

Blended Learning in Kindergarten

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Abstract

Give a kindergartener a pencil and see what happens. Now, give a kindergartener the world and see what changes. Giving a five-year-old the world seems quite ridiculous, wouldn't you agree? What could they possibly know about the world around them? Society views the length of time each person has been on Earth as a measurement of that person's worth and capabilities. With this notation, we, unintentionally, limit that person's potential. Harapnuik tells us, "It has to start with the learners. The needs of the learner become the measuring stick." Although educators teach students of a wide range of ages, they are not the only means of a student's learning. The students themselves are a part of that measuring stick, as Harapnuik explains. Blended learning allows the student, teacher, and experiences within and outside the classroom to mold a student's education. Through various learning materials, explorations, and meaningful connections, students will not be limited to what the teacher thinks they may or may not know. This literature review will examine a variety of articles, scholarly cites, and books on why blended learning in kindergarten is essential to a student's educational career and beyond, the importance that needs to be placed on students having choice in their learning, and why the station rotation method is the best approach of blended learning in a kindergarten classroom.

Keywords: blended learning, kindergarten, station rotation, choice, voice, authentic learning

Blended Learning in Kindergarten

What is blended learning?

Blended learning is not a new form of education. John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Sigmund Freud, B. F. Skinner, to name a few, all have their version of blended learning. Constructivism is a more likely term that would have been examined and discussed by these theorists.

"According to Jonassen (1994), constructivism is also often misconstrued as a learning theory that compels students to "reinvent the wheel." Constructivism taps into and triggers the student's innate curiosity about the world and how things work. Students do not reinvent the wheel but attempt to understand how it turns and how it functions. They become engaged by applying their existing knowledge and real-world experience, learning to hypothesize, testing their theories, and ultimately drawing conclusions from their findings." (Olusegun, 2015, p. 66)

Constructivism, or blended learning, holds the student's ability to take ownership of their learning at the forefront. With this learning, the teacher kindles the passion for learning, not for the material that will be taught. Horn and Staker explain that "Blended learning is any formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and pace (Horn & Staker, 2014, p. 34)."

Computers, laptops, and any other technology device does not make the learner a better learner. It's the experience behind the technology that helps the learner obtain a better learning experience.

Station Rotation Model.

One model of blended learning is the Rotation Model. A first station could consist of individualized learning with online software that personalizes instruction and moves with each learner at their own pace and on their path. For kindergarten, this would look like the Istation program or Seesaw. A second station could include collaborative activities with opportunities to work together and receive peer feedback (Hattie, 2007; Harapnuik, 2020). Allowing young learners to begin their educational career with an understanding of why collaboration with others is essential can continue to create better learners and leaders for our future and theirs. In a third station, the teacher will have opportunities to work in small groups or one-on-one, with students in each subject focusing on what each group of individuals needs to be successful in their learning.

Benefits.

"A successful blended environment involves an appetite for trying new things, strong district and school leadership, teacher buy-in, effective training, and vibrant community partners. It is a recipe that, despite the hard work, the district is willing to take on because the results appear to be worthwhile" (Daniel K. Lautzenheiser & Taryn Hochleitner, 2014, p. 13). Blended learning is not a matter of meshing a few good things that work and miraculously thinking change will happen. This type of learning stems from the fundamental parts of human nature. Harapnuik shifts our thoughts by saying, "What if we focused on helping all learners learn how to learn? What if we focused on helping all learners continue to be the autodidacts they actually were when they were young children?" (Harapnuik, 2020, 17:18 - 17:35 min). Taking this thought process into the classroom means making a shift in our educational system. "Whilst a researcher or teacher might consider a course to be successful if students meet or exceed

expectations in assessment, learner satisfaction is important because it accounts for students' personal experiences of the course" (Jessican Bowyer & Lucy Chamber, 2017, p. 19).

Moreover, it consists of a particular way of learning-by-doing and extensive project-based learning. Blended learning allows students to make the most out of their learning experience. It makes for an authentic learning exploration while allowing facilitators to differentiate students' learning, increase student tenacity, and monitor their progress.

Drawbacks.

What tends to happen to "many schools is they find themselves unsuccessful in implementing blended learning because purchasing technology is not enough to transform learning" (How to Effectively Implement Blended Learning, 2018, para. 6). A technology device will not change the learner itself, just as giving a student a pencil will not create a world-known author. How an educator can successfully integrate different pieces of learning, such as technology, into a blended learning environment distinguishes whether or not the approach is successful and impactful on the student's education. Although we are currently in the Digital Era, incorporating a technology device into a classroom does not signify a blended learning atmosphere. The benefits of having such a valuable resource in the palms of student's hands are bountiful, but technology isn't a fix for the education system. The belief that technology could be the savior through this process is proving wrong time and time again. What continues to prove true is that students who are actively engaged and making connections to the real world through their learning are obtaining choice, ownership, and voice in their learning experiences.

Choice.

Allowing students, even kindergarteners, choice in their learning will create a positive impact throughout their life. "Learners are given the freedom to choose how they wish to organize, structure and present their learning experiences and evidence of learning" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018). Without deprecating the learner's power in having choice, "it is crucial to acknowledge that the learner's choice is guided by the context of the learning opportunity and by the instructor who aids the learner in making effective choices" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p. 69). Even at five years old, there is always a window for a learning opportunity, but it is still vital to steer students in the right direction. Let them create what you are steering, let them navigate how to get there, but guide them in a significant way that still allows them to do the actual doing and learning.

Ownership.

When a student takes control of their learning, it will change the dynamic of their education, along with their life, forever. Jonassen explains that a learner taking ownership of the problem is key to learning because it increases learner engagement and motivation to seek out solutions (Reigeluth, 1999). A result of this is taking a kindergartener's infamous question "why" and turning it back on them. A student taking "ownership requires that the teacher give control over/back to the learner" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p.71). This means you are not dismissing their "why" questions but instead empowering them to find this answer creatively and independently. "When we let our learners take control of their learning, the experiences they can embrace, the meaningful connections they create, and the knowledge that they gain will be life-changing" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p. 83). Allowing a five-year-old to take ownership of their learning shows that the teacher instills in them to take the world and make it their own. The

answers are all around us and simply giving the student the response they are looking for provides the learner with zero tools and skills to put in their toolbox for situations that are guaranteed to arise later on. "If we care enough for our learners, we need to let go of the control and be willing to see them struggle or fail or even get annoyed with us if we expect them to learn the life lessons that come about through taking full ownership of authentic learning opportunities" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p. 82). As scary and as impossible as it may sound, kindergarteners are well equipped to take ownership of their learning. Educators are resources to them and should hold that title with pride, but believing that they can accomplish such higher-level thinking tasks will further support blended learning. This is what makes a blended learning environment great; although it's probably the most challenging part, teachers can let go of the control in their classroom and let the students thrive (How to Build a Successful Blended Learning Model, 2017).

Voice.

With the endless amount of platforms that promote individuality, students are easily provided a way to have a voice all their own. Learners should use their voice in the structuring of their work and ideas and when sharing those insights, knowledge, and their creations with their colleagues within their organizations (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p. 70). Because of these opportunities, there is no longer the same regurgitated information projected out of different learners, but instead, meaningful knowledge presented in a voice all their own. "Voice is realized and is authentic when the learner is creating, writing, presenting and sharing with their audience and not for their instructor" (Dwayne Harapnuik et al., 2018, p. 71). The simple shift of throwing the question back onto the learner allows their voice to shine through. Their takeaways from the information they researched through blended learning will be different from what the teacher

would have given, and that is the point. The continuation of fostering a love for learning and sharing it with the world is shown through blended learning using the station rotation approach.

Authentic learning.

Authentic learning happens when choice, ownership, and voice are all embedded within a learner's knowledge. This blended approach meets each student on their own level through personalized learning, thus making the student experience much more individualized (Four Keys to Success Using Blended Learning Implementation Models, 2015). Bartell states, "I teach my students that failure is an opportunity for growth and that they shouldn't be afraid to try new things, but sometimes it's hard to take my own advice. My students need to practice being independent thinkers and learners like all other students, and they deserve to know what it feels like to take pride in their own learning" (Bartell, 2018, para. 14 & 16). Authentic learning does not mean failure is obsolete. Instead, it means that failures are only another benefit from the blended learning approach. Failures bring more questions, consequently leading to where and why the initiative began. A student is guaranteed to fail, but the learner will be equipped with the tools needed to continue their learning cycle and be successful because of blended learning.

Conclusion.

Blended learning is not a new approach to teaching. We have seen it take form through Dewey's works, along with many others. What remains at focus is the choice, voice, and ownership through the learning that will facilitate a passion for an authentic learning experience. Although incorporating technology is needed in the world we live in today, ensuring that the educator lets go of control within their classroom to develop the learner's thoughts and ignite a

lifestyle of life-long learning is as well. Blended learning allows kindergarteners to make meaningful connections through both their successes and failures. Adapting this learning approach, especially in kindergarten, will empower students to seek answers long after their educational career.

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