iLab Manual

Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030

Module 8

Developing a blended-learning course

University of Perugia, Italy

Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030

Welcome to the course Teaching2030!

Technology rapidly changes the way we think, live, learn and lead. Education plays an essential role in this transformation process. Teachers and trainers have to be prepared for new challenges and learning environments in order to guide future generations the best way possible. Based on these considerations, the blended-learning course "Future-proof your classroom – teaching skills 2030", Teaching2030 for short, addresses teachers, tutors and trainers in higher education institutions providing them with instructional competencies and skills over eight modules. The course comprises a web-based training course (cBook) and an on-site learning space (iLab) and can be accessed without limitations and is free of charge. It is funded by the Erasmus+ Austrian National Agency under Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships.

Lucia and Marko will guide you through the cBook and iLab

The didactical concept of the entire blended-learning course follows the principles of ***storytelling***. Storytelling is quite common in company training but has so far not been commonly used in educational courses. It is, however, an essential part of Teaching2030. Throughout the modules, Lucia and Marko, two teachers at a higher education institution, will guide you through your learning experiences, helping you deal with the new trends and difficulties you might experience in your future teaching. They will accompany you and share stories about their recent successes with their students and their reservations about giving new approaches a try. They provide each other with teaching advice and support, and, last but not least, they help future educators manage the challenges they may face. They are both a constant presence in the cBook and in the iLab, which are closely interlinked.

The ***cBook (computerBook)*** is a web-based training environment that contains the eight modules of the course, each of which comprises five chapters organised around key topics. The cBook offers you a diverse range of learning material, like information (texts, hot spots, didactic sequences), interactive exercises (drag and drop, multiple choice, memory, surveys, word clouds), reflection tasks, videos and additional materials and links. Each cBook module contains five major tasks entitled "iLab", indicating that these tasks are better suited for use within the iLab**.** In addition, the cBook provides reflection tasks, called "iThink", for discussion in the iLab. Nevertheless, you can also work with the cBook as a stand-alone MOOC.

The ***iLab (innovationLab***), as part of the blended-learning course, is an on-site, open, self-directed learning space, estimated to require two days per module. It can be organised as a training environment under the supervision of a Teaching2030-developer, or without supervision, as a self-directed learning environment for teachers who would like to widen and strengthen their teaching approaches and skills. The iLab is designed to be used flexibly, as it provides additional exercises, tools, materials and links, but it is recommended that the cBook be completed first in order to build a solid basis for the iLab. Each iLab module offers a guide explaining the didactical approach of the entire course and a glossary containing the central items and terms used by the development team.

Give Teaching2030 a try and have fun!

Your development team:

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Faculty of Tourism & Hospitality Management

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Universitat de Valencia

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What to expect

1. Introduction to blended learning

Story

Marko: Every day we need to learn new things to improve ourselves!

Luisa: Also in our teaching activities, we need to implement new approaches and new tools in order to attract and effectively retain our students.

Marko: Hence, it is extremely important understanding the new generation and replying to answers such as: what does the new generation need? What are the right communication means? What tools do our students prefer to learn with (see chapter 2 of the present module)?

Marko: But remember that each student may have different needs, expectations, emotions and cognitive approaches, then, don't forget to listen and feel the emotions!

Luisa: To keep up to date and do our best as a teacher we have learnt a lot about innovative tools and methods in the previous chapters. Now we are ready to understand how to mix them and realize an effective blended learning course.

Marko: Then, let's start!

1.1. Origin and definition of blended learning

Blended learning is a recent learning approach adopted in education, which is aimed at mixing face-to-face (f2f) classes with e-learning (Voos, 2003), combining the advantages of both teaching methods (López-Pérez et al., 2011).

According to Semler (2009), "blended learning combines the best aspects of online learning, structured face-to-face activities, and real world practice. Online learning systems, classroom training, and onthe-job experience have major drawbacks by themselves. The blended learning approach uses the strengths of each to counter the others' weaknesses".

Its origin is linked to the birth and spread of computers and the web. It is one of the technology-based and web-based learning approaches. Unlike e-learning, which is exclusively delivered via the internet, blended learning is a hybrid form that combines both f2f and web-learning.

Of course, its origin is linked to the rise of ICTs and the web. Following a synthesis of the historical steps that led to blended learning (source: www.elearningindustry.com):

- 1840's - First Distance Course;
- 1960's & 1970's - Mainframe Computer-Based Training;
- 1970's to 1980's - TV-Based Technology to Support Live Training;
- 1980's & 1990's - CD-ROM Training and Rise of LMS (learning management systems);
- 1998 - First Generation of Web-Based Instruction.

Only in the last decades, we observe a growing integration between online and offline tools in learning, carrying out the so-called blended learning.

1.2. Implementing and evaluating a blended-learning course

Before starting a blended learning course for the first time (in particular if it is the first time inside your school/university) it could be useful to begin with a pilot course (Willis et al., 2017) where a small group of selected students and a team of experts work together to try and assess the new learning approach. Once the pilot is finished and all the needed changes are implemented, the innovative approach could be widespread inside the institution. In this way mistakes and failures may be reduced.

Relating to the implementation of a blended learning course, Bowyer and Chambers (2017) summarize as, generally, scholars consider training of teachers/tutors and ongoing evaluation as two essential aspects for the success of the programme.

As Pombo and Moreira (2012) propose, for the evaluation of a blended learning course, four aspects have to be considered: the **purpose,** the **person** (who needs to be evaluated) **mode** and **timing** (what should be evaluated).

Bowyer and Chambers (2017) offer a detailed framework for evaluating blended learnings synthesized in the following table.

Level	Variable	Elements
Situation	Context	Socio-economic Ethical context Cost Accessibility Cultural Geographical
	Institution	Support Administration
Course	Design and Planning	Curriculum management Organisation of teaching (the 'blend') Flexibility Support
	Content (online and in class)	Relevance and scope Quality Breadth of content Breadth of methods of presentation and activities Validity Accuracy and balance Interactivity Accessibility Organisation Currency (up-to-dateness) Support
	Assessment	Diversity Fit/relevance Support
	Technology	Interface design Ease of use Security Reliability Usability Maintenance Accessibility Organisation Availability personalisation Interactivity Currency (up-to-dateness) Support
Individual	Teachers	Attitude towards computers and technology Attitude towards learners Technological experience Teaching experience Subject knowledge Response time Feedback Support provision of information
	Learners	Attitude towards computers/technology Attitude towards learning elements Attitude towards teaching staff Motivation to take the course Study habits Technological experience Prior knowledge & learning experience Convenience Autonomy Perceived usefulness Perceived enjoyment Peer interaction/support* Group working and collaboration*
Outcomes	Learner satisfaction	With course (overall) With learning With teaching

		Utility of course for future plans/education
	Student engagement	Psychological and cognitive engagement Behavioural engagement Emotional engagement
	Course outcomes	Grades and marks Online activity Attendance Drop out rates

Source: Bowyer and Chambers (2017)

1.3 Effectiveness of blended learning course

To understand and assess the effectiveness of blended learning is a very relevant issue, both to students/teachers to identify the best ways to work together and for decision makers (such as school or university administrators) to take the right investment decisions.

Many scholars have studied the effectiveness of blended learning. Skrypnyk et al. (2015), in analysing all the meta-analyses and systematic literature reviews on blended learning, found that "essentially, all selected studies concluded that in situations where the students experienced BL instruction, whether it was in an online course with some additional f2f time, or whether it was mostly an f2f course with some online time, student academic achievement was higher than that of students who experienced a fully f2f or fully online learning mode".

The success of a blended learning course is not, however, a foregone conclusion. There are, in fact, factors that can facilitate the outcomes and, therefore, the effectiveness of a blended learning course. Kintu et al. (2017) highlighted that learner characteristics (such as attitude and self-regulation) and design features (such as technology quality and online tools and resources) have a positive impact on student satisfaction. A good blended learning course, then, should be supported by **usability, availability, reliability of the technology** and **online materials.**

The institutions should offer the right assistance (both strategical and operative support) to make sure that both teachers and learners feel comfortable with blended learning.

Exercise

Before starting a blended learning course check for the existing experiences in your institution and discuss with your colleagues who have already performed it about pros and cons and do not forget to look for advices.

Activity: Benefits of a blended learning course

Blended learning offers many advantages to you and your students. In the next chapters we will understand how to design and implement a blended learning course.

In the meanwhile, let's try to define what we expect from a blended learning course.

Record a video in which at least 5 students and 3 colleagues are interviewed and in which they list the benefits they think they will get from the course, in particular in relation to the blended methods.

You can use this video in promoting your course!

iThink: Designing a blended learning

Read the following mistakes made when designing a blended learning course and define three major principles what you would like to avoid in your next blended learning course!

Express the principles that will guide you through your efforts **in a positive way!**

Example:
When designing my next blended learning course I will especially pay attention on the selection of proper tasks for the online phase. Please pay attention to the following readings.

Reading 1

Reading 2

Reading 3

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2. Students of a new generation

2.1. The importance of improving student engagement

The main aim of each teacher is to reach learning outcomes and personal growth in his/her class. One of the most relevant factors influencing these goals is student engagement (Carini et al, 2006). In fact, as Trowler (2010) stated "Student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions intended to optimise the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students and the performance, and reputation of the institution". Moreover, she summarized some strategies that can be pursued to increase student engagement: at institution level, strategies such as to involve blended professionals and to adopt institutional engagement plans and, at individual staff level, implement values such as solidarity, hospitality, safety, redistribution of power and criticality (Mann, 2001).

Moreover, Parsons and Taylor (2011) identified six areas within which to operate in order to stimulate student engagement:

1. **Interaction**. Relationships based on interactions, respect and kindness.
2. **Exploration**. Classroom activities based on problem solving, curiosity, flexibility and exploratory actions.
3. **Relevancy**. Not only the study of theoretical topics but also the application of teaching in real-life.
4. **Multimedia & Technology**. Technologies give the opportunity to access tthe tools, materials and experts at a global level.
5. **Engaging and Challenging Instruction**. Changing how we teach and what we teach in respect to student expectations and needs, as well as building constructive teacher-student relationships
6. **Assessment for learning**. Use assessment practices both to monitor student learning and find a way for further development, engaging conversations to share results, and solutions.

2.2. Generation Z and a learning environment tailored for them

As already seen in the cBook the new generation of students belongs to Generation Z with specific characteristics when compared to the previous ones (Generation Y/Millennials and Generation X).

First, "members of Gen Z—loosely, people born from 1995 to 2010— are true digital natives: from earliest youth, they have been exposed to the internet, to social networks, and to mobile systems" (source: www.mckinsey.com).

Moreover, "Gen Z is part of a generation that is global, social, visual and technological. They are the most connected, educated and sophisticated generation ever. They are the up-agers, with influence beyond their years. […]. They are the early adopters, the brand influencers, the social media drivers, the pop-culture leaders. […]. Gen Z's have been born into the crisis period of terrorism, the global recession and climate change" (source: https://generationz.com.au).

Considering these characteristics and according to the report "Gen Z is in the classroom creating the future" (available at: http://www.adobeeducate.com/genz/adobe-education-genz), Gen Z prefers:

- a learning by doing approach
- a problem-solving approach
- a creative learning environment
- the use of technology in learning

Exercise

"Take a coffee with young people": If you have the possibility to spend time with them (students or young friends/relatives). Talk to them friendly about their current and future expectations and about what is their idea of teaching: they could give you some surprisingly advices and brilliant suggestions!

iThink: Class observation

In class, we are often so busy with getting the contents across, watching the time and guiding the students that we do not pay attention on students' statements.

But exactly these statements, they may be positive or critical, offer the opportunity for reflection on students' needs.

On the next page you will find a task about students' statements and how we can use them to improve future courses.

Ask for an explanation if you hear sentences like:

Positive

- "I decided to enrol for another course but now I am back in your class."
- "I am so happy I have enrolled for this course!"
- "You gave us some interesting thought impulses."

Critical

- "Why are you asking *me*?"
- "Do I have to attend the online session until its end?"
- "May I write an assignment instead of presenting?"

Observe your classes for one semester and note down the statements and answers. At the end, cluster the results and design the next course according to your findings!

Activity: Students design a course

Let's conduct an experiment in our class!

Divide your students into group of 4-5 people and ask them to design a brief course of 15 hours in the way they would like it to be done.

No matter the contents! You could let them choose the contents they feel most comfortable with. The important thing is to let them define the stages of the course and, for each of them, the teaching methods (face-to-face, online, seminars, etc.) and the tools (video, blog, discussions, presentations, project works, etc) they would use.

In this way you can understand what are the methods and tools they prefer, their attitude towards learning and how to match their needs!

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3. Mixing teaching methods in a blended-learning course

3.1. Challenges and advantages of blended learning

Story

Lucia: Performing a blended learning course requires neither to leave anything to change nor to program and design every aspect in detail. It could be a time-consuming activity, but the result may be very positive for the outcomes reached (as seen in the cBook and in the previous section of this manual).

However, before starting it is important for us to be aware of the challenges to face, as well as the advantages that we obtain as reward for our efforts.

Hofmann (2011) identified the most important challenges in performing blended learning, as summarized below:

- **Technical challenges**: Try to facilitate the use of technologies by introducing them gradually and choosing them carefully.
- **Organizational challenges**: Introduce the course and prepare facilitators, as well as perform a continuous assessment of all the participators.
- **Instructional design challenges**: Focus on how to teach and not just what to teach, define the best tools for each learning outcome, guarantee the right interaction, ensure coordination.

If not managed in an effective way these challenges can be translated into costs for teachers and participants without obtaining the expected results and this is the main disadvantage of a blended learning programme (www.elearningindustry.com).

At the same time, if the challenges above are well faced and managed, the blended learning may represent an exciting method allowing to pursue relevant advantages, as those highlighted by Kaur (2013):

Advantages

"- It represents a switch from passive learning to active learning

- It offers learners the opportunity to be either together or apart.

- It adds a human touch to the teaching.

- It enhances individualization, personalization and relevance.

- The model offers students the best of both worlds because instructors and students have greater flexibility and accessibility without sacrificing face-to-face contact."

3.2. A focus on flipped classroom

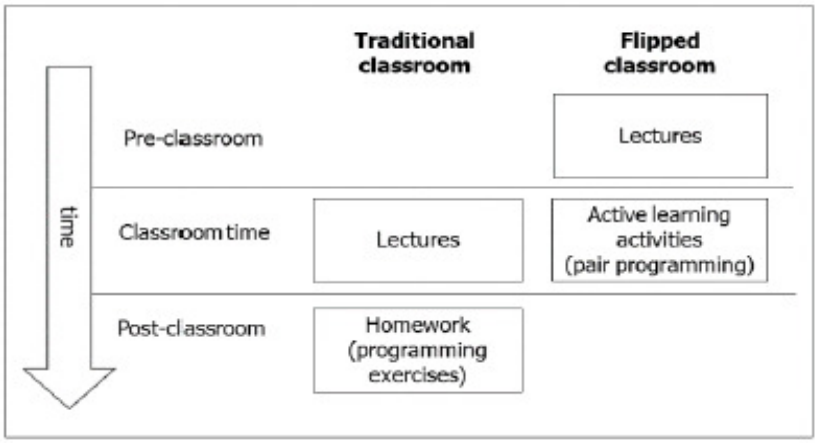
In the cBook we have seen that the blended learning approach can be applied within different models. One of the most widespread models is those of flipped classroom, also called inverted classroom because of its philosophy to invert the conventional approaches to non-traditional learning.

Abeysekera and Dawson (2015) asserted, that "In a flipped classroom, the information transmission component of a traditional face-to-face lecture (hereafter referred to as the 'traditional lecture') is moved out of class time. In its place are active, collaborative tasks. Students prepare for class by engaging with resources that cover what would have been in a traditional lecture. After class they follow up and consolidate their knowledge".

Mok (2014) reported an example on how the concept of a flipped classroom can be implemented in practice. First of all, almost 70% of the course was recorded, creating 400 minutes of videos. Each video lasts about 20 minutes on average and was uploaded on YouTube. At the end of each video a quiz was prepared for student self-evaluation in the e-learning portal. Each video was to be seen before the following lecture and at the end of the classes the link to videos and quizzes was communicated. Lessons were dedicated to clarifying doubts about videos, to analyze the quizzes with the worst scores, to pair-programming activities and to a final debriefing. In synthesis "Two things are critical for the flipped classroom to work: (i) students are physically in class for the active learning activities, and (ii) students must come prepared for each session by watching the assigned video lectures. To ensure the latter, students were warned that they would not be able to contribute to the pair programming effort if they came unprepared" (Mok, 2014).

A visual representation of a flipped classroom (in comparison to a traditional one) is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. The traditional classroom and flipped classroom juxtaposed



Source: Mok (2014)

Exercise

Survey time! Distribute a questionnaire in your class to your students in order to identify two or three topics related to the contents of your course they would like to deeply analyse. Prefer not theoretical topics and, anyway, something applicable in real-life. You can design a closed questions questionnaire, when you pre-choose a selection of arguments. The most voted topics could be the themes of a blog in which you and your students can interact and discuss. By making them choose the alternative, they should be more involved and participate more actively in the blog.

Activity: Let's have a benchmark activity!

- Before designing our blended learning course, let's try to understand how others teachers did it before us. Let's have a benchmark activity!
- Choose about 10 leading University worldwide and, for each of them, identify one course adopting blended learning (you can choose course similar to yours in terms of content or target students). Try to outline the structure of these courses, focusing on

the timing, on how they balanced the different teaching methods and on the most frequent tools they used.

- This benchmark activity could help you to better understand how to perform in practice your blended learning course!

iThink: Improving recent lectures

- Think of a lecture/class you delivered recently and allow your imagination to wander:
- Which parts of this lecture could I do online?
- Which tasks/activities could I set for self-study?
- How would I combine face-to-face, online and self-study activities?
- How much time would this take?
- How would my students react?
- Who would assist me in blending my course?
- With whom could I share my experiences?
- What would be the benefits of choosing a blended-learning approach?

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4. Executing a blended-learning course

4.1. Blended learning in practice: what to do before starting

A teacher who decides to consider a “blended learning” technique in her/his teaching, needs to take into account some important guidelines. Their purpose is to encourage and motivate students approaching with this new kind of learning method. The first one concerns a real attention to the needs of Gen Z, their communicative behaviour, their attitudes and learning styles. In addition, it is also fundamental to combine face-to-face-teaching, online teaching and self-study effectively and choose the technology that allows you to combine tasks and tools effectively. A study conducted in 2009 by the U.S. Department of Education shows that "students in fully online and blended courses tend to perform better than students in face-to-face courses, with students in blended courses performing significantly better" (Glazer, 2011). Anyway, in blended learning the teacher has a significant role as he/she needs to structure first and then monitor the course. First, **teachers should come up with interesting scenarios,** in order to keep up students’ motivation and have to communicate clearly the goals, outcomes and assessment criteria of the course which is going to start. Teachers are required to plan various and interesting self-study activities, in order to motivate their students and, in the meantime, they create an opportunity to become more and more autonomous.

Another important point to consider is that there should be a **good balance between individual and group assignments**: they are both useful elements that allow students both to be able to work individually and to collaborate with their colleagues. It should be made clear to the students that they are responsible for their learning, in fact the teacher’s role is that of a guide and moderator, but the real protagonists are the students. It is important to keep in mind that blended learning courses should always include social media and LMS for feedback/interactivity: this point would increase student’s online work.

With regard to that, another finding of the same study mentioned above (Glazer, 2011), was that the more time students spent on a task, the greater the difference in student performance. These findings are attributable partly to active learning strategies that include opportunities for reflection and interaction with peers. Finally, the studies in this meta-analysis do not demonstrate that online learning is superior regardless of how it is implemented. Only the combination of elements produced the observed benefits.

Undoubtedly, online learning shows many advantages: “it differs in terms of time spent, facilitating additional learning time, it has more interactive materials available and could count on additional opportunities for collaboration”. (Glazer, 2011).

4.2. Learning and teaching strategies

While a group is forming and developing it is really important to create the right atmosphere in order to obtain a closely-knit class and a strong team, able to work together and collaborate: this behaviour would enhance both teaching and learning.

First, a teacher needs to set clear goals regarding the course:

- the learning outcomes
- the grading criteria and the test formats
- means to keep the students informed
- upload the syllabus and all materials on her/his LMS

The last mentioned deserves a quick in-depth analysis as it shows several advantages for both students and teachers. According to Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, (2005) “The major advantage of the LMS is that it brings content delivery, communication, assessment and administration of online instruction into a single secure platform that could be accessed by anyone on the Internet”. Likewise, Kats (2010) points out that “the standardized interface of an LMS made it easy for students to navigate through different online courses to put their content online”.

At the beginning of the course, the teacher works to bring the class together on-campus and uses icebreaker games: this is a valuable technique which gets students to know each other offline and online via social media. Involving students in online discussions is an efficient system, so virtual classrooms can be used for students’ presentations and discussions instead of lecturing. It is also important to alternate group work and individual work, encouraging peer feedback processes and critical thinking. Learners, in fact, “should be encouraged to use critical thinking to apply prior knowledge to new situations and to develop shared understanding” (Information Resources Management Association, 2018). Garrison and Anderson (2003) highlight three factors that need to be addressed in the design of teaching activities:

1. the first one is about the **time frame**, that should provide flexibility and opportunities to consult experts and resources;
2. the second one is about **activities** which should be diverse and emergent from the group's collaboration, to ensure the enrichment of the collaborative learning experience;
3. as a third point, learners should be given the chance to explore their **prior knowledge** and be given an opportunity to apply it to new situations (pre and post activities).

Teachers should offer the students all the necessary instruments to provide effective peer feedback, and the also apply the inverted classroom model to support students personally and to check their progress. Teaching approaches should be changed, applying a variety of methods, first of all involving the students in engaging discussions in class: it would favour both a rapid learning and the group cohesion and it would create an inspiring learning environment. Skills-focused learning needs to be enhanced and the correct strategy is the use of real life examples and case studies. Finally, a fundamental aim will be to make teaching relevant thanks to a series of strategies listed above and that can be gone into.

4.3. Designing a blended-learning course

When teachers come to design a blended-learning course their first goal is to develop a course which emphasize the benefits of the different environments while integrating learning activities and interactions to maximize learning. Course design, indeed, "…influences both learner satisfaction and level of learning achieved in blended courses" (Picciano, 2013).

A question to take into consideration before starting to plan is about the fact that some students might think that learning online is isolating. In fact, students are alone while they are learning online, but they should not feel isolated. If this happens, many of them might drop out of the course or fall behind. This means that it depends on the teacher who should always make sure that all students feel well connected and not excluded. For this reason, it is essential for every teacher to study and analyse carefully every single point of the course during the design process, in order to consider inclusion as a priority and a key success of the online course.

We must not forget that Gen Z students are considered **global, visual, social and mobile,** hence, we should use teaching approaches that meet the needs of Gen Z, so students should be able to develop their own ideas. Consequently, teachers should be organised to come up with interesting scenarios and real-life examples to keep them engaged, as teachers "gotta make it relevant!"

Learners also need to understand that they are responsible for their learning, while the teacher's role is to provide coaching to students and to encourage critical thinking, as facilitators and not preachers. During the planning, teachers carry out different teaching strategies useful for an efficient process of learning, so he/she follows some important steps:

- **Theory-practice**: build links between principles and real events
- **Critical thinking**: examine past events or current topics and pose challenging statements or ideas
- **Brainstorm**: stimulate ideas ahead of lectures, tutorials, field trips or guest speakers
- **Create discussions based on assigned readings**. Threads may include pre-reading (anticipation) activities, interpretations, evaluations
- **Cooperative debate**: in groups or individually students present perspectives on a particular issue, followed by a whole group discussion for consensus-building
- **Collaborative writing**: students work together in groups to create a single document, formulating proposals and analytical reports, which they will post later to the larger group for discussion and/or critics

The **brainstorming strategy** should be integrated into whatever existing course as it has demonstrated its effectiveness on students' education. Three aspects are decisive:

- **planning** – "the teacher prepares a brief of the task to be the focus of brainstorming" (Railean, 2017);
- **implementation** – "teachers have the choice either to conduct small groups or the whole class depending on the task to be given and on the teaching purpose of the brainstorming" (Railean, 2017);
- **assessment** – "During the brainstorming session there is no criticism of ideas – the idea is to open up as many possibilities as possible, and break down preconceptions about the limits of the problem. Once this has been done the results of the brainstorming session can be analysed and the best solutions can be explored either using further brainstorming or more conventional solutions" (https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/brainstorming).

The **cooperative debate**, as well, is a very important step that permits students to work in groups and share their ideas before a whole group discussion. Moreover, according to Mills (2010) “this random approach allows learners to interact with a variety of “classmates” and ensures that the highest achieving students do not self-select, skewing the debate results. In fact, as homework they read what the teacher proposes and in class they receive time to compare their notes and to work on preparing the best possible arguments”.

Finally, concerning the **collaborative writing**, Mills (2010) states that "when learners co-author with peers they deliberate about similar types of issues as when writing alone”.

Exercise

Train yourself to brainstorm! Select a current topic (climate change, economic situation, etc.) or related to your teaching subject and develop a brainstorming session with your students. Remember to create a circle with all participants in the discussion and to follow all the instructions explained above.

Activity: Designing a blended-learning course

It is time to design your blended learning course!
Prepare a document in which you outline in details your course. In particular:

- Identify all the stages and modules in which your course is divided
- Identify for each stages which teaching methods you will use, their contents and how to effectively mix them
- According to the methods chosen, define the timing (a GANTT chart could be useful)
- Identify when to use tools such as video, blog, seminars, etc
- Identify the timing and the contents of the assessment (before, during and after the course)

Remember to check the balancing of the different teaching methods and, before implementing your course, do not forget to discuss the document with some colleagues and revise it according to their suggestions!

iThink: Setting up a forum

Set up a discussion forum with colleagues to share experiences on teaching blended learning courses.

The forum should help your online community to

1. Make recommendations for blended learning/teaching
2. Share assignments and tasks that work well with this format
3. Resolve problems that might be of general interest
4. Share experiences with test formats
5. Get in touch with instructional designers

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5. Marketing and promoting blended-learning courses

5.1. The promotion of a blended learning course

After having designed a great blended learning course it would be dutiful to promote the course inside and outside the university, attracting new students and expanding this professional network. It is demonstrated that there are several activities that teachers can adopt in order to sponsor the learning course, three of them could be:

- **Networking activities**
- **Marketing activities**
- **Attracting students**

Additionally, a case study done at the University of Perugia will function as an example to demonstrate the tangible effectiveness of these activities. The case study on “Management of tourism enterprises” course may help to understand how to increase the visibility of blended learning courses and their results. In addition to this case study as an example, some recommendations on how to promote a blended learning course within specific areas of research and teaching will be shown.

The first and most important strategies to adopt to make the course more visible are, without doubt, **online networking activities**. In fact, using at least one online tool to promote the course would certainly spark interest in the subject. As Badrul H. Khan explains in his work titled *The People–Process–Product Continuum in E-Learning: The E-Learning P3 Model*, “One of the important marketing strategies is to make accurate and updated information about their e-learning offerings known to as many potential learners as possible. This can be accomplished by registering e-learning sites with search engines, banner advertising, postings in listservs brand strategy (e.g., brand names), endorsement by credible people and institutions, etc. Effective marketing products will help institutions to attract and recruit students for their courses and programs”.

Traditional marketing activities are also highly effective for promoting the course as they bring diverse people together, enhancing visibility and introducing the research to the public.

Another step would consist in producing a complete and comprehensive **marketing plan** for the e-learning. Teachers don't have to compose an elaborate marketing plan, since they are not marketing executives at a major costumer products company: "It's more important in the case of e-learning to apply appropriate marketing concepts than it is to spend time creating fancy plans" (Cross et al., 2002). In conclusion, all the success factors of the course could also be enriched in terms of students' attendance and satisfaction by applying a variety of learning approaches which permit both to be acquainted with the learning project and all the methods that will be adopted during its teaching.

5.2. How to improve participation and involvement: networking activity

As we know, participation and involvement are fundamental in learning courses, but it is not always simple to foster them. In an online course, students and teachers share videos, links and files on the e-learning platform and/or in a Facebook group. The e-learning platform ensures that students and teachers can carry out many activities that nowadays result natural and spontaneous. Here are some of these actions:

- **upload didactical material**
- **share multimedia content (video, files, links, photos, audio)**
- **stimulate discussions before the lesson**
- **foster exchange among the group**
- **assess their level of knowledge**

In order to promote the course, it is important to follow some specific steps which would result useful as well as easy to realize. A first suggestion could consist in **recording at least one video** explaining the course and uploading it on YouTube. This would contribute to "marketing" as people use technology every day and find it more convenient and quick to receive information watching a video online. Another important idea could be to **create a Facebook group** for the course, involving all the students: this is undoubtedly useful both for functional communication and to make learners feel well, integrated and cohesive. In the same group, or via e-mail, students could also share links, files and keywords: this can be done via hashtags, too. It could appear over-elaborate, but technology is part of our everyday life. An original solution could be about **inviting a guest speaker to the virtual classroom**: this would raise curiosity among students who, definitively, will not feel bored.

Also **blogging and publishing** about their professors' research activities can reveal very useful information to the students in order to keep them updated about their teachers' work. Sharing projects, ideas and studies with students helps increasing the educators' credibility since they are rightly perceived as experts in their field from the outside.

Teachers can also follow further recommendations to encourage the promotion of their course: for example, they could **host a personal blog** about the course or post inspiring comments, using the linking function. Additional ideas are up-loading relevant publications on the website "Academia.edu" and make use of LinkedIn to promote the course.

A very appreciated activity is a **company visit:** in fact, evaluations on blended learning courses at the University of Perugia have shown a high satisfaction level when having included company visits: it is both a moment of encounter with the world of work, and it also allows students to enter into a dialogue with entrepreneurs, who represent a successful model of how to bridge theory and practice. Therefore, it would turn out to be successful to organise field trips and site visits to companies, this step would motivate students to know more about the course. Learners may also prepare questions and engage in the dialogue.

The press has also an important role to promote projects and courses: a good idea would be **inviting journalists** to report about the course. Teachers, as well, could do this by writing articles about the course for the university newsletter.

Moreover, the University of Perugia often applies **project work** in the courses. They are offered from the second year of the Bachelor's degrees and represent a key instrument in blended learning courses. As we know, teamwork is a fundamental skill for the future world of work, in particular, blended-learning courses foster this skill due to their interactive style and collaborative possibilities provided online. Further expedients to reinforce a learning course promotion could be summarized into three actions:

1. **Diversify the teaching approaches in the face-to-face sessions.**
2. **Concentrate on skills and competences rather than theory to boost student attendance.**
3. **Organise learning spaces at the university.** This third point is significant in both promotion and teaching: improving learning spaces also means to arrange flexible learning spaces, with flexible furniture in order to support discussions, active and collaborative learning.

Exercise

Imagine a place and / or person that could be a starting point to develop the lesson by making your students feel more involved. The place could be a company, a library, or a public place. The person could be an entrepreneur, an author, a professional who works in the same field as your course. Make an appointment, spread the news about the event and train your students before participating (ask them to think about some ice-breaking questions, in order to create a friendlier atmosphere): they are the protagonists of the lesson, you will only care about organizing and moderating the discussion.

Activity: Marketing plan

Set up a marketing plan in which you map out on the promotion of your blended learning course:

- For each phase of your blended learning course indicate the means and media used for promoting the course (e.g. social networks, university website, ad hoc meetings, etc.), write the text of the messages you would use for promoting the course and identify all materials (e.g. photos) you would add to the text.
- Identify the people in your institution who can help you with promotion activities (e.g. marketing department).
- Prepare a questionnaire you would distribute to your students at the end of your course in order to evaluate the visibility of the course and the effect of your promotion (how many posts were written, how many comments and likes a post got, how often a comment was shared, if other students mentioned the course). It is advisable to define these questions at the start of your course.

iThink: Promoting the course

Think of what you can do for promoting your course. In particular:

- Think of the most suitable social network/s you can use to share course information.
- Reflect on the opportunity to create a website or a blog of the course or if a page in a social network will do for marketing
- Check your contacts regarding the names of participants, managers and stakeholders you can involve in your course.
- Think of at least five topics for your blog.

- Check, among your research/projects, the most suitable and useful to be shared with your students, colleagues and external stakeholders.
- Reflect on the possibility to organise some fun activities with your students, such as dinners, thematic walks and one-day trips.
- Have a look at module 1 for more ideas!

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Glossary

Blending strategy: chapter 1 is about developing a blended learning strategy, that is about balancing traditional and innovative, on-line and off-line tools to meet students' needs under the constraint of available structures, resources and capabilities

Generation Z: persons born between 1995 and 2010, following the Millennials generation. They are: digital natives, more entrepreneurial, multitasking, independent, with less mental and physic barriers and they communicate through images.

Inverted classroom: also called "flipped classroom", is a kind of blended learning in which the logic of learning is reversed. The lesson becomes homework while the time in the classroom is used for collaborative activities, experiences, debates and workshops.

Cross-fertilization: a teaching methodology that considers the role of the physical space where students can work together in. In addition to contents a teacher has created, it promotes the use of open education resources (online and from Library) it uses the online space (blogs, social networks, discussion board, etc.). This technique schedules a discussion among students in each lesson.

Brainstorm: a creative teaching technique that stimulates ideas ahead of lectures, tutorials, field trips or guest speakers. After having written a list of ideas, it often appears useful to analyze a problem and to solve it.