Essentials for Blended Learning, 2nd Edition, A Standards-Based Guide, written by Jared Stein and Charles R. Graham, comes with a specific focus, i.e. to foster the distinct contribution of blended learning. This book has first helpfully elucidated what makes 'blended learning' similar and different from onsite or online learning by differentiating what characterises and is entailed in each mode of learning.

This book is written for course tutors of any discipline who are keen to enhance, even transform their teaching by harnessing what both onsite and online learning can offer, with a view to delivering the intended learning outcomes for the course, and in so doing, strategically creating a tailored blended mode of learning for students. These are posited to be the core principles in writing this book, i.e. to get the best from both worlds – onsite and online learning. In achieving this objective, the ten chapters were written in a chronological manner. Part 1, comprising four chapters, focuses on gaining a sound understanding of 'blended learning', with practical examples in the classroom. Part 2, comprising six chapters, is almost like having a mentor when designing a course using blended learning principles. These ten chapters comprehensively address all questions that course tutors could potentially raise concerning a 'blended learning' environment – from design to revision.

Stein and Graham highlighted several arguments for the necessity of using blended learning, rather than merely online or onsite learning. These include blended learning: a) fitting in a modern lifestyle where learners live in the 'blended world' or technology being embedded in day-to-day lives, activities and experience (e.g. 'A Day in the Connected Life'); b) having the capacity to offer opportunities for authentic learning by overcoming existing limitations of the traditional classroom; c) having the capacity to capture the novelty of technology in teaching and learning leading to improved instructional design; d) providing greater flexibility for the delivery of learning and teaching and in turn, increasing learner participation; and e) as a pedagogy being research-based and underpinned by very strong pedagogical bases (i.e. encouraging more active and hands-on activities for students; generally regarded as a more effective pedagogy than purely traditional or online interactions). In sum, 'Blended courses mix the best of onsite and online to create new, more effective learning experiences for learners.'

At the same time, the authors equally emphasised that since blended learning considers and harnesses learning from both onsite and online environments, using this approach requires a lot of reflection, flexibility and adjustment from both tutors and students to be successful. For example, planning and forming new learning habits are essential. They argued that

while technology 'holds the promise of improving educational experience', we should not assume that 'technology itself improves learning'. These arguments are invaluable, i.e. dependent upon the tutor's goals, the book can be used in two ways: a) 'as a complete guide to redesigning a course as blended or hybrid over a period of weeks or months; b) as a collection of learning activities that can be applied right away in order to blend a course in smaller steps'. In deciding on the most appropriate online tools or technologies, consideration for not only the Intended Learning Outcomes, but also for the subject areas and the simplicity and accessibility of the selected technology for both tutors and learners is essential. This book has carefully explained how these factors serve as the anchor when deciding the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of adopting blended learning that can truly assist learners' learning enjoyment and progression.

Whereas pure online courses are arguably more appropriate for exceptional circumstances, e.g. during a pandemic, this book discusses in depth the reduced flexibility offered by blended courses compared to pure online courses. Nevertheless, it explains in detail the advantages that blended learning is able to offer, particularly with respect to building personal relationships and greater access to different forms of existing resources. The advantage of blended learning can be appreciated when educational settings are able to embrace this learning mode again.

One of the strengths of this book is that it has helpfully clarified some misconceptions that may discourage others from adopting blended learning. For example, the flexibility offered by the online component to work or support students does not suggest working all the time. In this regard, a number of practical tips are offered, particularly in these areas:
- efficient use of time in preparing and delivering a course, particularly after course materials have been prepared
- use of the flipped classroom
- peer instruction and peer support for engaging discussions
- considerations for video lectures, use of and re-use of openly licensed resources
- promoting regularity to establish learning routines, e.g. weekly quizzes, peer instruction activities, etc.

This book comes with a companion website that is intended to enhance readers' understanding of blended learning. Altogether, this book can reinforce tutors' existing knowledge and skills of both onsite and online learning environments in order to inform their decision to adopt and subsequently, reap the benefits that a more strategic and tailored blended learning can offer to both tutors and learners.

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