# Blended Learning Deconstructed

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Blended Learning Means More Student Engagement

Blended learning, brick and click, tailored learning . . .we are surrounded by these terms today. However, do we know what they really mean? Can they benefit our students? Most importantly, do we really understand the pedagogy behind them? The *brick* is the traditional classroom setting. …
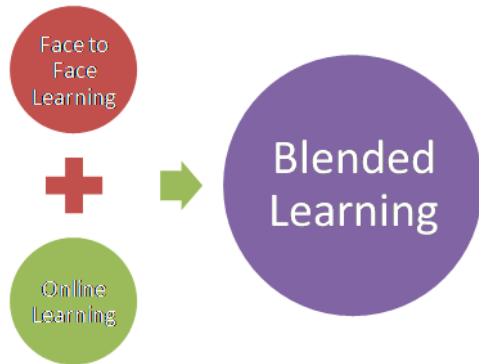
The traditional setting promotes a social and cooperative learning environment. It motivates learners through peer interactions and immediate teacher feedback. It allows both teachers and students to address questions and confusions as they arise. The *click* is the autonomous learning environment available through the web. Web-based tools allow learners to practice and acquire new language skills without classroom distractions, as well as self-direct their learning. Merging these two worlds together creates an environment that meets a variety of learning styles, and a variety of both student and teacher needs. This merge is blended learning. Blended learning blends the social nature of the classroom with the self-paced environment available in a web-based setting (Clark 2001).

Blended learning does not mean a reduction of face-to-face class time. Conversely, it requires greater participation of learners, greater interaction with content, and an overall greater level of engagement. As ESL educators, we understand the importance of students being engaged. Traditionally, the more students are engaged, the more learning occurs. Following a blended learning model can increase learning by over 11% compared to that in a traditional classroom (Siltzmann, Ely 2009). The reason is simple. Students are more engaged with a digital tool over a traditional text outside of the classroom. They can interact with content at their own pace, on their own schedule, receive reinforcement of course content, and self-select exercises and activities. Students have access to their language success *outside* the walls of the traditional classroom.

Blended learning can enrich our students learning experience through interactive activities and immediate feedback. We as ESL educators can be more informed about our students' successes and failures, and perhaps even our own. Lastly, it offers both teachers and students a flexible solution. Students can practice when and where they like. Teachers can choose the most appropriate activities and customize course content to meet curricular and programmatic demands.

FLIP is a term that is thrown around a lot today. It means different things to different people, just like blended learning. However, FLIP is an acronym that was coined by its originators, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams. There are four pillars of Flipped Learning:

F—Flexible Environments
L—Learning Culture
I—Intentional Content
P—Professional Educators.

These four pillars are the foundation of an effective flipped classroom, as well as successfully employing blended instruction in your class. Let's explore, the first pillar, Flexible Environments in relation to the ESL classroom.
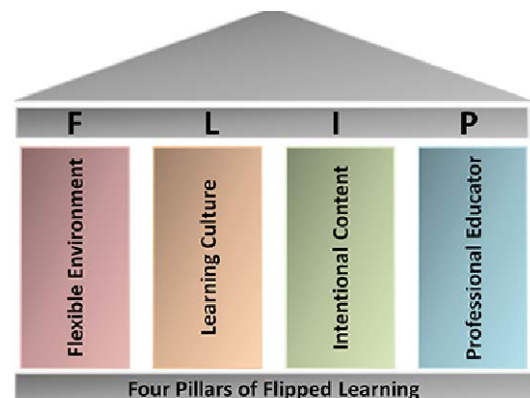
As ESL educators, we know all too well the need to be flexible. We understand that our plans must leave room for "on the spot" instruction, as well as the 'outside forces' that may require us to be flexible with assignments. We know that some assignments are more successful in small groups, while others may fail in that

setting. So, flexibility is not new to us. However, what may be new is how our lessons can be instructed both in and out of the classroom to enhance learning.

Flexible Environments in a flipped model not only refers to the physical learning spaces, ie. small groups, pair work, but also refers to the flexibility the instructor has with what content will be taught in the classroom and what content should be taught outside of the classroom. This is especially critical in an ESL classroom.

Let's take listening activity for example. We may have only enough face-to-face class time to play this once. However, how many of our students will need to hear it again and again, and perhaps, again? A great number. In a Flipped model, we have the flexibility to offer that listening outside of the physical classroom. Students, especially those who require more cognitive work, are able to listen again and again, without classroom distractions. This not only ensures that our learners will interact with the content, but they will do so in a much deeper way than if we were simply playing it once in class. This is what flexibility means in a flipped model. I think of it this way—those language learning tasks or structures that require a greater cognitive load on a students part should be placed **outside t**he classroom. That flexibility *allows me as the instructor greater flexibility **in** the classroom*. My classroom can become a place to apply newly learned structures and safely 'try out' new language.

Deciding what to do inside the classroom, and outside of the classroom is often referred to as loading. There are two basic models of loading—Front Loading and Back Loading. The chart below gives you an idea of each model.

Front Loading	Back Loading
Content is assigned outside of the classroom	Students receive in-class instruction on new structure
Student comes to class with understanding of content	Students complete activity outside of class using new structure
Class time is used to apply new structures	
Example: Video on grammar structure assigned outside of class. In class students use the structure in roleplays, writing or other applicable activity.	Example: Teacher explains new grammatical structure. Students go home and post orally or written on discussion board using new structure.

Front and Back Loading offer ESL educators flexibility in how they design their course lessons. And, that is the first pillar of a FLIPped classroom—flexible learning environments. What is important to remember whether you plan to Front Load or Back Load, is understanding that in either environment—face-to-face or online, there are opportunities for learning to occur—not just reinforcement, but learning

Resources:

http://flippedlearning.org

http://longmanhomeusa.com/blog/tag/Christina-Cavage/