



# Hibernia College Quality Framework

## The pedagogical basis of blended programme design

### 1 Introduction

Blended learning seeks to draw on the strengths and affordances of both the online and the face-to-face environments to deliver academic programmes that are interactive, academically robust, engaging and accessible. A typical blended programme integrates online collaboration tools, multimedia content and digital communication technology with traditional on-site and face-to-face components, such as live tutorials, workshops and workplace experience.

#### 1.1 Purpose

This document is designed to provide all personnel involved in the programme development process with a good understanding of the pedagogical basis of blended programme design and how it relates to the programme development process.

#### 1.2 Scope

*a. To whom does the document apply?*

It applies to all academic staff and support staff involved in the design and delivery of blended programmes.

#### 1.3 Definitions

Definitions in the Policy on Designing Programmes for Online/Blended Learning are relevant.

### 2 Blended programme design: theoretical underpinnings

The term blended learning has been applied to a variety of educational contexts exhibiting significant variation in the extent of the mix between online and face-to-face activities. QQI's *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for providers of blended learning programmes* utilise Garrison and Kanuka's (2004) definition of blended learning as 'the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences'. As Garrison and Kanuka (2004, p97) explain, blended learning is

not just about using useful technologies or opening up access to learning; rather it represents 'a fundamental reconceptualization and reorganization of the teaching and learning dynamic'. McGee and Reis (2012) in their qualitative meta-analysis of the literature on blended learning designs, identify three levels of blended programme:

1. Enabling blends, which are primarily concerned with convenience and access
2. Enhancing blends, which involve small changes to the pedagogical approach, but do not dramatically alter teaching and learning processes
3. Transformative blends, which facilitate learners in actively constructing knowledge through interaction with peers, instructors and content

Rooted in a social constructivist pedagogy (Vygotsky, 1978), Hibernia College's blended learning programmes are designed to be transformative, building on learners' past experiences and developing the knowledge, skills and attributes that are key to their development as professionals.

## **2.1 Social constructivism**

Social constructivism stresses the role played by culture and context in creating both individual and collective understandings of reality. Arising from Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of psychological development, it focuses on learning as a process by which individuals internalise and make meaning from experiences that occur in the social sphere. For Vygotsky, and social constructivists in general, social interaction, rather than individual cognition, is the starting point for learning.

Social constructivist approaches to learning are thus 'based on distinctly different epistemic and pedagogical assumptions than classical approaches' to instruction (Jonassen and Rohrer-Murphy, 1999, p61). The focus for the instructor is on the facilitation of the process of knowledge acquisition by students, rather than the more didactic approaches that emanate from the cognitive or behaviourist perspectives. According to Tam (2000, p53), social constructivism 'encourages the construction of a social context in which collaboration creates a sense of community'. Within this community, 'teachers and students are active participants in the learning process.' This notion of a learning community is central to social constructivism.

## **2.2 Community of Inquiry Framework**

The Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) is a theoretical framework that guides the creation of a collaborative-constructivist learning experience through a focus on three interrelated elements – social, cognitive and teaching presence.



Social presence is the extent to which students and their instructors/tutors can project their presence online when communicating via text in the absence of visual or verbal signals. Social presence has been identified by Anderson as one of the key components of the online teaching and learning environment' (Motteram and Forrester, 2005, p284) and has been shown to sustain the motivation of online learners.

'Teaching Presence is the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes' (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). It incorporates all the choices an instructor/programme designer makes in terms of the content they deliver, the tasks they require of students, the feedback they give and the modes of delivery they employ.

Cognitive presence refers to the extent to which students are intellectually engaged in the online space (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Research has shown (Swart, 2017; Arend, 2009; Maurino, 2006) that synchronous, text-based, collaborative communication, such as occurs on an online discussion forum, has the potential to engender deep learning, connection making and critical thinking. In order to achieve

this it is important that online instructors carefully design and provide feedback on tasks and activities designed to develop these attributes and engage their students cognitively.

### **3 Blended design in practice**

The range of materials and activities with which learners engage are designed to develop both the knowledge and the attributes that are essential to their future careers as professionals – reflection, critical thinking, analysis, self-direction and the ability to take responsibility for learning. The core elements are:

- Scaffolded online content – online content is carefully structured to ensure that there is a progression in the depth of the learning activities. Structured online sessions/lessons comprise series of tasks and activities, both individual and collaborative, that learners are required to work through within a given time period (usually a week). The nature of this content depends on the subject matter of the programme/module content but it typically includes multimedia presentations or videos to introduce key concepts and map out the areas that the learners need to focus on. These may be followed by tasks such as questions that learners are required to research, multiple choice quizzes, case studies and other readings they must study and topics they must research in the online library.
- Opportunities for discussion and interaction – drawing on Wenger’s (2011) concept of Community of Practice, tutors and lecturers use online collaboration tools to promote discussion and help learners negotiate meaning and construct new knowledge. Collaborative activities may include tutor-facilitated forum discussions, debates and case studies; peer review tasks; and live online small group tutorials using web conferencing applications.
- Reflection – reflective practice (Gibbs, 1998; DIEP, 2007; Brookfield, 2010) is a core element in the integration of the course content, the creation of emotional resonance and the construction of identity as a learner and a professional. Reflective activities typically involve things such as writing blog posts, keeping a reflective journal and creating a digital portfolio.
- Simulated practice – skills lab, classroom or relevant work environment. This aspect is vital not only for putting learning into practice, but for providing

learners with an opportunity to rehearse the behaviours and dispositions that will be integral to their professional lives.

- Professional practice – this provides learners with an opportunity to bring everything together in a supported environment so that they become integrated into the professional community.

*Table 1* provides an overview of the types of approaches used.

**Table 1**

<b>Blended Learning Components</b>			
<b>Structured online content and activities</b>	<b>Tutorials</b>	<b>Simulated learning environment</b>	<b>Professional practice</b>
Multimedia presentations	Face-to-face (F2F) tutorials	Skills lab	Schools
Videos	F2F workshops	Micro-teaching workshop	Hospitals
Simulations	Live online tutorials	Laboratory work	
Forum discussions	Live webinars		
Scored quizzes	F2F learner presentations		
Case studies			
Library research			
Open ended questions			
Reflection			
Peer review activities			
Collaborative projects			

## 4 Document Control

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