Preface

Rationale

Districts, schools, and teachers are turning to blended learning as a way to leverage devices for student success. Although fully brick-and-mortar and fully virtual learning environments offer benefits to various types of learners, a blend of face-to-face and online learning opportunities has the potential to increase K–12 student learning and engagement. This is particularly true in elementary classrooms, where students and their families typically have fewer options beyond the brick-and-mortar school. Blended learning enables teachers to take advantage of the affordances of technology while increasing the impact of face-to-face instruction. Through purposeful design and facilitation of face-to-face and online learning experiences, teachers can meet the needs of each learner and manage personalized learning pathways for students.

School districts tend to focus their technology efforts (funds, professional development, and policies) on high school students to equip them for their futures in higher education and the workforce. Programs that involve purchasing a device for every student (1-to-1) or enable students to bring devices from home (BYOD) tend to be targeted at our oldest K–12 students. This leads elementary teachers to seek out their own solutions for leveraging technology to shift teaching and learning in their classrooms.

I argue that blended learning is a natural fit for the elementary classroom, where many teachers already think flexibly about the learning environment, resources, and time in order to meet diverse student needs. However, making the shift to blended learning requires intentional planning and support. As more and more classrooms become settings for blended learning, teachers and school and district leaders need to develop a shared understanding of the characteristics of effective instruction in blended environments. Blended learning involves more than simply adding devices to a traditional classroom model. However, in many schools implementing blended learning, the conversation quickly shifts to devices while overlooking the essential foundations of a blended learning environment.

The goal of this book is to help guide elementary teachers through the transition toward blended learning, focusing on support for the most critical component of an effective blended environment: the teacher.

This book aims to help elementary educators working in or transitioning toward blended settings develop a blueprint for successful implementation of blended learning in their classrooms.

Organization

The iNACOL Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework, a framework outlining the characteristics of successful blended teachers, provides a common lens and shared language for this book. The first chapter of the book provides an in-depth look at the competency framework to foster a deeper understanding of the teacher competencies needed for effective blended learning environments. As teachers read Chapter 1, they will identify their own strengths and needs related to the blended teacher competencies.

The remainder of the book serves as a guide to support teachers through a successful transition to blended instruction. Teachers will be guided through the development of a blueprint for designing and facilitating blended learning in their classrooms. This book will serve as a workbook, providing strategies and examples of blended learning in elementary classrooms along with opportunities for teachers to design and reflect on their own plans for blended instruction. This format will make visible the instructional decisions of effective blended teachers, helping make quality blended instruction transparent and actionable.

Features of each chapter focus on blended learning in action, including images, lesson plans, student work samples, and digital resources.

Readers will be able to

- Reflect on the competencies needed for effective blended instruction

- Explore strategies and methods for blended learning environments

- Design a blueprint for implementing blended learning in their classrooms

- Evaluate and reflect on instruction in their own blended contexts

This book aims to take the mystery out of effective blended teaching and provide a guide to support elementary teachers in designing and facilitating blended learning. By crafting a blueprint, readers will design their own personalized implementation plans for blended learning.

Possible Uses

This guidebook is designed to help K–5 teachers develop and carry out a plan for effective instruction in blended environments. Serving as a step-by-step guide, this book will present the competencies blended teachers need

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and strategies for developing those competencies and prompt teachers to develop a personalized implementation plan for successful blended instruction. Elementary teachers and school and district leaders could use this book to assist with the design and facilitation of quality blended learning experiences. In addition to supporting individual teachers in developing competencies for blended learning, schools and districts can use this book to develop a shared understanding of quality blended learning environments and work collaboratively to leverage blended methods for student learning.

Educators who provide professional development for elementary teachers, including instructional technology facilitators, instructional coaches, and others, could use this book to design face-to-face, blended, and online professional development for blended teachers. Each section of the book could be the focus of a professional development session. Professional development providers could use the book as a guide during hands-on, application-based professional development as teachers create or redesign blended learning opportunities based on ideas and resources provided in the book.

University instructors could use this book as required or suggested reading in courses focused on blended teaching methods. In those courses, undergraduate and graduate students could use the book as a guide to complete course assignments and apply effective blended teaching methods in their coursework, blended teaching practica, and K–12 blended learning environments.