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### Book Review

**Best Practices for Blended Learning**, by Pete Sharma and Barney Barrett, Pavilion Publishing and Media Ltd, 2018, 254 pp., £28.95 (GDP), ISBN 978-1-911028-84-0

Responding to the emergent needs of educators pertaining to blended learning (BL), Sharma and Barrett offer a wealth of knowledge to support educators with a better understanding of traditional classroom and digital input associated with blended learning. The authors divided the book's 24 chapters into three sections: (1) blended learning in language learning, (2) practical ideas, and (3) resources. Sharma and Barrett provide useful input and practical guidance in a systematic manner. Each chapter begins with pre-reading tasks in the form of questions relevant to the chapter (e.g., *What is your definition of blended learning?*) and ends with a reflective activity (e.g., *Revisit the definition you wrote down at the start of the chapter. Has reading this chapter refined your definition in any way?*)

Language learning continues to evolve rapidly in the digital era (Grand-Clement, 2017) and, over the last decade, blended learning has grown significantly in English language teaching (Hockly, 2018; McCarthy, 2016). However, there is not a "right blend" and thus, *Best Practices for Blended Learning* explores and informs how both novice and established practitioners can blend their classes and examines current and anticipated developments in the field, such as mobile learning and adaptive learning in the shifting nature of digital pedagogy.

The first section's 10 chapters introduce the concept of blended learning and offer a brief overview of its history. This section also contains two convincing chapters on why we should blend our courses and potential challenges and factors to consider. Toward the end of the second section, Sharma and Barrett introduce a four-step framework that could be useful when implementing a BL course. Moreover, as there exist a vast number of platforms available to teachers and administrators today, the authors give an overview of five major options. These include publisher platforms (e.g., coursebooks, etc.), LMSs (e.g. Blackboard, etc.), services (e.g., Blog, etc.), online teaching tools (e.g., Skype, etc.), and purpose-built options (e.g., in-house platforms) and examines the range of choices that needs to be made. Teachers will find the examples from practitioners situated around the globe (Africa, Asia, and Europe) that highlight BL's flexibility, to be inspirational.

In the second section, practical ideas come to the fore. Sharma and Barrett bolster the understanding of how language or skill development can be approached in a pedagogically sound way. The authors cover productive and receptive skills (grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, speaking, and writing), as well as games and projects, testing and assessments, and ends with two activities on how to finish a blended learning course and continue to learn. The activities presented are applicable to all levels of learners, with only minimal adjustment necessary. Teachers will benefit, as each activity describes the type of tool used, planning (time/preparation), type of materials (published, own, authentic), and type of tool (software, platform, website, app, etc.); the procedures are easy to follow.

The final section of *Best Practices for Blended Learning* contains four chapters; in this section, the authors look toward the future and the many developments in the field of blended learning. They briefly review augmented reality, virtual reality, robot-assisted language learning, and artificial intelligence. Then the authors discuss how to evaluate the hardware and software as to make informed decisions about which kind of material to incorporate into one's teaching courses, digital materials, and learning platforms.

Toward the end of the section, Sharma and Barrett provide a detailed chapter containing tips for teacher trainers that outlines how and why critical teacher training is essential for successful implementation of BL. Particular attention is given to why technology training is especially challenging; the authors then list some guidelines, activities, and tips for teacher trainers running sessions on BL.

Although *Best Practices for Blended Learning* is a timely publication, certain sections could be further improved. Specifically, it lacks more than one example of software, websites, and apps which can be used in the practical section. Though Sharma and Barrett have included 20 practical ideas, it feels fairly light. Additionally, in describing how much planning is involved the authors have used short/quick or medium. This is rather vague; it would have been helpful to provide an approximate timeframe. Teachers starting out with BL and who do not have any background knowledge might find the lack of extensive/detailed information challenging. Overall, it would have been nice to see a more thorough discussion of the various platforms with additional examples with practical ideas.

To strengthen and build on the foundation of Sharma and Barrett's *Best Practices for Blended Learning*, further work on evaluating the impact of Blended Learning on second language learning and learners in the digital world could be explored/researched—especially research which investigates successful models of BL integration in the Asian context, to engage the digital generation of students with both low-tech and high-tech BL alternatives. Also, it would be beneficial to have additional research into critical teacher training to help teachers adopt BL in the Asian context. Overall, the first few chapters include a fair discussion of recent research within the field; however, this could have been further expanded to be included throughout the volume.

In conclusion, *Best Practices for Blended Learning* is written in a clear style and the book offers a variety of rich examples to illustrate how blended learning can be used for both novice and experienced educators. Sharma and Barrett managed to combine BL models, elements for success, practical examples, and future developments in a pedagogically sound way. *Best Practices for Blended Learning* provides teachers with inspiration, motivation, and resources regarding how key language areas can be approached and be far more engaging in a blended learning environment.

## References

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**Lucas Kohnke**

English Language Centre, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong  
E-mail: [lucaskohnke@gmail.com](mailto:lucaskohnke@gmail.com)