

**Literature Review for  
Instructional Coaching in Blended Learning with Action Research  
for ESL Teachers and Emergent Bilingual Students**

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## **Introduction**

Learning is at the beginning of life whether it is learning what not to eat in a garden or adapting to survive. How we learn and learn well is where controversy arises. Researchers have spent many years dedicating their lives to studying learning and the best learning environments. Blended Learning has come to the forefront as one of the best learning environments and Action Research as one of the best methods to assess its instructional practices (Horn et al., 2014; Mertler, 2019). This literature review provides an overview of Blended Learning for Instructional Coaching along with Action Research for identifying effective instructional practices. This review starts with supportive learning theories, as an effective student-centered approach to education for diverse populations such as Emergent Bilingual learners whose particular learning needs are met and assessed through authentic learning environments, where students have choice, ownership and voice in their learning using cutting edge classroom technology (Harapnuik et al., 2018; Horn et al, 2014; Mertler, 2019). Then, it examines the efficacy of Action Research in determining the best instructional practices in a learning environment along with the need for its ability to determine effective instructional practices for Emergent Bilinguals in a Blended Learning Environment.

## **Theories to Support Blended Learning**

First, there is a history of learning theories to support Blended Learning. Jean Piaget was one of the first psychologists to study the brain's cognitive development from birth to after age 11. He determined that there were four stages of development (Borst, 2023). In one of his initial publications, he looked at the development of a 6- to 7-year-old child through the use of questioning and agreed with other colleagues that “questions in the form of ‘what is...?’ and ‘when?’ are admittedly earlier than ‘whys’. But it can be definitely stated that at the moment

when ‘whys’ first make their appearance, a reorganization of values takes place in the child’s mind, which enables us to see more clearly the relations uniting the different categories of questions” (Piaget, 1923). This research was the foundation to determine the move in cognitive development from Preoperational to Concrete Operational stage (Borst, 2023). Piaget “believed children process information differently than adults and that intelligence is not inherent but acquired, adapting and expanding as children investigate the world around them” (Borst, 2023). His work has helped the educator to understand where a student is usually cognitively functioning at a certain age in order to create learning opportunities that are appropriate to development whether it is in a traditional school environment or a progressive school environment that Dewey discusses (Dewey, 1938).

John Dewey was a philosopher and educator who studied learning, and when looking at traditional education, asked one of many pivotal questions, “How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them?” (Dewey, 1939). He was concerned that the present learning environment in most schools was not meeting the educational needs of students. Instead, the learning environment was taking away the motivation to learn with the lack of authenticity in the learning. He believed that society needed to improve the learning experience by changing the learning environment. He saw the school as a social environment where education “is a process of living and not a preparation” for it (Dewey, 1897). Dewey believed that activities should build off things that students already know and have experienced. Piaget’s work and Dewey’s work can be linked by how learning is “acquired” (Borst, 2023).

Then, there was Jerome Bruner, a psychologist and educator, who stated, “One thing seems clear: if all students are helped to the full utilization of their intellectual powers, we will

have a better chance of surviving as a democracy in an age of enormous technological and social complexity" (Bruner & University Professor Jerome Bruner, 1960/1977). He believed that learning takes place at any age in the same way, same format and that "the difference was in degree, not in kind." Thus, it was the depth of the learning of the material at each age - not the concept itself that is the focus. He shared that knowledge should be acquired through relatable experiences and not in a "sterilized" environment (Bruner, 1960).

### **Constructivist Learning Theory for the Blended Learning Environment**

Finally, there is Constructivist Learning Theory that is the basis of the Blended Learning environment to provide Choice, Ownership and Voice for the learning experience that the learner builds upon to ignite further learning. The work of Piaget, Dewey, and Bruner contributed to the Constructivist Learning Theory that "each person reflects on their experience and incorporates the new ideas with their prior knowledge" to obtain learning (Kurt, 2021). Educators, who understand this theory, utilize it in their classrooms by understanding the background knowledge that a student brings in order to build on this background knowledge for learning. This theory also supports knowledge being constructed and personal to the learner. Additionally, the learning process is an active and social one with metacognition increasing to reflect on the learning of the learner. Motivation is also pivotal to the process for the learner to maintain engagement in the learning (Kurt, 2021). Seymour Papert added to the Constructivist Learning Theory remarking on how the latest technology in a generation could significantly affect the learning. For him, it was the computer even more than the television that enhanced constructivist learning through experience for a child (Papert, 1993). His viewpoint promotes the pivotal use of cutting technology in Blended Learning to enhance Choice, Ownership, and Voice (Harapnuik et al., 2018; Horn et al, 2014).

### **The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model**

Also supporting Constructivist Learning Theory is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol Model. A research-based model of instruction for its validity in the past twenty years. One of its major components, Building Background Knowledge, supports new learning concepts being “explicitly” linked to students' backgrounds and experiences along with past learning to make the content more comprehensible for the learner. This learning model is not only recommended for English Language Learners (EBs), who were specifically studied using this model, but for *all* learners (Vogt, 2016).

### **Detractors of Blended Learning**

Instead of utilizing research and Constructivist Learning Theory, traditional schooling based on an industrialized training model took over mainstream education (Horn, 2014). Traditional schooling follows a laid-out curriculum with the primary material embedded and focuses on skills leading to mastery. Teachers disseminate the information for students to learn at a specified pace with the learner gaining knowledge through repetition and spiral review. However, this model struggles to meet the diversified needs of learners in society such as Emergent Bilingual Learners. Nations have “progressed well beyond the industrial age and have moved into the digital information age where the challenges and opportunities that we face will not be met by standardizing training nor sorting people based on their fixed skills” (Harapnuik et al., 2018).

### **Blended Learning for Emergent Bilinguals**

Blended Learning changes the environment on how learning is acquired and embraces the Constructivist Learning Theory. Thus, it is referred to as “disruptive innovation” because it is

not the traditional schooling model for learning acquisition. Blended Learning leverages the utilization of technology to build on knowledge along with student interaction to share ideas and resources in a variety of groupings (Horn et al., 2014). It also enables teachers to utilize technology to give students choice, ownership, and voice in how they learn and showing they have learned it (Harapnuik et al., 2018). This is an environment that Emergent Bilinguals need in order to be successful in their learning and in sharing their learning.

First, there are various environmental models in Blended Learning: Rotation, Flex, A La Carte, and Enriched Virtual. The Rotation model can take up different forms. There is the Station Rotation where students are broken into groups and move through a set number of stations with technology and online learning being a part of the stations. There is the Lab Rotation where a computer lab is a part of the rotation with the students. Another is the Flipped Classroom where students receive the primary instruction online, and the teacher facilitates the active learning with the students through projects, class discussions, etc. Finally, there is the Individual Rotation where students rotate on a personalized schedule customized by “playlists” or menus (Horn et al., 2014). An Emergent Bilingual Learner can grow as a learner in any of these rotation models including the following ones.

The Flex Model starts with online learning and works the environment and its structure around that learning. Furniture may be flexible seating with tables or workstations. Students are grouped by ability not by grade level. Students choose and work through their own learning plans to achieve specific goals, and teachers monitor as well as provide intervention support as needed (Horn, 2014).

The A La Carte Model allows students to take a full course online with a certified teacher for that course with a facilitating instructor on location for support. This allows students to take

courses that might not be available due to the lack of a certified teacher for that course in that particular district or school (Horn, 2014).

The Enriched Virtual Model has entire accredited online courses with virtual certified teachers. However, students have opportunities to meet face-to-face with a learning coach for support. The learning coaches provide one-on-one tutoring, small group instruction, and enrichment opportunities (Horn, 2014).

### **Action Research to Assess Blended Learning's Effectiveness**

Action Research began in 1944 when Kurt Lewin named it “for a process of inquiry and investigation that takes place as an action is carried out to solve a problem” (Main, 2023; Mertler, 2019). Today, the education arena utilizes it for “a reflective process of inquiry,” so that instructional practices are assessed for their effectiveness in the learning (Main, 2023; Mertler, 2019; Pond, 2022). To complete an Action Research Cycle properly, Mertler (2019) breaks it down into four stages of Planning, Acting, Developing, and Reflecting. Mertler’s (2019) stages are detailed into nine steps for an educator or institution to follow in order to get an in-depth and accurate set of data for analysis and reflection (see Appendix B).

Due to its efficacy, others like Main (2023) and Pond (2022) have written about Action Research’s success in their educational environments. However, they prefer a simplified Action Research process for their classroom purposes to 1) Identify a Problem; 2) Review the literature to devise an Action Plan; 3) Collect Data based on the Action Plan 4) Analyze the Data; 5) Draw Conclusions for Making Revisions; and 6) Share or Publish the Results with Reflective Conclusions (Main, 2023; Pond, 2022).

The ease of Action Research is the ability to turn one's own classroom into the place of study with students as the subjects and instruction as the variable. The attraction of Action Research is that data results are in real-time and occur within the work (Main, 2023; Mertler, 2019; Pond, 2022). Educators can reflect and respond to data more quickly than using a traditional research study with an outside company.

It should be noted that Blended Learning incorporation takes time. It is highly recommended that educational organizations start Blended Learning in increments to bring about sustainable change in their organization. It can take three to five years to build a Blended Learning environment successfully (Tucker et al., 2016). Action Research can be utilized to make these incremental changes more effective and lasting in the learning organization (Mertler, 2019),

In looking at the *Blended Learning Roadmap* by Red Bird Advanced Learning, the key phases include Foundations, Transitions, and Expansion over this three-to-five-year time period (see Appendix A). First, establishing a vision with key stakeholders in the academic organization is crucial in the Foundations Phase. Then, there is the determination of path and pace to develop the design of the overall plan. Just like new software, the bugs have to be discovered, and Action Research can be utilized to address these “bugs” or problems as they arise ((Main, 2023; Mertler, 2019; Pond, 2022). This is a “pre-pilot” period where a small group of teachers are willing to try and fail and try again as the problems, or pitfalls, are systematically addressed (Tucker et al., 2016). This is described as “the learning pit” in the midst of the learning process as a part of environmental change (Nottingham, 2023). A culture is created and embraced where those involved in this phase are willing to be risk-takers regardless of the data to make an effectual change. Growth mindset is a key component in this culture, too, where

administrators, teachers, and students are willing to think “outside the box” of traditional classrooms and envision a blended classroom environment (Brock & Hundley, 2017). Digital tools are selected, space is configured, and curriculum is reworked into a station, flex, or online format (Horn et al., 2014).

The Transitions phase starts with a pilot of teachers and students using the integrated technology along with the chosen configuration and tailored curriculum. Data is gathered from the learning both formally and informally to review and assess. From this data, adjustments are made at the class level whether it be with the technology, the configuration, or the curriculum. This is another area where Action Research can be implemented to effectively assess the learning environment (Mertler, 2019). In this phase, preparation for expansion also begins. This phase includes the “bridging of the chasm” in the technology adoption cycle of the teacher including “the pragmatists and the conservatives” who tend to resist change initially. The academic leadership must “leverage technology in professional development” to make this work effectively (Tucker et al., 2016).

In the Expansion phase, the Blended Learning Environment pieces are in place along with advanced technology tools embedded in the curriculum. Data is gathered and reviewed for adjustments at the student level so that by the time the Blended Learning Environment is fully functioning, the adjustments from the data collected are made *daily* on a student level. Action Research can also be utilized well in this phase of implementation to get on-site, real time results (Mertler, 2019). By this time, the Blended Learning Environment is considered sustainable throughout the campus and even the district (Tucker et al., 2016).

Once a Blended Learning Environment is chosen from the various models as an authentic learning environment, the structure for students having Choice, Ownership and Voice is crucial.

These elements “are interrelated, interdependent, and must be present” or the instructors “are not genuinely giving the learner choice, ownership, and voice through authentic learning opportunities” (Harapnuik et al., 2018). This structure of Choice, Ownership, and Voice are what make Blended Learning such an effective student-centered approach to education for diverse populations such as Emergent Bilingual Learners.

For example, students can have choice through the use of playlists or menus. Playlists allow students to complete a project or conduct a lab experiment on a large scale at their own pace, or a playlist can enable students to explore and understand a concept on a smaller scale (Tucker et al., 2016). This is extremely important for an Emergent Bilingual student who needs the pacing opportunity while learning (Vogt, 2016). Also, there are menus where students can choose to read a certain genre and choose how to demonstrate their comprehension of the literary piece whether it is creating a piece of art or typing up a realistic journal entry by a main character or author. Choice allows the Emergent Bilinguals, who may not be able to express their comprehension in a type-written format, the ability to express it orally through a recorded response (Vogt, 2016). Choice allows the learner to personalize the journey to the outcome, the format of the outcome itself, along with choosing the tools to produce the outcome in an arena where the teacher “aids the learner in making effective choices” (Harapnuik et al., 2018).

Ownership is when a student has investment in the learning and the output required to demonstrate the learning (Harapnuik et al., 2018). The student is allowed control over the learning process through the decisions made under choice such as the type of project, the evidence of learning, and the tools to use with teacher guidance in the work - similar to bowling with bumpers. The student can choose the lane, the size ball, and personalized toss motions with that bowling ball to knock down pins keeping the student’s ball in the lane until bumpers are no

longer needed. This is the essence of guided discovery (Harapnuik et al., 2018). Emergent Bilinguals need to have ownership to feel value in their learning especially in having to learn another language to be successful. This helps keep Emergent Bilingual students from dropping out of school. Goal setting is also a part of personalized ownership. This allows the student to track progress and own the personal data of the progress toward the goal to feel empowered in the learning (Ed Elements, 2018).

Voice is when students are able to articulate the “why” behind the work. They are able to reflect on the data regarding their goals, and share how they can demonstrate their learning with others outside of their teacher. Authentic voice is seen in their creativity, decision-making, and overall presentation in a variety of media and artifacts such as videos or pages in ePortfolios (Harapnuik et al., 2018). This is empowering for students of diverse populations like Emergent Bilinguals who can use a means other than language to be heard.

### **Action Research to Assess the Instruction in Blended Learning**

Instruction is like art. The painting relies on the skill of the artist just like instruction relies on the skill of the teacher. Just like an artist needs to step back from the painting to get perspective on its effect, teachers need to take time to get perspective on the effect of their instruction. Blended Learning instruction is no different from any other instruction. As mentioned earlier, one powerful way to improve instruction or instructional practices is through Action Research (Mertler, 2019).

A crucial area of proficiency for Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) is Speaking because according to various studies Speaking proficiency can affect growth in the language proficiency of Writing (Martirosyan et al, 2015; Rausch, 2015; Ebrianti, 2018). One overarching study that

examined correlation of language proficiency with EB learners with their academic proficiency was completed at a four-year university in northeast Louisiana in the U.S. The study's premise was based on the literature that quality of ESL instruction was a variable for language proficiency to affect academic ability. A study was conducted to test this correlation through a survey of 54 multilingual students, and it underlined the need for intentional ESL instructional support for quality academic proficiency (Martirosyan et al, 2015).

Another study through St. Cloud University researched the correlation of the speaking ability of EB learners with their writing ability (Rausch, 2015). The study analyzed standardized tests along with pre-test and post-test data. It also took data from student surveys about the instruction received. The study found that when speaking was taught with structure that the same structure in turn positively affected the quality of the writing responses of those students (Rausch, 2015).

Then, there was a study done in Indonesia looking at the correlation of speaking ability in conjunction with writing ability (Ebrianti, 2018). The study description goes into specific speech theory and into a definition of speaking including the various types of speaking. The study also goes into the same details for writing. The quantitative research method for this study used the Pearson Product Moment Correlation with the speaking and writing scores of the 20 participants. The study determined that there was a "sufficient correlation" in the data to support that speaking ability influenced writing ability (Ebrianti, 2018). Thus, having various studies even outside the U.S. makes it compelling for educators to act upon having strong effective instruction in the area of speaking since it has such an influential effect on writing.

### **Creating An Action Research Plan in Blended Learning with Emergent Bilinguals**

With this correlation, using Action Research to measure the effectiveness of Blended Learning instruction with EB learners provides important information for their educator, as well as, the educator's instructional coach. For example, there can be a specific instructional piece across all content areas that requires EB learners to submit a recorded spoken response following a specific academic protocol in order to prepare them for the State of Texas TELPAS assessment in the Language Proficiency Domain of Speaking. These recordings by EB students would allow them to listen to their response and edit them just like they can on the state test. It also allows the students to have the opportunity to think about how understandable their response is and vary the speaking pattern for the next or a future recording. If the quantitative assessment data is conclusively positive in which scores in the Speaking domain along with the Writing domain have increased, the validity of this instructional practice of recording a speaking response also supports a specific way that Blended Learning can be utilized to provide differentiated instruction for these learners to grow their speaking abilities along with their writing abilities (Horn et al, 2014; Mertler, 2019). Additionally, this instructional practice would provide EB students with choice, ownership, and (a literal) voice in their learning (Harapnuik et al., 2018).

Instructional Coaches can obtain qualitative data from students along with the teachers participating in the instructional practice through surveys or questionnaires using an electronic form for ease of response, as well as, for data disaggregation into an Excel document. The results of this research would be shared to assist other teachers on the campus and even throughout a district in implementing Blended Learning practices effectively (Mertler, 2019) .

## **Summary**

Blended Learning requires a commitment to working toward a learning environment that is in the best interest of the student. Thus, it is student-centered learning vs. teacher directed learning (Horn et al, 2014). The instructional practices put in place need to be vetted through Action Research to have the most impact on the learning and the learning environment (Mertler, 2019). Previous studies in this review share that there needs to be more research done with EBs in instruction that grows their language proficiency (Martirosyan et al, 2015; Rausch, 2015; Ebrianti, 2018). Vetting out the Action Research example shared using TELPAS language proficiency criteria is a next step to be taken along with others to provide effective instruction in a Blended Learning classroom (Mertler, 2019).

It takes time to put all of the elements of Blended Learning into place along with conducting Action Research properly so this is not a change that can be completed overnight in an educational environment. This learning and the research to support it has to be embraced by administration and leadership and not just in one classroom with one teacher (Horn et al, 2014; Mertler, 2019). All of this is crucial for diverse populations like Emergent Bilinguals who need consistency in the learning model with all of the thinking that it takes to acquire a new language (DeLollis, 2021).

Blended Learning must have an incremental implementation plan and have *all* of the components in place working interdependently, or it becomes just another program – not a disruptive innovation. Creating a sustainable, authentic, research-supported learning environment where students have choice, ownership, and voice in their work using the latest technology is a true picture of Blended Learning in operation and an environment for all learners - especially those of diverse needs like Emergent Bilingual students whose population continues

to grow exponentially in today's schools (Harapnuik et al., 2018; Horn et al., 2014; Tucker et al., 2014; DeLollis, 2021).

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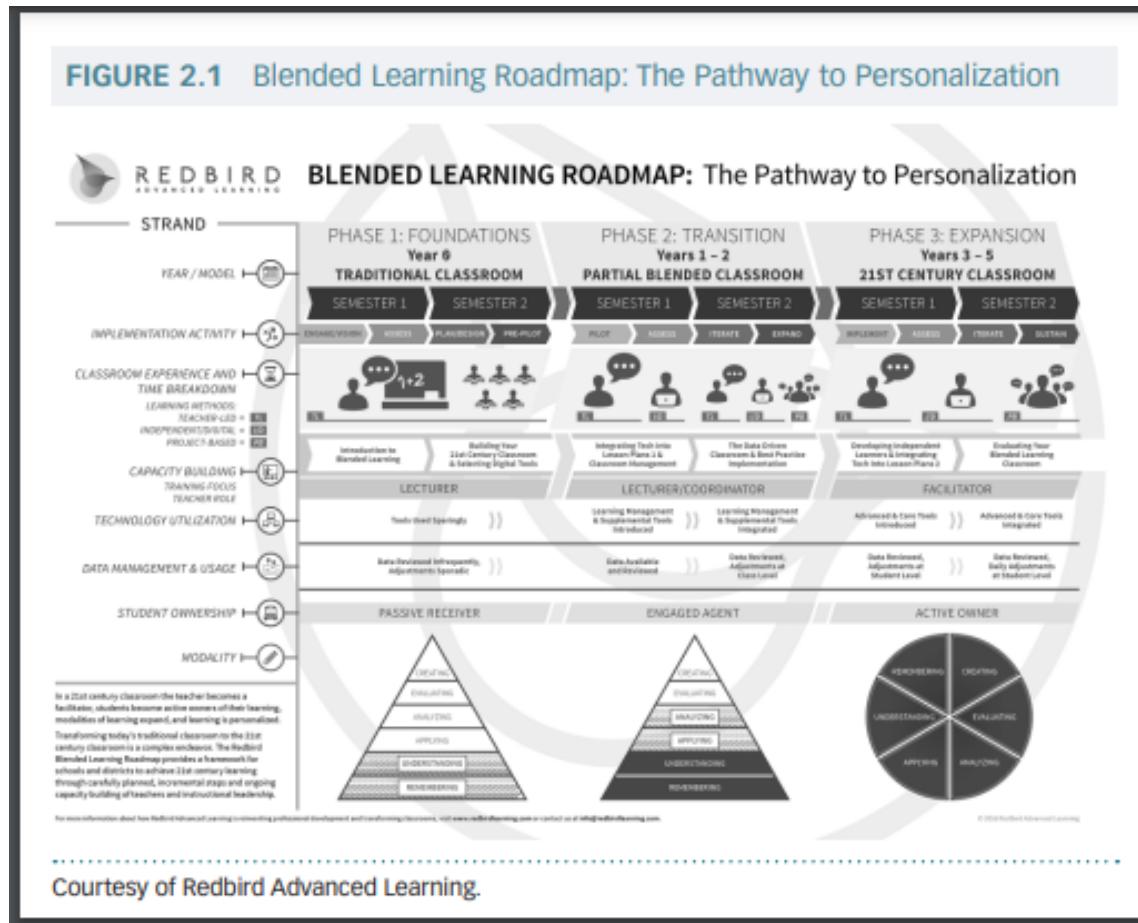
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## Appendix A

### Blended Learning Roadmap: The Pathway to Personalization

for *Blended Learning in Action: A Practical Guide Toward Sustainable Change* (2016) Review



## Appendix B

Integration of Two Organizational Schemes for the Step-by-Step Process of Action Research

from *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. (2019)

Figure 2.1

Integration of Two Organizational Schemes for the Step-by-Step Process of Action Research

