

Blended learning spaces: Patterns of use

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With the onset of blended learning spaces (BLS), teachers are blending face-to-face, communicative tasks with online activities synchronously—within one lesson and within the walls of a single room. Our institution has 10 BLSs; modern, versatile classrooms equipped with a range of technology including 30 laptop computers. The study, an overview of BLS use across departments in the spring of 2009, comprised an online teacher survey (n=38) and follow-up interviews (n=12). We found that laptops were being used at some point in 87% of BLS lessons, most often for word processing, internet research and watching videos. When teachers did not have access to BLSs, the CALL mode was often assigned for homework—mirroring the asynchronous model of blended learning prevalent in the literature. BLS lessons also had different lesson goals, more variety of media, more variety of input and output, and signs of increased learner autonomy, particularly: individualization, interaction and interdependence.

ブレンディッド・ラーニング・スペース (BLS) では、1つの教室で行う1回の授業において、教師は対面のコミュニケーションタスクとインターネットを利用した活動を同期的に融合させている。当大学の10室のBLSは、30台のノートパソコンを始めとする幅広い設備を備えた、多目的に使用できる最新式の教室となっている。2009年春学期における学科全体のBLS利用状況を総括する本調査は、オンラインによる教師へのアンケート (n=38) とフォローアップ・インタビュー (n=12) から構成されている。BLSでの授業の87%でノートパソコンが使われていたことがわかったが、最も利用されていた機能はワープロ、インターネット検索、ビデオ視聴であった。BLSを使用できない場合、教師はCALLで宿題をするよう指示することが多かった。文献によく見られるように、CALLはブレンディッド・ラーニングの非同期モデルを反映するものである。BLSの授業には様々な授業目標、より多様なメディア、より多様なインプットとアウトプットもあり、また、特に個別化、インタラクション、インターディペンデンスの点で学習者の自立の増加の兆候も見られた。

COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE learning (CALL) has long been associated with separate laboratory classrooms that only specialists could operate. This condition is changing, as Hinkelman (2005) explains:

Closed laboratories operated by CALL specialists will disappear, replaced by ordinary classrooms where even non-technically oriented teachers can integrate internet-based activities into a face-to-face setting. (Hinkelman, 2005, p. 17)

Blended learning (BL) is traditionally defined as a combination of face-to-face, classroom learning and online, out-of-class learning (e.g. Banados, 2006; Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005;



Kupetz & Ziegenmeyer, 2005; Neumeier, 2005; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Stracke, 2007). With the onset of blended learning spaces (BLS), however, the traditional definition becomes problematic because teachers are blending face-to-face, communicative tasks with online activities synchronously—within one lesson and within the walls of a single room. Our institution, Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), opened six BLSs in 2003, and another four in 2009. With considerable collective experience in this particular, synchronous type of BL, we felt that we had something unique to contribute to the BL literature. This paper discusses patterns of BLS use across departments in the spring of 2009.

What is a blended learning space?

A BLS at KUIS is a modern, versatile classroom equipped with a range of technology and accommodating up to 30 students. A 2003 BLS has, for example, the following equipment:

- Teacher computer and LCD projector
- A/V cabinet housing a stereo receiver, CD/DVD player, VHS player, MD player, satellite TV receiver
- Speaker system
- Whiteboards at front and back of room
- 30 laptops with wireless internet access
- Audio splitters (enabling students to listen to the same audio source together with headphones)
- Printer

Student desks are on wheels, and fold up and stack together when not needed. The teacher computer can be wheeled into a corner if necessary. 2009 BLSs lack satellite TV and share a central printer between rooms, but are otherwise similar. When the BLSs were designed, the goal was to build in as much flexibility as possible, to accommodate different modes of learning. Our

English Language Institute (ELI) handbook (2009) characterizes the BLSs as follows:

BLSs are “classrooms designed to blend the best of traditional classroom teaching with the flexible advantages of state-of-the-art technology... Kanda’s ‘3 Is’ of Individualization, Interaction, and Interdependence can be supported as students work in various group formations and/or with various media tools... There is no need for a “computer day”; teachers blend technology into their everyday pedagogy. (pp. 69-70)

What really distinguishes the BLSs from other classrooms across campus is the sets of student laptops. And what distinguishes them from traditional computer labs is that the laptops are not always out on the desks, but are housed in a cabinet in the corner of the room when not in use. A BLS can thus accommodate a variety of classroom setups (e.g. group discussion, class presentations, poster presentations, individual students at laptops, pairs at laptops, etc.).

Of course BLSs vary from institution to institution. At Sapporo Gakuin University, for example, BLSs have desks in the middle of the room, and computer stations around the perimeter. This allows lessons to flow easily between regular mode and computer mode.

The study: Phase one

At the time of the study, the ELI comprised 51 full-time teachers and 8 full-time learning advisors. ELI teachers teach across three departments: English, International Communication, and International Languages and Cultures. The ELI was founded on the principle of learner autonomy, defined (as in the handbook quote above) as: individualization, interaction, and interdependence.

Phase one of the study was a teacher survey. The survey was designed to get a broad snapshot of BLS use across the ELI. The survey was conducted online. All 51 ELI teachers were invited to respond, and 38 did, giving us a response rate of 75%. Survey questions (see Appendix 1) asked teachers about: their familiarity with CALL theory and practice, their access to BLSs, frequency of student computer use and types of CALL activities utilized in class, and a variety of factors influencing their decisions to incorporate student computer use into their lessons.

Our 38 survey respondents were teaching a total of 273 (90-minute) lessons a week at the time of the study, and 109 of those (40%) were in BLSs. For classes meeting twice a week, it was common to meet once in a BLS and once in a non-BLS. Respondents were teaching a variety of courses across the three departments.

Findings

Survey respondents reported that laptops were being used at some point in 87% of their BLS lessons, most commonly for word processing, internet research and watching videos (see Table 1). We noted that laptops were being used less for technologically social (web 2.0) activities like blogs, chat and social networking sites—perhaps because BLSs are social environments already with teachers striving to maintain orally communicative lessons (and laptops often being shared by students, for example).

Table 1. What do students do on the laptops in a BLS lesson?

Activity	% of respondents incorporating activity
Word processing	79%
Internet research	74%

Activity	% of respondents incorporating activity
Watching videos	66%
Listening to audio	55%
PowerPoint	55%
Surveys	55%
Moodle	50%
Collaborative writing	24%
Class administration	16%
Blogs	13%
Chat	11%
Email	11%
Other (compiling a glossary, writing responses to forum questions, designing quizzes, making websites together, internet ESL sites, working with data using Excel, games (typing, vocabulary))	8%
Video/audio editing	5%
Social networking (e.g. Facebook)	5%

The study: Phase two

In phase two of the study, we conducted follow-up interviews with a selection of survey respondents. The interviews were designed to get more detailed, personal information from particular teachers.

We selected 12 survey participants randomly and approached them for follow-up interviews. We asked interview participants to bring two lesson plans with them to the interview; one from a BLS lesson and one from a non-BLS lesson (and from the same course if possible). Both lessons were to have been taught within

two weeks of the interview to ensure that they were fresh in teachers' minds, and to strengthen the validity of the study; rather than allow teachers to choose a favourite BLS lesson, for example, we wanted to have more of a realistic cross-section of BLS and non-BLS use.

Our interview questions (see Appendix 2) asked teachers for their own definitions of BL and BLS, and how being in a BLS influences teaching and learning patterns. We then asked them to walk us through both of their lessons, comparing them on the following criteria: learning objectives, choice of technologies, blending of face-to-face and CALL modes, and perceived success of the lesson/evidence of learning.

Interviews were audio recorded and lesson plans were collected. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour.

BLS lessons

BLS lessons described by interview participants are outlined below.

BLS lesson A

This lesson was part of a unit on media literacy. The teacher began by reviewing some common mistakes from the previous lesson's vocabulary test using PowerPoint. He then showed a TV advertisement and asked students (sitting in groups of three) to discuss the roles of sex and male stereotypes in the ad. Next, he distributed a handout that contained two magazine ads and questions pointing to elements of sex and male stereotypes in the ads, which students discussed and filled out in groups. Students were then asked to get a laptop each and find internet ads that featured sex and male stereotypes which they then presented to their group for discussion. Groups were then mixed so that students could present their ads to and discuss with other students.

BLS lesson B

This lesson was part of an investigative unit in which students work together in groups of five or six to solve a fictional investigation. In this lesson, groups were continuing through a handout packet (at their own pace) that sets up the scenario, provides key vocabulary, and guides them through the investigation. Most groups were starting into the audio clues, which are provided on CD. To listen to a clue together, groups get out one laptop and connect headphones using audio splitters. Clues are puzzles that require group discussion and critical thinking. They often point to a particular place on campus, requiring groups to leave class briefly to take a photo of the location for proof. Once a clue has been solved, the group is given the next audio clue by the teacher.

BLS lesson C

This lesson was part of a course on English for international communication, and was intended to help students develop the ability to discuss various aspects of foreign cultures. It began with a Moodle-based vocabulary quiz, during which students were given the freedom to work at their own pace, attempt questions multiple times, and even collaborate with others if they choose to do so. The teacher believed that this activity went beyond simple testing of previous vocabulary acquisition, to providing opportunities for students to learn as they completed the quiz. This was followed by a short presentation, in which the teacher used his computer and the room's projector to display images and videos illustrating different aspects of a chosen country's culture. This served as a model for the students' own presentations, which the remainder of the class was spent preparing. They worked in pairs to research an assigned country, using a list of web resources suggested by the teacher as well as any other information that they were able to find. The teacher

reported that this approach allowed students a degree of autonomy, with enough guidance (in both the structure and content of their presentations) that all students were able to successfully engage in the task. The use of the internet for research also provided exposure to a variety of authentic English-language material, which the students were required to comprehend and then assess the relevance of.

BLS Lesson D

This lesson was the second of a two-lesson sequence that examined music festivals in Britain. The first lesson had been in a non-BLS class and the teacher had had the students discuss their favorite types of music, music festivals in Japan, and music festivals they have attended; hypothesize about what music festivals in Britain might be like; and do a paper-based jigsaw activity on 10 well-known British music festivals. In this BLS lesson, students worked in pairs on one computer. The pairs were given a handout that directed them to a website with information and links to the 10 British music festivals studied in the previous lesson. The handout included questions about the content of the websites which students had to navigate through in order to answer. After completing the handout, students began a second task which had two pairs working together. Each pair chose one festival to investigate through the various websites for 20 minutes, after which pairs presented the information they found to each other. The final task of the BLS lesson had students visit a website with photographs of a music festival in Japan and answer questions about the photographs.

BLS Lesson E

The objective of this lesson was to write a literature review. Students used Microsoft Word, the internet, and books brought to class to achieve this objective. The teacher explained that being

in a BLS for this lesson is advantageous for a number of reasons. One reason is that students can choose from a wider array of strategies to solve problems with their writing. If students run into difficulty with grammar or spelling they can ask each other, or use the internet to find the answer. The teacher also noted the utility of writing a literature review on a word processing program versus by hand. Word processing programs usually have a spell-check function which helps students to avoid spelling errors. Another advantage of being in a BLS that the teacher noted was that students who forget to bring the necessary books for their literature reviews can begin the task by using the internet to track down relevant books and articles on their respective subjects; class time is not wasted.

BLS Lesson F

This lesson was part of a first-year writing course. The purpose of the lesson was to increase students' use of descriptive adjectives. It was a continuation of a previous (non-BLS) lesson on developing descriptive adjectives. The teacher began the BLS lesson by reviewing the handout from the first lesson, in which students read an example of descriptive adjective use from a novel and completed various writing exercises to expand adjective use, including a written description of a cat. Next, using the computer and projector, the teacher demonstrated an online thesaurus and the thesaurus feature in Microsoft Word. The students then completed a mini-exercise replacing common adjectives with more descriptive ones. Finally, various famous works of art were displayed on the screen and students chose one and wrote a descriptive paragraph on an image of their choice.

BLS Lesson G

This lesson was part of a unit on globalization. In the previous lesson, the students had read articles and answered questions

about a multinational company. In this lesson, they continued exploring issues about multinational companies. First, they warmed up by discussing the meaning of “having different perspectives” with a partner. Next, they discussed one positive and one negative influence of globalization from the perspective of a Japanese college student. Third, students selected an article from a globalization-themed website. A handout prepared them for a group discussion on the article of their choice. The handout had the students think about the perspective of the article, points of agreement/disagreement, new ideas and perspectives learned. Before the group discussion, students summarized the article in their own words, made notes of new vocabulary and expressions, and wrote discussion questions.

BLS lesson H

This was a lesson on global conflict. The beginning of the lesson was spent reviewing the previous lesson’s vocabulary and issues. The teacher then had the students take out laptops and headphones and search YouTube for clips related to global conflict. At a set point in the lesson students had to come together in small groups and show each other the clips they had found. They then had to reflect on the content of the clips and discuss together.

BLS lesson I

At the beginning of this lesson, students checked each other’s homework in pairs. They were then given four useful expressions and had to write dialogues using them. After forming groups of four, they had to compare and correct each other’s dialogues. Students then reviewed vocabulary and expressions from a TV sitcom episode they had started watching in the previous lesson. They then watched the remainder of the episode, with the teacher pausing the video at times for students to take notes and discuss vocabulary and expressions and any other points of interest.

Findings

It became clear, after talking to interviewees, looking at their lesson plans, and analyzing the data together, that there were some differences between BLS and non-BLS lessons. BLS lessons had: different lesson goals, more variety of media, more variety of input and output, signs of increased learner autonomy and motivation, and different patterns of interaction and homework.

Different lesson goals

While several teachers claimed that learning objectives are not affected by BLSs, and that they simply plan different activities to achieve the same goals in a non-BLS, others suggested that BLSs have a significant influence on lesson goals. Many noted that they might concentrate on different skills depending on the room, doing more listening when computers were available to listen from (with students working in pairs and finding their own listening passages on the internet, for example), or more speaking when computers were not available to offer alternative forms of interaction. On several occasions, mention was made of the fact that the use of technology can sometimes become a lesson goal in itself, as teachers may be required to train their students before they can make use of unfamiliar hardware or software. One interviewee also suggested that the use of technology sometimes makes his goals more flexible, in that he is able to allow students to act more autonomously in finding their own materials and setting their own tasks to work on.

More variety of media

Not surprisingly, the BLS lessons presented by interviewees incorporated a wider variety of media than the non-BLS lessons. For example, lessons in the BLS classrooms incorporated slide-shows, videos, and other projected images for demonstration

purposes. Participants also had their students working on the laptops in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel—and online in Moodle (our online course-management system). All BLS lessons discussed incorporated the internet at some point. On the other hand, lessons in non-BLS lessons were limited to traditional tools such as paper handouts, blackboard, and occasionally newspaper and video.

More variety of input and output

Interviewees were unanimous in their satisfaction with student exposure to input in a BLS. All cited the internet—YouTube in particular—as an exceptional source of authentic input for students. Common phrases from this section of the interviews included: “wider range of input”; “student choice”; and, “authentic input”. One teacher also noted that students are able to control the pace and number of times they hear the input through the pause and rewind functions on media players.

In terms of student output, access to a word processor was mentioned repeatedly. One writing teacher suggested that the BLS better represents the situation most students will find themselves in after graduation, as once in the workforce they will be writing with aid of word processors that afford them the luxuries of spell check, grammar check, copy-and-paste functions, etc. In addition, one teacher mentioned that some students feel more comfortable interacting with the teacher and their peers through electronic means (e.g. email, forums, message boards) as compared to traditional face-to-face interaction. This phenomenon has been well documented elsewhere in literature on computer-mediated communication (see Lam & Kramsch, 2002; Shang, 2007).

Signs of increased learner autonomy

When teachers were asked how being in a BLS influences their students’ learning, the common response was that it empow-

ers them. When doing computer-based activities, interviewees noted that students are able to move at their own pace. One instructor noted that he can give a list of tasks to be completed during the lesson and “turn students loose”.

Interviewees believed that students are able to work at a smoother pace when they do not have to stop and wait for further instruction from the teacher; anything that is not finished in the class period can simply be completed outside of class. This creates an environment which is conducive to students entering what Csikszentmihalyi calls a FLOW state, or, a “...state characterized by intense focus and involvement that leads to improved performance on a task...” (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 174).

Signs of increased motivation

Interviewees generally felt that students are more motivated to learn in BLSs as opposed to non-BLSs. One teacher suggested that in a BLS, students feel an investment has been made in their learning and are thus more motivated to take advantage of the environment to learn. Other teachers noted that students appear more excited about the different modes of input available to them through computers and the internet in a BLS. While there was a general consensus that students seem to be more motivated (or at least more animated) in BLSs, one teacher made the observation that “student motivation is far too complicated to say it’s influenced by a BLS.”

Different patterns of interaction

There was some concern among interviewees over the possibility that computers and other technology might present a barrier to communication in the classroom. The opportunities that computers offer for learner autonomy (with tasks being computer-mediated, rather than directed by a teacher, and students even able to select their own materials from the wealth of authentic

text, video, and audio available on the internet) seemed to lead to some teachers feeling redundant in their own classes. Often, this was by design, with teachers preferring not to come between students and their tasks unnecessarily, but some interviewees expressed discomfort in not providing the level of input that is traditionally expected of a teacher. In some cases, teachers even admitted that they had spent time using a computer in class themselves for other work-related tasks, instead of paying attention to students.

A number of teachers expressed concern about students “getting lost in the computer” and interaction between students suffering as a consequence. One teacher also voiced the concern that when students pair up on a computer, it is likely that one student will take the lead operating the computer and the other student will lose interest in the activity at hand. However, this concern was not unanimous among the teachers interviewed. Many teachers regularly pair students up on a computer as they feel it facilitates interaction. Additionally, having a mutual point of reference, such as a computer, allows interlocutors to anchor their conversation around that point. Research suggests that having a shared point of reference facilitates language learning (van Lier, 2004).

Different homework patterns

When asked how a BLS lesson might change if it were taught in a non-BLS, teachers explained that the CALL activities would have to be assigned for homework instead. Some teachers were reluctant to assign CALL activities as homework, however, concerned that some students lacked the technical skills to be able to complete the activities alone. Teachers liked having the ability in BLSs to demonstrate how to navigate a particular web site, for example. When in non-BLS rooms, some teachers allow students to leave class and work in computer labs or the library. The fear in these situations is that students are no longer work-

ing in an English environment, and discussion with classmates happens in Japanese.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that our survey response rate was 75%, so 1 in 4 teachers’ views are unknown.

Another limitation is that we did not speak to or observe students, and thus our data was limited to teacher observation. Our plan is to continue the study in 2010 with student participants, and direct attention to the nature of learning in a BLS.

Summary

It appears, based on our findings, that having access to the internet on laptops in a BLS changes teaching and learning significantly—particularly, it seems to promote learner autonomy. Teachers see benefits in terms of: individualization, with students being able to access their own input online and control playback of audio and video files themselves; interaction, with desks moving easily and laptops folding closed to promote face-to-face communication; and interdependence, with learners often working together at one laptop.

When teachers do not have access to BLSs, the CALL mode becomes homework, and we have the asynchronous model of blended learning prevalent in the blended learning literature (where the face-to-face mode is separated in time and space from the CALL mode). While an investigation of the nature of the homework being assigned by ELI teachers was beyond the scope of this study, we gather that CALL homework is more “technologically social” than CALL classroom activities. That is, CALL homework (similar to distance learning) sees students at their own homes, in computer labs, etc. interacting *through* computers (largely in writing) whereas BLS see students interacting

around computers (largely by speaking). Our findings seem to indicate, then, that BLSs accommodate learner autonomy and CALL in a communicative classroom situation. In our 2010 research on student perspectives of BLS lessons, we hope to shed more light on this interesting dynamic.

Hopefully, as BLSs become more common at other universities, a body of research will develop which will allow comparisons to be made across contexts.

Bio data

Dirk MacKenzie is a senior lecturer and the CALL research project coordinator at Kanda University of International Studies.

Lara Promnitz-Hayashi is a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies and is interested in bilingualism, codeswitching and blended learning.

Daniel Jenks is a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies, and is interested in applications of CALL in reading and writing classes.

Joe Geluso received his MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Massachusetts at Boston, and is currently a lecturer of English at Kanda University of International Studies.

Roman Delgado is lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies and Josai Kokusai University and interested in the use of CALL for peer revision in basic writing classes.

Joachim Castellano is a lecturer at Kanda University of International Studies. He is interested in language learning with web social, media, and web 2.0 tools.

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Appendix I

Survey questions

Part A

1. Please enter your name
2. Have you ever studied CALL? If yes, please explain.
3. Did you use CALL in your teaching prior to Kanda? If yes, please explain.
4. Have you ever used CALL as a language learner? If yes, please explain.
5. Rate yourself as a computer user: (beginner/novice/intermediate/advanced)
6. How many koma per week are you teaching this semester?
7. How many koma per week do you have in a BLS this semester?
8. How many koma per week in a BLS would have been ideal? Please explain your selection.

Part B

1. How often do your students use laptop computers for at least part of a BLS class? (always/usually/sometimes/rarely/never) If you answered "rarely" or "never", please explain why.
2. I feel obligated to incorporate student laptop use into my BLS lessons. (strongly agree/disagree/no opinion/agree/strongly agree). Any comments?
3. I would incorporate more student laptop use into my BLS lessons if... (strongly agree/disagree/no opinion/agree/strongly agree).
 - a) students were more computer-literate
 - b) students were more enthusiastic about computer use

- c) there was more support available to me as a teacher
 - d) it facilitated language-learning goals
 - e) other (please specify)
4. What do students do on the laptops in a BLS lesson? (email/internet research/PowerPoint/Moodle/watching videos/listening to audio/word processing/chat/audio or video editing/blogs/class admin./surveys/collaborative writing/social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)/other (please specify)

Part C

1. Do you have any additional comments about your BLS use, or BLS use at Kanda?

Appendix 2

Interview questions

1. What is blended learning in your own words?
2. What is a BLS in your own words?
3. What BLS features do you use?
4. How does being in a BLS influence...
 - a) your teaching?
 - b) your students' learning?
5. Does being in a BLS influence...
 - a) your choice of lesson goals?
 - b) the likelihood of you experimenting with new methods/activities/technologies?
 - c) your interactions with students?
 - d) students interactions with other students?
 - e) learner autonomy/choice/3 I's?
 - f) student motivation?
 - g) student confidence/willingness to contribute?

- h) student exposure to input?
 - i) student linguistic production?
 - h) other
6. Please walk me through your BLS and non-BLS lessons, and compare:
- a) learning objectives
 - b) choice of technologies
 - c) blending of FTF and CAL modes
 - d) success of the lessons/evidence of learning
7. a) How adaptable would your BLS lesson be to a non-BLS room?
- b) How might your non-BLS lesson plan change if it was to be taught in a BLS?
8. How can we improve the BLSs?