

Creating Effective Blended Language Learning Courses

Blended language courses, which combine face-to-face and online instruction, are becoming increasingly popular due to the need for more flexible yet effective learning opportunities. This book recognizes the associated opportunities and challenges for teachers and provides the rationale, strategies, and tools to design blended learning courses or to guide the transition from fully face-to-face or fully online courses to blended instruction. The authors propose a framework based on four phases – Design, Build, Teach, and Evaluate – which facilitates a systematic approach to course development. The volume simplifies the connection between theory and practice by including examples that readers can relate to and immediately implement as they build or teach a course. Including case studies of successful implementations and effective instructional strategies and techniques, this book is accessible even for teachers without previous experience in course design, while also acting as a reference for more experienced language educators.

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*A Research-Based Guide from
Planning to Evaluation*

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Author Biographies

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Preface

This book makes the case for blended language learning, defined as a balanced and intentionally designed combination of face-to-face and online instruction, to explain from a theoretical and applied perspective why combining the affordances of each of these two learning environments can facilitate language learning and promote learner autonomy.

The book is going through the final steps in the publication process as an international emergency unfolds due to the coronavirus pandemic. Consequently, a massive shift is taking place in higher education, as many educational institutions have suddenly switched all instruction to online delivery, at least temporarily. This unprecedented shift constitutes a tipping point in higher education, as it requires all faculty members to become online teachers almost overnight, including those who may have resisted the implementation of online instruction for years.

In the case of language education, the sudden need for distance learning has led to an onslaught of questions regarding effective course delivery. While many universities have the technological infrastructure to conduct classes partially or entirely online, they may face difficulties with language faculty who lack the experience and technological know-how required for virtual teaching. In the absence of such expertise, many educators are struggling to construct efficient plans for course delivery outside of a face-to-face classroom setting. What has become particularly evident throughout this unexpected crisis is the lack of clear criteria regarding how and when language educators can apply specific instructional strategies and technological tools to design efficacious courses that include one or more online components.

In light of these current and pressing concerns, the pedagogical proposals presented in this book are particularly timely as they provide clear and specific directions for educators who need or want to build an effective and efficient blended learning environment. The book encourages educators to rethink, rather than merely replace, their existing teaching strategies by analyzing which specific aspects of each of the two environments, face-to-face and online, should be incorporated into the blended delivery format to create an effective learning experience.

To achieve this purpose, the book is divided into three parts: Part I, a theory-based rationale for the design of blended courses; Part II, an overview of courses successfully implemented at institutions around the world that exemplify different design frameworks, with a focus on the various permutations possible between online and face-to-face environments; and Part III, a proposal for a course development framework that illustrates the steps for creating a blended language course, drawing on principles of teaching and learning relevant to the development of blended courses in higher education.

We conceptualized the structure of the book in accordance with our understanding of the importance of a solid theory-based and research-informed rationale to guide language educators through the design process of blended language courses. As such, the final part of the book, which describes our recommended course development framework, is founded on the theory-based premises presented in Part I and the evidence-based experiences described in Part II. In the process of reviewing current theories and available evidence, we found important gaps in the institutional knowledge surrounding blended language course delivery options. This realization led to the development of a recommended framework that will enable educators to effectively design and evaluate blended language courses in higher education. Our proposed framework assumes that blended learning is beneficial only if the combination of online and face-to-face formats is carefully planned, and only if instructional practices, strategies, and techniques are carefully selected and effectively implemented in each format. If well designed, a blended course will facilitate increased student engagement along with enhanced participation and interaction among learners and between teachers and learners in both offline and online modes. The modified learning environment is conducive to promoting learners' reflections on their own learning processes, ultimately making them more responsible, autonomous, and eager to progress in their language learning.

The main audience for this book is language educators at institutions of higher education. We hope that the book will provide theoretical support and practical guidance for in-service and preservice instructors faced with the challenge of developing new blended language learning courses and for those who are redesigning existing face-to-face or fully online courses into the blended format.

The book should also serve as a useful guide for instructional designers without expertise in second language acquisition who are working with faculty on the design of blended language courses. It can also help guide

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the decision-making of department chairs or language program directors who are considering the adoption of blended language learning models.

In sum, our objective with this book is to provide a theory-based practical guide to the development of blended language courses informed by our own experience as language educators and researchers and enriched by the knowledge and expertise of many of our colleagues to whom we are deeply indebted.

Acknowledgments

This book draws together work with blended language teaching and learning that has consumed our professional lives over several years. Thus it is imperative to begin by thanking all those colleagues who have contributed to our reflection, understanding, and application of this concept: John Harrington and Marco Campos at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies as well as Jon Thomas and Qin Li from the University of Utah's Teaching and Learning Technologies.

We are also very grateful to all those who have let us write about and use screenshots taken from their blended courses: Chiara Fabbian from the Italian Language Program of the Department of Hispanic and Italian Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago; Hosun Kim from the Department of Romance Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Neil Hughes from the School of Cultures, Languages, and Area Studies at the University of Nottingham; Laura McLoughlin from the Department of Italian at the National University of Ireland Galway; Vardit Ringvald from the Middlebury Language School of Hebrew; Marco Campos, Saida Erradi, Mohamad Esmaili-Sardari, Yasue Oguro, and Sophie Russelburg from the Language Studies Program at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies; Daniela Bartalesi-Graf from the Department of Italian Studies at Wellesley College; Margherita Berti from the Second Language Acquisition and Teaching Program at the University of Arizona; and Donatella Melucci from the Department of Italian at Georgetown University.

Anna Murray is due particular acknowledgment for the significant part she played in the reviewing process. Last, but not least, we extend special thanks to our families for their support and patience throughout these busy years.

Guide to Book Resources and Activities

Readers can find additional resources and practical activities for each chapter in the online catalog. Based on Bloom’s taxonomy, all activities encourage interaction with content.

If this book is adopted as the main textbook in courses on language teaching methodology or instructional/educational technology, we suggest using the activities in each chapter. Course participants will be able to reflect autonomously and share ideas or experiences, either in the physical classroom or on virtual collaborative venues. In the latter case, participants may be asked to sign up for Web-based tools for virtual collaboration and add their comments based on teacher-created prompts.

Throughout Sections I and II – theoretical and methodological in nature – we propose the following:

1. Additional information sections:



**Know
More**

By scanning the QR code provided or clicking on the links listed, readers will be able to read more details about a specific topic.

2. There are four types listed of follow-up activities for readers based on Bloom’s taxonomy:



**Identify, Label,
and Conclude**

These comprise individual activities to ensure comprehension of the main points presented through reflection on and application of the main concepts and examples. [Associated with the following levels in Bloom’s taxonomy: Understand and Apply]



**Apply and
Analyze**

These comprise individual activities that guide the application and analysis of the main concepts and examples presented. [Associated with the following levels in Bloom’s taxonomy: Apply and Analyze]



**Reflect, Post, and
Share**

These comprise group activities that encourage readers to share reflections and comments on the information presented. [Associated with the following level in Bloom’s taxonomy: Apply]




**Discuss in Small
Groups**




These contain reflection questions to generate stimulating discussions, whether in class or with colleagues.

Throughout Section III – practical in nature – we propose the following:


1. Additional information sections:

	Know More	By scanning the QR code provided or clicking on the links listed, readers will be able to read more details about a specific topic.
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2. Three types of follow-up activities:

	Read and Understand	These comprise individual activities that guide readers through the main information presented. [Associated with the following levels in Bloom’s taxonomy: Remember and Understand]
	Reflect and Apply	These comprise individual activities that encourage reflection. [Associated with the following levels in Bloom’s taxonomy: Understand and Apply]
	Share, Connect, and Collaborate	These contain online collaborative activities. [Associated with the following levels in Bloom’s taxonomy: Analyze, Evaluate, and Create]

Readers can find the links to the original examples and resources listed within each printed chapter itself, instead of the online catalog.

	Information on the Original Examples and Resources	By following the links and/or the references provided, readers will be able to access the original examples and primary resources in which they are mentioned.
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