning, not to force it.

• **Don't try to force an activity.** Flexibility is key in this environment. If something isn't clicking with students, be willing to adapt.

Promote Deeper Learning and Check for Understanding

How It Clicks

It's no surprise to teachers that deep thinking and transferable knowledge result when students fully understand the principles behind specific facts and concepts. "Knowledge is constructed through social interactions among people," writes Karen Swan. "Better quality learning results from the greater personalization of learning experiences."[18] In a blended learning classroom, the technology is part and parcel of teaching students the facts and concepts, but the deep learning—the true *understanding* of the concepts—comes from teachers.

It is teachers whose work takes information and turns it into knowledge—building deep-thinking strategies and "positive attitudes toward learning that have been shown to enhance deeper learning."[19] It is teachers who fully develop student learning that supports "more complex learning for their students"[20] through their own:

- Deep understanding of their subject matter
- Knowledge of students' common ideas and misconceptions related to the subject matter
- Knowledge of the thinking of individual students
- Sensitivity to cultural, ethnic, and gender differences
- Knowledge of how children learn
- Flexible, adaptable teaching strategies to engage learners[21]

Using these skills in a blended learning classroom, teachers are able to help students verbalize their thought processes, correct misconceptions, and resolve problem-solving deficits—resulting in students who have deep knowledge of a subject, topic, or concept.

We know that when students engage with content in active ways, their work is more easily transferred to learning, particularly when teachers frequently check for understanding and allow students to learn not only by themselves but also "vicariously," with other students in the class.[22]

> In a blended learning classroom, the technology is part and parcel of teaching students the facts and concepts, but the deep learning—the true *understanding* of the concepts—comes from teachers.

When at work in a blended learning environment, students not only have access to individualized, engaging online content, but also to teachers who coach and mentor them to elaborate, question, and explain—asking students to think about a text or problem they encountered in the online course, supplementing the online work with offline examples, encouraging group discussion, and providing valuable one-on-one time when confusion arises.

Making It Click

Rio Rancho Cyber Academy
Rio Rancho, New Mexico
Elaine Manicke, Principal
Heidi Parnell, Online Program Manager

Now in its eighth year, the Rio Rancho Cyber Academy serves 158 students in grades 6–12 in Rio Rancho, the third largest city in New Mexico. The school prides itself on its hybrid setting, merging traditional teaching methods with the latest technology.

Students at the Cyber Academy spend two to three days a week on campus and work off-campus the rest of the week. While on campus, students receive one-on-one help from eight teachers and work in groups for an array of purposes. Off campus, students have near-constant access to teachers, who check their work regularly and monitor their progress.

Nearly six years ago, the staff at the Cyber Academy developed a document of guiding principles, *Writing and Thinking Across the Curriculum*. The goal of this document was to establish clear, concise expectations for student learning for all members of the Cyber Academy community.

The concept is simple: Identify the skillsets all students need in order to achieve success in creating, discussing, and presenting through interactive work. Skills include:

- **Reading and answering questions** to develop vocabulary and comprehension, to activate schema, to predict and question
- **Note-taking** to use vocabulary and refresh objectives, to study and review, and to underscore relevant information
- **Writing short answer responses and essays** to determine writing purpose, to think and organize, and to use relevant information
- **Developing thinking maps** to organize thinking and information, to document information, and to discuss learning in class

But these skills aren't simply for students. They also help teachers, says Elaine Manicke, the Principal of the Academy. Using this rubric, "We set expectations for students, ensure standards are taught, assess student competence, and have a chance for immediate intervention if someone struggles." Moreover, teacher evaluations and expectations for performance have "helped to define very specific expectations that are key to student success," Manicke notes.

Teachers at the Cyber Academy mentor, monitor, motivate, and model, helping students understand what mastery of a topic or skill looks like, and encouraging them to take ownership of their success and learning. If students struggle with an online activity, they can reach out to a teacher—either in person or by e-mail—for immediate help.

Even if students don't reach out for help, the data in programs like Edgenuity make it easy for teachers at the Cyber Academy to assess understanding—they map student work to the established lesson objectives, and reteach if necessary. "In reteaching," says Heidi Parnell, Online Program Manager for the district, "the focus is on each individual student's learning through small group or one-on-one tutoring to attend to learning gaps. Teachers have the means within the enriched virtual learning environment to practice personalized learning and adapt to the needs of their students, reinforcing and encouraging higher levels of comprehension.""

In this blended environment, the "Cyber Academy has so much more flexibility to meet the needs of students," says Manicke. "That can be a scary thing, when you think about a classroom full of kids all learning at different places and paces." This kind of work requires a tight-knit group of communicators working together in service to students. At the Cyber Academy, there are no students on campus on Friday afternoons, so the teachers use that time to collaborate and plan.

Deeper Learning Dos

Do establish a routine. Students, especially those who gravitate toward alternative learning programs, need to understand the expectations placed on them. A daily routine (when both on and off campus) set by the teacher goes a long way toward reaching those expectations.

Do empower students to advocate for themselves. If they believe their understanding of a topic or skillset isn't reflected in the data, they should feel comfortable saying so. The teacher's job is to facilitate learning, and sometimes in the argument for mastery, everything clicks.

Deeper Learning Don'ts

Don't let students believe the work is too hard. You start losing kids when they think they can't do it or that they won't understand. Make sure they see their progress. Find little places to make them active owners of even the smallest amounts of learning.

Don't believe all teachers can do this without training. Blended learning takes a special kind of teacher. Lecturers and assigners are not enough. This work takes highly qualified subject area teachers who can facilitate and mentor to get at learning in a different way and ensure it's really happening, no matter where the student is.

Teach Students Metacognitive and Self-Regulation Skills

How It Clicks

A student's ability to take ownership of his or her learning is the cornerstone of success in a blended learning environment. This is no easy task, however, and requires a teacher to help students understand not simply the course content, but also the learning strategies needed to succeed.

When students are introduced to blended learning, metacognitive skills are often the first they must learn, as they are essential to deep learning. The teacher becomes a guide, mentor, coach, and support in these situations, helping students "learn about learning" and, as a result, take ownership of their success.

Perhaps the most important aspect of metacognitive learning is a student's ability to question, monitor, and explain his or her own learning. The role of the teacher here is immense—teaching students to understand their own learning and evaluate their own confusion. Ultimately, it is often the teacher who helps students identify their challenges and successes—and set achievable, high goals.

> Perhaps the most important aspect of metacognitive learning is a student's ability to question, monitor, and explain his or her own learning.

This kind of initial metacognitive learning comes in a variety of ways, with students learning to:

- Pause video instruction to take notes
- Look up unknown words and research unknown concepts
- Recognize their personal learning struggles and take advantage of available supports and scaffolds (e.g., read aloud, translation, calculators)
- Monitor their own progress through both available data and their own understanding of their learning
- Set achievable goals
- Be persistent during their independent work
- Manage their time both in a single class and over the course of a quarter or semester or year, as well as learning to set goals and plan ahead
- Know when to ask for help

Making It Click

The Richard Allen Preparatory Charter School
Philadelphia School District, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Ryan Wolvin, Assistant Principal

A 10-year-old charter school in the Philadelphia School District, the Richard Allen School serves 92 high school students in grades 9 and 10 with four staff members. ELA and social studies are taught in a traditional brick-and-mortar environment, while math, science, and foreign language are taught using Edgenuity.

"Learning, particularly cyber learning, doesn't work without structure," says Ryan Wolvin, the Assistant Principal of the school. And the unique environment of a blended learning classroom requires students to learn an entirely new way of thinking about thinking.

Students at Richard Allen participate in a "Freshman Academy" in the July prior to starting school. Students complete a "Strategies for Academic Success" course online through Edgenuity, providing them with important learning skills such as note taking and study skills.

At the same time, teachers at the school begin a conversation with students about independent work and time management, which serves two purposes: First, students gain a better understanding of what it will take to achieve in the unique environment of Richard Allen; and second, those who don't think the program suits their learning style are able to leave.

At this point, students work with teachers to complete "individual learning inventories" and create a "cyber growth plan" for the year. Through these plans, students are immediately learning how to break out their work to maximize success, how to schedule their semesters, and how to individualize their learning to achieve their goals. Growth plans are continually revised as the school year progresses.

"As adults," explains Wolvin, "we understand what needs to happen to achieve our goals. We naturally manage our time and chunk information. Kids have to learn those skills—and they're not easy. But once they do, that learning carries on well beyond the cyber classroom."

The teachers at Richard Allen keep a cyber learning log for every student, requiring all students to complete 15 hours a week of on-task time on Edgenuity software. "This is about forward progression," Wolvin explains. "They have to move forward in learning. They can do it in their own way, at school or at home, but they must hit 15 hours a week." All stakeholders in a student's education have access to this work—teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

Technology and data collection are critical components of students' metacognitive learning, Wolvin notes. "If we told them the weekly requirement but didn't give them the tool to track it, we'd be setting them up for failure."

The same is true for scaffolding learning, "Too often with online learning, the scaffolding is invisible. You never get the sense that you are learning," Wolvin says. Using the school's Online Learning Log, "students are able to make these kinds of connections themselves—thinking about what they've done before they move on to the next thing and answering two questions: *What did you learn?* and *What questions do you still have about the lesson?*

Students answer these questions for every lesson, articulating what they need and taking time to e-mail their teachers if they are struggling with a concept. And during all this, the teacher is facilitating learning by:

• Reviewing cyber logs with students
• Acting as a learning coach, supporting, coaching, mentoring, and motivating
• Keeping students on task

Metacognitive Learning Dos

Do set clear goals and expectations at the start. The most difficult thing about teaching anyone to learn is understanding that learning itself is learned. Setting expectations for everything from coursework to time management helps keep everyone on track.

Do understand that cyber learning is not for everybody. Personalized learning is just that: personal. Some students require a more traditional approach, and that's fair.

Metacognitive Learning Don'ts

Don't expect every student to embrace learning immediately. Particularly with students who have struggled with school all their lives, everything related to learning is a challenge. Thinking about thinking and understanding how we learn is a challenge for even the best students.

Don't staff only with teachers. While teachers are essential to the model, consider the need for other adults and mentors to form relationships with students—counselors, experts in sociology and psychology, and those able to identify student struggles and successes.

Make Learning Relevant and Engaging

How It Clicks

We know that motivation and engagement are essential in any learning environment. Student engagement in the classroom results in academic persistence and success. And we know that when "the light bulb goes on" for a student, that's where the magic of teaching happens. The more students enjoy and engage with their subject matter, the more adept they become at discussing their learning with teachers for feedback, coaching, and instruction.

The blended learning classroom is designed to encourage this kind of engagement through vibrant technology, self-directed lessons, and providing students with ownership of their education. Research suggests that the following engagement strategies—in the hands of a great teacher—contribute to enhanced learning outcomes:[23]

• **Capturing student attention and priming curiosity at the start of the course.** It's imperative that students understand how their coursework impacts their lives. If students don't see value in their classes or courses, they will quickly tune out.

• **Establishing a teaching presence both on- and offline.** Students know when a teacher cares about their work. In a blended learning environment, a teacher's presence online can be the lynchpin in making students accountable and invested in their work.

> It is critical that teachers and other staff members develop relationships with students. Providing help and support for any problems the student may have can help remove roadblocks to academic success.

• **Engaging students in challenging, authentic, real-world tasks.** Students are not motivated when they are given high marks for simple tasks, nor are they motivated when the task is far beyond their ability. Teachers can ensure that the bar is set just high enough to engage and encourage.

• **Monitoring and identifying disengaged students.** Finding these students early (through both observation and student data review) is the key to providing personal, one-on-one intervention and support, and to developing trust and community in the classroom.

• **Having personal contact with students.** It is critical that teachers and other staff members develop relationships with students. Providing help and support for any problems the student may have can help remove roadblocks to academic success.
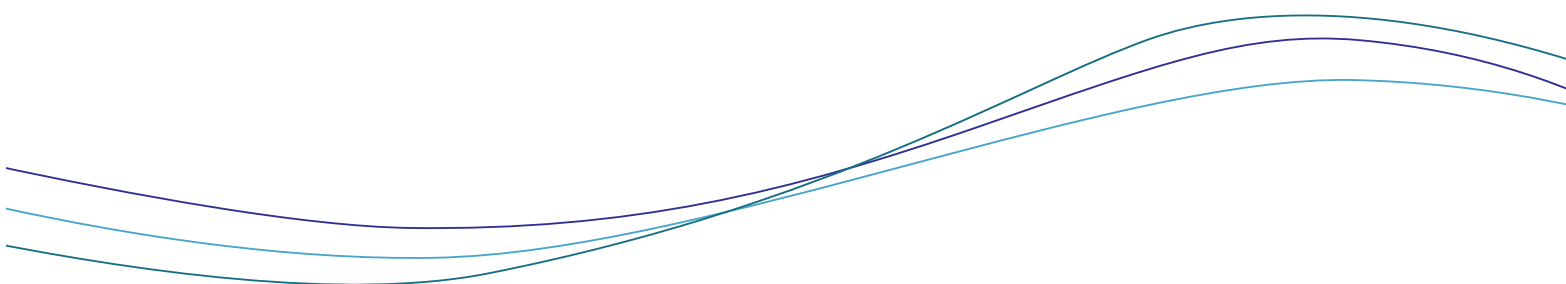
Making It Click

Highline Interim Placement Program
Highline School District, Burien, Washington
Bruce Dearborn, School Leader

Now in its third year, the Highline Interim Placement Program (HIPP) is a learning program designed to assist students who require short-term education placement for a variety of reasons, including long-term suspension, court-appointed non-traditional schooling, and pregnancy. Now, the program serves additional students who struggle with attention deficit and social anxiety disorders.

With the help of two full-time and two half-time teachers, the 95 students enrolled in HIPP last year completed an average of 1.7 credits in seven weeks—learning four times faster than they ever had. At the end of their program, 92 percent of those students had either graduated or returned to their traditional schools.

"For many," says HIPP founder and School Leader Bruce Dearborn, "this is the only place they've felt successful and respected as learners."

What is the hallmark of HIPP's success? It begins with the structure of their day, Dearborn explains. "The key to making learning engaging is recognizing students as self-directed learners. They have biorhythms, like any of us." Students at HIPP are enrolled in one three-hour in-school session—accommodating either morning or evening rhythms.

Using Edgenuity, HIPP then assesses students' academic vocabulary, understanding, interests, and confidence levels. The software is particularly helpful in these early assessments, as the students enrolled at HIPP "have become adept at faking it to survive in school." But at HIPP, their challenges are never used against them. "Too often, their experiences in school are negative at best and traumatic at worst," says Dearborn. "We use the software to find strengths...they've too long been called out for their weaknesses."

Once the strengths are found, learning can begin. At HIPP, teachers start with the topics and entry points that are relevant and engaging to each student. "Working with students individually is elemental to their success," Dearborn points out. "We work to get at what students do understand. *I'm bad at math* is an unacceptable statement for us. Our job is to get at *why you think that way*."

To keep learning engaging, HIPP staff set clear expectations for both mistakes and success. "We're going to make mistakes. Everyone does. But they're not the end of the world. In fact, they can be the beginning of learning and success," Dearborn says. HIPP students are allowed to make mistakes, which gives them more freedom to explore and enjoy their school work. "Once we take the fear out of mistakes, students begin to see that success is possible. And they set their own goals and take control of their own learning."

Relevant And Engaging Learning Dos

Do work with students to build trust and honesty. Too often, school has built a culture of distrust with the kids who are most difficult to reach. The teacher-student relationship is essential to getting them to let their guard down enough to learn.

Do accept that sometimes, it's bigger than you. Making learning relevant and engaging enables students to open themselves to school, but it's not the only piece of the puzzle. If kids can't meet you where you are, don't get discouraged.

Relevant And Engaging Learning Don'ts

Don't wait for kids to fail. Start early, identify students who require special attention and intervention, and get them the help they need.

Don't let students think of mistakes as failure. Mistakes are opportunities for learning. It's not important that they got it wrong. It *is* important why. We can all learn from that.

Monitor Data

How It Clicks

For many teachers, data is a critical component of the blended learning experience. Students participating in blended learning programs are monitored as they work, allowing teachers to see—in real time—where every one of their students is, and how those students are performing.

If a student is falling behind, the data will show it. If he is finding the work too easy, the data will show it. If he's goofing off, the data will show it.

If a student is falling behind, the data will show it. If he is finding the work too easy, the data will show it. If he's goofing off, the data will show it. This helps learning on a number of levels—helping teachers know exactly where and how they're needed, helping students meet and exceed academic challenges, and keeping students accountable for their own learning.

Research suggests the following tips to ensure that everyone in the classroom is monitoring data thoughtfully:

• **Setting SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely) goals for students.** These goals should address academic achievement, of course, but also act as benchmarks for engagement.

• **Teaching students to access and examine their own data, and set and evolve their own learning goals throughout the year.** This builds both accountability and ownership and encourages self-regulation skills.[24]

• **Using data to drive instruction, group students, and monitor assignments.** No matter what the format of a blended learning classroom, the data serve an important face-to-face purpose—keeping the teacher as the true "educational designer" for a student's education.

Making It Click

Now in its fifth year, the Higley Learning Center offers Edgenuity's online content to 100 students in grades 9–12, and 18 "super seniors" in their fifth year of school. There are three full-time teachers in the program, all of whom are trained to use Edgenuity.

Students enrolled in the Learning Center are a mix of full-time students and, beginning this year, students who are doing extra work toward credit recovery as part of their school schedule. David Reed, Ph.D., the Lead Staff, says, "The benefit of the program's structure is the ability to roll students in and out as needed from traditional classrooms, to make sure they get everything they need for success."

At the start of the program, students are given a battery of prescriptive pretests to establish their personal benchmarks—how much they need to learn and which standards are particular challenges. Reed says the best part of this intense data collection structure is that it allows educators a synchronous review of student work...and struggles. "I can see how they're doing on the assessments question-by-question, and take immediate action," he says. "It allows me to be more proactive on remediation, rather than reactive. I can jump right in and see what's happening. Are they distracted? Or are they actually struggling with the content?"

Edgenuity works well for Higley in part because it allows for intense individualized instruction. At Higley, the program is used with students who have special needs, ESL students, hearing-impaired students, students with autism, those with social anxiety, and those who need a smaller, less-distracted classroom experience. "A teacher might have 25 students doing 25 different things in 25 different places. It gives the teacher a chance to interact independently with each student where that student is."

Reed is particularly excited by the freedom Edgenuity allows for delivering "competency-based instruction" rather than "seat-time instruction." The data collected on each student—from time on task to success in quizzes and competency assessments—is used to individualize instruction. "We do an individual graduation plan for success for each student, identifying what each student needs to graduate. This allows us to 1) complete the student's education at the Learning Center; or 2) get them back to traditional schooling ready to complete their work there.

Data from the Edgenuity educator dashboard is essential to the work of Reed and his team. "It shows us everything," he says. "More importantly, it shows *students* everything. If we have a student who has an inordinate amount of idle time, we show it to them. Which cuts down on problems in class, because he knows that I know." This works for everything from attendance to in-class work, successes to challenges. "We tell them: We want you to take ownership of your learning and your education. And they do."

Monitoring Data Dos

Do watch the data in real time and provide feedback. Sometimes that means going to the student and helping with a problem or a concept; other times, it's sending a chat from the program to say, "Hey, you're doing great."

Do supplement the data with your own understanding and skills. If a student is struggling, jump in and make that personal connection. It builds trust and understanding between you and the student.

Monitoring Data Don'ts

Don't simply assume that because students pass the assessment, they are ready for the next step. This is where the art of teaching comes in. Just because the data tells us the student has mastered geometry doesn't mean she's ready for Algebra II. Your work as a teacher is to ensure that the data is reflecting deep learning.

Don't be bound by a 180-day calendar. Once your students achieve competency, begin the work on the next topic, semester, course, or year.

Provide Positive Feedback to
Students and Celebrate Success

⑨

How It Clicks

Perhaps the most important role of the teacher—particularly in a blended learning classroom that serves those students who are struggling most—is to provide meaningful feedback and celebrate success in its many forms.

Research by Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck shows that students who believe they can grow and evolve their skills have greater motivation and higher achievement than do students who believe their abilities are fixed.[25] Teachers are critical in influencing students' mindsets in this area.

As a result, Mueller and Dweck suggest teachers:

- Emphasize that learning and effort hold more value than a perfect performance
- Reinforce that the amount of progress students make individually is more important than how they compare to others
- Provide targeted feedback for students to correct behavior that might impede success
- Praise students for elements that are within their control, such as effort, challenge-seeking, persistence, and good strategies—rather than on their personal traits or abilities

The blended learning classroom seems to be a prime location for this kind of teacher-directed positive feedback, in part because of the culture of community and trust that is the cornerstone of its success. "Online education seems particularly well constructed for social learning, because all students have a voice and no student can dominate the conversation,"[26] writes Karen Swan in her review of the research on online learning. When all students can participate in the class in an engaged, relevant way—and receive positive feedback—achievement cannot be far behind.

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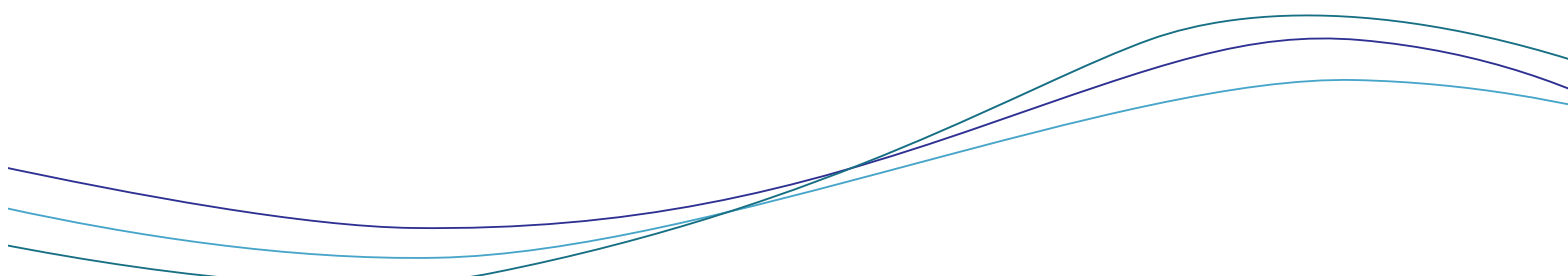
Making It Click

Round Lake Senior High School
Round Lake School District. Round Lake, Illinois
Veronica Lake, Deputy Superintendent and Principal
Anthony Baade, Teacher

At Round Lake Senior High School in Round Lake, Illinois, students who are at risk of dropping out are selected to go into a special program—SALTT (Student Alternative Learning Through Technology) Academy. The program, run by teacher Anthony Baade, serves 20 students who are 5th and 6th year seniors. Now in its third year, SALTT has graduated 33 students. Round Lake is also using Edgenuity software for credit recovery for 70 students.

"The kids do all the work," Baade says, when asked to describe his teaching. "They have to push the buttons. I'm their learning coach. I'm their cheerleader. The computer is a 'subject area specialist.' My job is to be their guide to growing their learning skills."

The Academy is serving the most struggling students in the district, many of whom have never received positive feedback in school. But at SALTT, students are encouraged to build a working relationship with Baade. "Through that relationship," he says, "you build a bond of trust. Trust gets them to the next level. Trust gets them success."

Veronica Lake, the Principal of the high school, elaborates. "Because this is a smaller setting, kids feel connected to Mr. Baade. They can contact him at night, on weekends, during the summer. There's real connection there. And his positivity is facilitating their success."

"One teacher can't service 20 students at a time in a self-paced program," Lake adds, "That's where two things come in— technology and teacher's aides."

Teachers and aides in the SALTT Academy can see real-time successes and struggles through the Edgenuity educator dashboard. That's where positive feedback comes in. "Congratulations goes a tremendous way," Baade says. "You did a great job. Now let's try the next one. You're almost there."

The students enjoy the feedback and the independence. Young people who have cut class and skipped school in traditional classrooms are now sitting for five hours at a time, maximizing their learning during that time. "They love that they have independence, that their learning is self-directed and personalized," Baade says.

The teacher is everything, Lake adds. "You need someone who has instructional knowledge but has coaching spirit. When learning is individualized, it can get boring if the kids are just left by themselves. But when you have someone who can encourage you, can push you along, can monitor you in real time and push you further, they require more of you—and you require more of yourself."

Positive Feedback Dos

Do consider an alternative time for the school day. The SALTT day starts at either 9 a.m. or 1 p.m., to accommodate biorhythms, parent schedules, work and childcare schedules, and other truancy issues.

Do make students accountable for their work, their pacing, and their education. Give them a sense that they're in charge, even as they have a coach and helper in their teachers.

Positive Feedback Don'ts

Don't lecture. No one likes being talked down to or talked at. These students prefer to be spoken *with*. Education, particularly for students who are best connected to blended learning, is about teamwork. They're independent workers, you're a coach.

Communicate to students that their time is valuable. Many of these students are bogged down outside of school with work, family, etc. They have clear goals, and they are working toward them. Honor that commitment and acknowledge the work it takes to be present.

Encourage Online Discussion

How It Clicks

"Online discussion affords participants the opportunity to reflect on their classmates' contributions while creating their own, and to reflect on their own writing before posting it. This tends to create certain mindfulness and a culture of reflection in online courses," writes Karen Swan in her 2003 review of the research on online learning.[27]

Research indicates that the quantity and quality of instructor-led online interactions with students is linked to student learning.

A decade later, online learning may look very different than what Swan was considering, but the core of her findings remains. Research indicates that the quantity and quality of instructor-led online interactions with students is linked to student learning.

Swan suggests teachers in blended learning environments should:

- Provide students with frequent opportunities for both public and private online interactions with instructors and peers.
- Post strategic questions online, encouraging students to brainstorm answers and compare ideas.
- Model the use of verbal immediacy behaviors (questions, humor, addressing others by name, praise, and inclusive pronouns) in interactions with students.
- Encourage students to share personal experiences and beliefs in online discussion, while similarly encouraging a non-judgmental environment for those experiences.
- Encourage experimentation, divergent thinking, multiple perspectives, complex understanding, and reflection in online discussion through provocative, open-ended questions.
- Model support and encouragement for diverse points of view.

Making It Click

For many students around the country who are participating in online learning experiences, the instructors from the Edgenuity Instructional Services Group serve as day-to-day teachers.

These instructors are subject-area-certified teachers who interact with students through the Edgenuity learning management system, web conferencing software, phone, text, e-mail, and chat—ensuring that students receive personalized feedback and assistance to meet their learning goals and achieve success. Even though the teachers are not located in the same place as their students, the model is structured with ample teacher-student interaction and is approved by the NCAA as a non-traditional course option for student athletes.

Mary Felix, the National Math Instructor Lead for Instructional Services, serves approximately 1 to 200 students per week, facilitating learning by:

- Analyzing student data, assessing student work trends, successes and challenges
- Checking in with each student by e-mail and/or phone to ensure that the data reflects learning
- Responding to student and parent e-mails with questions and concerns about content and technology
- Hosting five public study halls that provide a chance for students and parents to meet with the teacher for support
- Differentiating instruction for individual students who require special assistance
- Hosting small-group instruction to engage students in deep learning

"What's amazing about the Edgenuity online learning environment," Felix says, "is that it makes it easy to see where students are, how they are learning, and create a unique plan for accommodating them."

The data from the Edgenuity educator dashboard shows instructors just where students are succeeding and finding challenges, pinpoints which kinds of tasks students are drawn to and which they are struggling with, and "allows teachers to proactively work with these students to help them with everything from content to technology," Felix says. "I can pull kids from all over the country into my online whiteboard for a class, if I see they're all struggling on the same thing. It's remarkable."

In addition to her work with a cross-section of students, Felix also works with a list of "high-priority" students each week. This list is derived from the data provided by the Edgenuity software, and consists of students who are behind pace, students who have not attended school for four days or more, and students who are failing.

Virtual instructors like Felix are a part of a collaborative student-centered team that includes Success Coaches, who mentor and motivate students, and Concept Coaches—online tutors who provide extra help and additional support to those kids who need further explanation.

"We have such a broad spectrum of students at Edgenuity," Felix says, "but many of them come from school situations where a traditional school environment won't work, either because of academic or social struggles. We give them a chance to learn at their own pace in their own environment."

Students and Edgenuity instructors contact each other regularly, and develop a relationship that is similar to the traditional teacher-student relationship. "There's little difference between teaching in this environment and in a traditional environment," Felix says. "I get to know my students as learners and as people. If I have a student who loves baseball but is struggling with geometry, I use baseball to explain geometry—just as I would in a traditional classroom."

Online Discussion Dos

Do be flexible. Students in any blended learning environment are diverse and have unique needs. The best teachers are willing to "Say yes, always," Felix says. "We need to provide students with all the help they require."

Do care for the students. Student focus and student-centered work is essential to reach students and ensure they succeed in a blended learning environment. "The more we understand them and their experiences, the more likely we are to reach and help them," Felix says.

Online Discussion Don'ts

Don't be afraid to reach out to students. If a student isn't replying to e-mails or doesn't seem to be giving his all to the program, it's the teacher's job to check in and encourage. Complacency can be the enemy of a great blended learning environment.

Don't stop learning. "We're all professional learners," Felix points out. "An online environment allows us to continue to learn and experience and pass that information on to students. That's the best part of the whole experience."

Conclusion

"Great teachers have been blending learning for 150 years," says Rick Ogston, founder of Carpe Diem Charter Schools. "These days, it's about what you blend. We're blending technology with face-to-face instruction."

The schools and educators discussed in this report prove that blended learning classrooms are unable to succeed without the essential work of committed, engaged, and skilled teachers.

Edgenuity works daily with teachers and districts across the country, where teachers are embracing and mastering their new role—no longer lecturer, but facilitator, no longer knowledge keeper but learning designer. They're strategic instructors, targeting lessons and instructions to the needs of every student.

They're also making learning consistently more relevant, more engaging, and more challenging and exciting for students. David Reed from Higley Learning Center sees this every day. "When surveyed, most of our students believe that their blended learning work is more rigorous than what they've had in prior schools."

This is likely because these blended learning environments are making it easier than ever for teachers to differentiate instruction and actually reach every student. "We're giving every kid access to the curriculum in *their own way*," says Lisa Sheehy from EPICC Learning Academy. "How they learn it, how they synthesize it, how they present it. It makes teaching incredibly rewarding." What's more? "I feel like I'm learning every day right alongside them."

Inside the blended learning classroom, educators are finding new, exciting ways to teach—to reach even the hardest-to-reach students, to encourage the students who have struggled with school their whole lives, to engage those who are performing beyond their grade level. These teachers are using technology to find new avenues for teaching and learning, and to make learning click... for every student.

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