



### **4.3 REPURPOSING TIME WITH BLENDED LEARNING**

Earlier in 3.6 we talked about how Blended Learning can help us make some effective shifts in our youth worker role, specifically when working with a group of youth members. So, in this segment we are going to talk about Blended Learning a little bit further and specifically we are going to tackle repurposing time. Blended Learning from the methods we mentioned earlier deserves a special mention as it can fast track our efforts and increase our productivity and effectiveness as youth workers. In regards to its approach, logic and philosophy this method is:

- Learner-centred
- Values learner participation and engagement
- Acknowledges the existence of varied mastery levels amongst learners and the need for effective differentiation
- Is mindful of its methodological components, elements and tools and is focused on leveraging them strategically and intentionally to assist with the three aforementioned points.

The above points are important for the STREAMpreneur approach as well. Let's take a moment to elaborate on the last point a bit more. For many, Blended Learning is the combination of face to face and online learning. So it follows that at least on a practical level, the components, elements and tools found in this method, are associated with the ones needed to set up an online learning environment. Therefore, it is redundant that integration of technology is necessary at least to a certain extent. The problem with that thinking is that if we focus too much on its methodological components, elements and tools as standalone entities specifically, we run the risk of losing sight of the bigger picture of this method. The bigger picture is simply great teaching. Which is why perhaps a better starting definition for Blended Learning, is provided by Professor Diana Laurillard from UCL Institute of Education. *"Blended learning, we can say, is a mix of traditional and digital technologies that are blended together in a way that helps learners learn more productively. They use their time better; they achieve more. It can take many forms..."* In this definition I would like to highlight certain parts which are the following: it is a mix that when blended helps learners learn more productively. It can take many forms. So you see, It's not a one size fits all formula. It is up to us youth workers, teachers or trainers to be able to discern what our youth need and then be intentional about utilising and maximising everything at our disposal in order to raise the quality of the learning experience we offer our learners and thus produce great teaching and mentoring.

Therefore, both High quality blended learning and the STREAMpreneur approach aim to be intentional and strategic when making the choice to integrate different tools and elements in order to create an educational mash up that can make the most out of our instructional time thus raising the quality of the learning and support experience for our youth group.

That is why taking the basic definition of Blended Learning at face value can be problematic. The problem with accepting basic definitions as the be all and end all is that going with the description they offer as a basis for a complete and comprehensive methodological definition is that it can be misleading for newcomers and people who use these methods but do not have the time to thoroughly research their complexity.

In the case of Blended Learning as mentioned earlier, for many Blended Learning is merely the combination of face to face and online learning (which requires to an extent technology integration)





which is why technology integration often is confused with Blended Learning although they are not the same. If you accept that and you take a performance, presentation and teaching approach that already was not working for our youth group and just transfer a part of it online so that it satisfies the basic characteristic of Blended Learning then nothing will change. It will not suddenly become more effective, strategic or motivating. In fact, in many cases the decrease of face-to-face human interaction can when not handled correctly bring about the opposite of the desired results.

When you take the time to really dissect and understand Blended Learning in depth you will see that at its heart it is incredibly learner-centred. It's not so much about the tools this method uses as much as it is about instructional design that focuses on how to use the tools in order to allow for repurposed time. Blended is not about its tools, it is about giving the learners quality time with you, the educator/trainer/youth worker, their peers and the world around them. So instead of the youth worker/teacher/trainer using their instructional time to teach only with one teaching/training technique such as lecturing/presenting to the entire class at the same time which could result in only reaching the average learner/participant and thus not addressing the rest of the learners' needs, blended learning allows you to bring in and combine different techniques so that you can break up your class into smaller groups where one group might be doing a hands on activity, another can have time with you to talk about specific problems that they all share and the other can be watching the lecture or presentation online via an LMS (Learning Management System).

Perhaps your first step into High Quality Blended Learning could be via leveraging Flipped Classroom which is one of the models of Blended Learning. Earlier in 3.6 we talked about the youth worker's role and the problem with the lecturing persona and how it dismisses the need for differentiation. The Flipped Classroom model can free up your time, allowing you to be more productive with your youth group. Very briefly, what Flipped Classroom does is take the usual classroom format where we would lecture in class and then give them homework to do at home and flips it upside down. It reverses it but it does so intentionally.

Before, you would have to lecture/present the deliverables, "waste" that time, probably "waste" more time repeating the process a few more times so that everyone can understand it, and then assign work for them to do at home which not everyone would succeed at as there was not enough time to offer effective differentiation during class time in order to remediate learning gaps. With Flipped classroom what you can do is record your lecture/presentation, you only have to do it once and put it on an LMS for them to watch at home. In class you focus on the implementation of knowledge learnt from the recorded presentation which was homework before. Flipping things, reversing them offers incredible benefits as the learners at home can watch a presentation as many times as they need. They can pause and go back, they can go at their own pace and by the time they come to class they already have an idea of what the topic is, they have slept on it and have allowed it to percolate. This can probably alleviate a lot of stress for them as well. They then return to class, break them into smaller groups and start working on the implementation of knowledge. The great thing about that is because you are free now you can move around; you are able to pick up almost immediately when they need help and you can intervene.

Even before I started using flipped classroom as a Math teacher, I would hesitate to give my students homework because unless I was absolutely sure they understood things in depth it meant that they would go home, solve things in a way that could be wrong and repeat that wrong methodology. Meaning that they would teach themselves through repetition the wrong process which would create a whole mess as I would have to start from scratch with many of them, and quite possibly not reach all of them at the time and in the way they needed. I will share some of the tools that can help you start implementing Flipped Classroom later in this module when we address remote teaching tools.



This of course is just a tiny peek into what Blended Learning can do for us. If you would like to learn how to make Blended Learning work practically for you, please reach out as it is a topic that I am extremely passionate about and would love to help out.

To summarise, while practically Blended does combine face to face and online learning as well as technology, it is so much more. It is an incredibly versatile, complex and strategic tool that while yes it does have a strong and necessary online learning element component to it that integrates technology to it, the focus is not on the online component or technology integration at least not as stand-alone elements like we mentioned earlier. Its educational goal is more about leveraging its methodological components intentionally to restructure the learning environment to allow for repurposed quality time and thus increase effective participation and engagement.