

# Researchers develop course for online blended learning

May 2 2017, by Mike Krings

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Across the country, classrooms are making the transition to blended learning models. Typically, students work together, with devices, with a teacher and seek information from a number of educational resources. Recently, researchers at the University of Kansas developed an online course to help teachers create blended learning environments by moving from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, which increases opportunities for personalized learning. Early evaluation of the online course indicated that teachers find the course helpful in providing planning guidance and support necessary to shift to a blended learning model of instruction.

With support from the OAK Foundation, KU's Center for Research on Learning developed the online course. It helps teachers understand blended learning, identify what they want to include in their courses and to design and implement instructional plans. The course is supporting the Lawrence Public Schools' blended learning initiative and offers teachers the option of blending their own learning. In addition, the course is now being piloted in Virginia schools.

Irma Brasseur-Hock, assistant research professor with the Center for Research on Learning and KU's Department of Special Education, said her work with the iNACOL 2015 Blended Learning Teacher of the Year, Paula Barr, provided a simple analogy about blended learning by comparing it with teaching a group of students to swim.

"If the entire group of students jumped in a pool with the intention of

getting to the other side (meeting the learning objective or standard), some would need water wings, others would automatically swim to the other side, some might work together to build a raft, others might get out of the pool and walk around it, and others would look to the [teacher](#) to help them across," Barr said. "Similarly, a blended learning environment allows a more personalized approach to instruction with students receiving the support they need. For example, in a blended learning environment, some students would work together on a research project, another might work with a teacher in a one-to-one arrangement, and other students would be using technology to learn content. However, there is a caveat. Designing a blended learning environment and Implementing in an actual classroom is not a simple task."

"Our initial intent with this project was to ask, 'What supports and tools are needed by teachers to develop blended environments and personalize instruction for all students?'" Brasseur-Hock said. "But perhaps even more importantly, we need to ask, 'Are we meeting the needs of the students in the classroom, and students from all groups, including those with learning differences?'"

The course was developed over three years and by working with teachers. The result takes teachers through three phases: identifying needs, designing the course and implementing blended learning. The "identify needs" phase helps teachers and school personnel determine what content they want to blend, what classes, objectives and materials will be offered virtually vs. physically, and how teachers can assess what students are learning. The course also helps determine what the educational needs are for each [student](#), including gifted learners and students with learning differences. The course includes example strategies for addressing challenges in numerous areas, including reading, writing, math, student engagement and language skills. It also includes links to various online resources and example instructional videos.

"The course is designed to be flexible and fit teachers' limited time but still result in the design of an instructionally sound learning environment," Brasseur-Hock said.

The design phase of the course instructs teachers how to put a blended class curriculum together in a deliverable package for students. Once teachers know what content they want to include, the second phase features tutorials on how to produce videos, find quality pre-made videos and how to build a class website. In addition, the design phase includes a list of evidenced-based instructional practices. The design section also features comments from teachers who have used the system and who share blended learning design insights.

In the implementation phase, teachers learn how to prepare students and parents for a blended learning experience. The implementation phase includes information on the roles and responsibilities for all parties and guidance on self-coaching and reflection on using the model. The section also includes information on how blended learning works, the role of technology, dispelling myths and answering concerns parents and educators might have.

"The goal of a blended learning classroom is that students independently seek resources that answer significant questions," Brasseur-Hock said.

"The myth is that kids in a blended classroom are on a technology device all day. That's simply not the case. Students still work directly with a teacher. It's another means to get instruction to all students."

The online course has been used in ways that support teacher professional learning. For example, teachers are able to attain continuing education and professional development requirements through a variety of resources, keep track of progress, and earn badges and certifications. The course is in use in Kansas and is in pilot-testing stages in Virginia schools, while several other states have begun inquiring and doing initial

work to make it available to their teachers.

The Center for Research on Learning staff is in the process of writing research articles about the course. They are also working on a new iteration of the course that delivers its content in a more user-friendly and improved platform. As more schools make the transition to blended learning classrooms, the course may help answer questions about how the change can be made and how the method can support students of all abilities.

"This is a stand-alone guide for the design of blended learning classroom instruction," Brasseur-Hock said. "One of the key foci of this course was to help teachers transition to blended learning with all students in mind, including students who have unique learning needs."

Provided by University of Kansas

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