Book review

Blended Learning in English Language Teaching: Course Design and Implementation.
Tomlinson B. and Whittaker C. (eds.), (2013). London: British Council. ISBN: 978-0-86355-706-4, 252 pages.

Blended learning is a trend set to continue in language teaching (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012), with its focus on best practice, "i.e. the attempt to identify the optimum mix of course delivery in order to provide the most effective language learning experience" (Sharma, 2010; see also Motteram & Sharma, 2009). To this end, this volume offers insights into the use of blended learning in differing English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts, in various parts of the world, each with distinct local needs and constraints. The diversity within this volume is a strength in that its collection of 20 case studies on the practicalities of using blended learning in ELT should target a wide readership including teachers (both novice and practising), course designers, students and researchers.

The case studies in this volume are divided into four ELT contexts, namely English for Academic Purposes (EAP), teacher development, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and General English/English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In the introductory chapter, Whittaker reviews the literature concerning definitions of blended learning, and the reasons for employing blended learning and the affordances thereof, which she rightly notes is still in need of further research. She also critically discusses the types of blends possible, and the importance of getting the right blends, thus offering the practitioner practical and pedagogical advice from the outset. This leads into the first section of the volume, which addresses four case studies in the field of EAP. Here we are presented with four differing contexts, each with the inherent aim of improving some area of practice by drawing on blended learning, a summary of which can be seen in the breakdown in Table 1.

What emerges as salient across these four case studies is the importance of scaffolding learners both in terms of language/content but also the technology, and the value of the teacher/tutor as moderator and facilitator, the latter echoing notions of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison *et al.*, 2000; Anderson *et al.*, 2001), which outlines teacher presence as being one of the three elements within online communities (the other two being cognitive and social presence). The significance of aligning the technologies with the course aims and students' needs was also apparent in all studies, thus demonstrating the informed and pedagogical foundations of the four examples. While these studies indeed highlight the benefits of their approaches, they also make reference to the limitations and need for future improvements, and they demonstrate that differing contexts will render varying challenges. After Part One, Tomlinson comments on the four case studies by bringing everything together for the reader, and providing advice for creating blended learning courses in ELT.

Table 1 *English for Academic Purposes (EAP)*

Chapter	Course details	Technology used
1	An undergraduate EAP reading and writing skills course for students in Canada	Moodle
2	A course aimed to improve reading skills, critical evaluation and thinking in the Nigerian context	Moodle
3	An undergraduate student writing course in Russia	A wiki
4	An undergraduate course in Colombia entitled 'Autonomy and Orality'	Wimba

Table 2 *Teacher development*

Chapter	Course details	Technology used
5	A course designed to assist practising teachers in the UK in learning more about blended learning	Moodle and Web 2.0 tools
6	A course designed for practising teachers to develop their skills to teach online, namely the CertICT	Moodle
7	A course in testing skills in China	Moodle
8	An International Diploma in Language Teaching Management run in a number of countries throughout the world	VLE
9	A teacher training programme in Istanbul for practising teachers doing the DELTA course	Moodle
10	An online CELTA course	Pearson Fronter

Blended learning courses for teacher development are the focus of the second section of this volume, as can be seen in Table 2.

Recurring issues in Part Two include the use of online modes to facilitate deeper reflection, which is at the heart of teacher development and education (Crandall, 2000; Farrell, 2012). The courses outlined here were also often very flexible allowing participants to choose the route and the blend, which encouraged the teachers to learn at their own pace. The notion of a Community of Practice (CoP – Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) for sharing and learning was also noted, as was an induction period to get participants familiar with the technology and to allow them to bond as a group, issues which indeed emerge in the literature on developing online communities (Hanson-Smith, 2006). Also within these studies reference is made to Vygotsky, social learning, collaborative learning, connectivism, and reflective practice all of which are valued and promoted in language teacher education (Johnson, 2006), once again illustrating the theoretical and pedagogical grounding of these case studies. At the end of this section, Tomlinson comments on the flexibility of blended learning and its suitability for teachers who, due to work constraints, may not be able to take time away for professional development. He also considers the dangers of going completely online for teacher development courses, and quite rightly cautions that face-to-face contact is particularly crucial for observations, teaching practice, and feedback.

Table 3 *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*

Chapter	Course details	Technology used
11	An ESP course for taxi drivers in Turkey	A blog and mobile phones
12	ESP courses for aviation (one course for traffic controllers and one for pilots) offered by a language school in the University of Melbourne	Flash
13	A small-scale course delivered to diplomatic staff in Armenia	E-mail
14	A Business English course in Bulgaria using task-based language learning and CLIL	Screencasts and e-mail
15	A Business English course in the UK	A wiki
16	A course for military personnel in the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Reward CD-ROM

Note. CLIL–Content and Language Integrated Learning

Table 4 *General English/EFL learners*

Chapter	Course details	Technology used
17	A course with EFL learners in a secondary school in Latvia	Framework from a European funded project
18	A course with postgraduate students learning soft skills run by a language school in Cairo	A wiki
19	An EFL preparatory course in Istanbul, where a control and experimental group were drawn on for analytical reasons	Macmillan English Campus
20	A course by a language school in Munich	Macmillan English Campus

The third section of this book focuses on ESP, the breakdown of which can be seen in Table 3.

Common threads running through this section include that all the case studies seem context dependent and the resultant blend is affected by this. This is clearly an example of good practice, as the authors are choosing both the type of blend and technology from pedagogically founded rationale (see Sharma, 2010). Also, in this context, clients and their needs are the driving force, and the importance of flexibility, self-study, student control over learning pace, and interaction permeates these case studies. At the end of Part Three, Tomlinson once again offers a critical summary, in which he refers to the recurrence of themes pertaining to localisation and personalisation, and reminds us that in an ESP context, blended learning can offer classes tailored to suit clients and their needs.

The fourth and final section comprises blended learning approaches with General English/EFL learners (Table 4).

The flexibility that blended learning offers to EFL students and teachers, as well as the wider access and exposure to language as a result of online modes of delivery, and the suitability of blended learning to various learning styles (see Oxford, 2006) are the commonalities in these chapters. At the end of this section, Tomlinson describes how blended learning can promote independent learning, which can be useful for general EFL learners

once they finish their courses, and he discusses having the right reasons for using blended learning (and not imposing it), therefore advising that the context and the benefits to learners must be considered.

What all of the chapters have in common is therefore a description of their authors' approach to blended learning, the tools they used, and why they used them but more notably, they refer to the challenges, advantages, and lessons learned from their endeavours, which for me is one of the many strengths of this volume. Another strength is the concluding chapter, in which Whittaker deals with questions surrounding blended learning under four headings, namely context; course design; learners, teachers and tutors; and evaluating and developing the blend (also provided in an appendix). She insightfully deals with these questions in two ways: by relating them to the existing literature in the field, and by referring to the 20 case studies in this book in order to better inform practice in blended learning. Here she also makes reference to the dearth of blended learning studies in ELT, and notes: "I believe this publication goes some way to addressing those concerns as not only does it provide detailed descriptions of blends from a number of contexts, but it also outlines the lessons the authors learned while designing them and offers constructive advice" (p.240), with which I fully agree.

Therefore, for me, the strengths of the volume are: (1) the practical (as well as theoretically and pedagogically grounded) case studies involving four core sectors of ELT across the world; (2) the structure of the book and individual studies in terms of describing the blends, the contexts, issues that arose regarding the approaches taken, any limitations, as well as lessons learned and future challenges; (3) the editors' voices both in the introduction and conclusion, but also at the end of each section, making for a very critical and cohesive whole; and (4) the academic and accessible style in which the book is written. *Blended Learning in English Language Teaching: Course Design and Implementation* is an excellent resource for the many reasons outlined above, and to my knowledge, it is the first volume of case studies on blended learning in the ELT context, which should make it an attractive textbook for those in the field of ELT, language teaching and CALL.

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