Virtual Blended Q & A

1) Is the 'lock step' and 'all access' opposites or can they be used alongside?

They are opposites. 'Lock-step' involves (e.g.) opening every week of a 10-week course at the start of each week. So, in Week 1, students cannot see weeks 2-10. In 'Open access', all the materials are there all the time. There are pros and cons for each approach and situations where each would be more appropriate.

2) …we face difficulties in getting learners to work at home, so that classroom time can be maximized for oral interaction, for example... do you face this issue as well? How do you cope with it when, for instance, only 3 out of 18 have read the text for synchronous Discussion? Thanks...

How do you make students actually do the asynchronous part of the online course? How does engagement factor into this equation?

Do you have any tips for making sure students do get involved in the virtual part of the blended program?

This is a common problem. One 'root' of this problem lies in older, traditional views of language learning where what is important is what happened in the classroom. What is deemed less important is the stuff you do at home – homework being optional. 3 / 18 is very low ;-)

Some things which could help:
- have students really understood the nature of BL? They need a session on Learner Training at the start of the course to set out that BOTH modes (f2f + online) are equally IMPORTANT.
- You can access data on learner engagement with the platform and use the data in individual tutorials to discuss progress.
- You can make a small part of the Final Grade dependent on participation in the LMS forums. This could be a simple E = excellent / G = Good / BA = could contribute more (i.e. below average)
- It is not very nice / appropriate, but in some ways the students who have not done the reading should 'feel' the quality of their engagement in the lesson is less, so they will 'amend' their ways! I'm not a 'heavy-handed' disciplinarian, so this may not work in all cases :-)

3) how much do you believe teachers should monitor learners' production in the LMS, considering that most of them give learners immediate feedback and answers?

When we mediate sessions via LMS with learners we are tempted to answer each and every message but I have read in a reference that this is something we definitely should not do because it is better to wait until another learner steps up and answer so that learners interact with each other. What are your views about this?

It is important to distinguish between the different kinds of work on the LMS (a) digital exercises (b) contributions to the Forums (in the second question) and (c) preparation for the synchronous class.

Re. digital exercises, the feedback is provided by the exercise. No need to intervene (except in the case of 'frustration' as in the Practical Grammar idea in the plenary).

Re. answering every message, I agree it is inadvisable and often impossible to do this. (A MOOC course has thousands of post). As the interactions follow a socio-constructivist approach, students can and should learn from each other. The tutor is there to provide 'clarification' when necessary, steer the conversation, add ideas etc.

4) I find very difficult to monitor the students and the ones on the computer. Any tips there? I notice that I tend to give more attention to those in class.

I completely understand. I would not know where to begin! So, I am studying how hybrid works. There is NOT one solution to this, as schools may have different approaches to (e.g.) do in-class and online students work together?

Check the Handout on my website for the link to a report on this from Nile et al. Also, Check out Beth Alexanders Twitter feed.

Cultura organises in-service training so you will hugely benefit from input from your colleagues on this question. Soon, there will be enough experience of what works and this can be cascaded down in teacher training.

Pete Sharma