

Podcast Transcript

What's Your Blend with Associate Professor Jimmy Winfield

Host: Evan Zerf

Co-Host: Nawaal Deane



Evan Zerf:

Welcome to the Learning Exchange podcast brought to you by the Center for Innovation in Learning and Teaching where educators meet learners and curiosity needs knowledge.

What's up everybody? Welcome back to another episode of the Learning Exchange podcast. I'm your host, Evan Zerf. Today's episode, we'll be touching on blended learning and while blended learning has been around for quite some time, I think once the pandemic hit, it really pushed blended learning to the forefront.

With me in studio. Today, we have our co-host Nawaal Deane and joining us as a guest is Jimmy Winfield.

Nawaal Deane:

Hi, Evan. Yes, I'm Nawaal and I'm from CILT. I'm the head of online and course development. Um My approach to blend it is really because I'm at the forefront of obviously rolling out a Amathuba the [Learning] platform that UCT uses.

Evan:

Yeah, and Jimmy tell us a bit about yourself.

Jimmy Winfield:

Hi, Nawaal and Evan. I am an Associate Professor in the College of Accounting. I've been there for 18 years and uh yeah, I, I love teaching. I'm very passionate about teaching. I've taught a whole range of different courses to commerce students over the years. Lately I've mostly been teaching the first year accounting. In my teaching I like to confront my fears. So, uh I think sometimes people mistake me for being somebody who's really passionate about online and blended. And uh, actually, I kind of, I'm now passionate because I've seen how it works. But the truth is, I'm just kind of curious about innovative ways to teach and although I'm a bit scared about starting something new. I usually like to confront that fear and try it out and see what works. And over the years, I've, I've tried a bunch of things that haven't worked very well. Um And others that have, and I guess I'm here because the blended learning experiments that has kind of slowly unfolded and involved in first year accounting over the last few years seems to have worked really well. And so I'm excited to be telling you guys about it.

Nawaal Deane:

Really talk to me about your blend, like sometimes it just takes one narrated powerpoint or audio recording and it's really about that first little step in the thinking of the pedagogical framework. So, yeah, I'm just like to coffee conversations. What is your blend?

Jimmy:

Yeah. Sure. OK. So let's try, let me try. Uh I think what I'll do is I'll show you the student, I'll try to describe the student experience for you. Uh But before I do that, let me just quickly explain that accounting is a discipline, I suppose, a little bit like maths. I'm always a bit scared to say that accounting is like maths because I have lots of students who weren't very good at maths and now they think they're not gonna be good at accounting and that's not how it works. But, but here's a similarity between maths and accounting, which is that you need to understand some basic concepts and those, those concepts are, are not always easy to understand.

And what makes it harder is that we layer concepts on top of other concepts, right? Like in maths. Uh and then to be a good student, you not only have to understand those concepts, but you also need to be able to apply them to a question under time pressure, right? That those are two very basic skills in maths and also in accounting.

Now, OK. With that as a kind of background, here's the student experience in what I call FR1, Financial Reporting One. That's the course that, that I convene. Uh you start off at the beginning of the week, at 10 o'clock. The material opens for, for the week and you basically are exposed to a series of lessons. OK? Now, this can happen on Vula or Amathuba. We've done both and you open up lesson one, lesson one has a required activity and that's watching a video almost always, sometimes uh in one on one occasion. This semester I've used the PDF because it was just easier to deliver the material in a written format rather than a video format. Mostly it's watching a video.

Then you've got some recommended activities and these really offer students to be able to do more if they wish to. And actually, I'm just gonna back up for a moment and, and mention something else about the recommended activity.

That video. It's not just a video, there's also a transcript available which has been done to a high degree of accuracy. Thanks to the arrangement that you have with a, with a partner. Then those transcripts have been taken and made into a word, a word document where we actually then go and stick in images of the video at key moments because I've written all sorts of stuff on the screen. And if you're just reading the transcript, you might kind of be a little bit lost unless you can see an image of what's going on, on the screen.

Now we did that kind of because a few students said they would have liked to see something like that. We

definitely did it in response to students needs. And I was quite skeptical by the way about whether they would really appreciate that. It turns out I've actually met a bunch of students who's told me they don't like watching my videos, but they love reading the transcripts, right?

So this is, this is a thing, I'm, I'm going into a little bit of detail here to try to show you that I think one of the massive benefits of blended is that it allows you to learn in a lot of different ways potentially. And you can choose which way you want to learn. Just think about a video. You can watch it as many times as you like. You can't watch a video, uh a lecture as many times as you like. You can, you can speed it up if you're a smart student or you've done this before and you can watch it on 1.5 times or if you need to, you can go slowly, you can pause it, you can try to work through something on your own. You know, there's just so much more control that a student has, right?

Then let's go to the recommended activities. There's a reference to the precise section of the textbook that's relevant to this particular video, right? The video was only 15 or 20 minutes long. So it's just covered a certain few concepts. And now you get a very direct link to where that is in the textbook with page references. You also can discuss on the forums or discussions or Q and A or whatever you choose to call that um feature of your LMS (Learning Management System) where people can um ask questions of the lecturers. Then there's often an extra question. So you can do a question. That's kind of like the one that was in the video but different so that you can practice and see if you wanna do that.

Now, that's all the recommended stuff. People don't have to do that but they can if they want to. And then very importantly, there is a final step in this one lesson, which is that you have to do a knowledge check and that's either a five or 10 mark question where you need to get 80% in order to be able to progress to the next lesson. Both Vula and Amathuba have this capability. They stop you progressing. You can't, they, they won't open up the next lesson until you've got that 80%. And that's highly effective. I think we get incredibly strong feedback from students, which when you think about it is a surprise because students don't tend to like being asked questions and having to do assessments, but they recognise the benefit of it because it really gets them to reflect on whether they have understood what they are meant to understand from this video. OK?

Now next step, the next lesson opens up and then you've got a required activity, recommended activities, another knowledge check. And usually there are five or six or seven of those in a week. By the end of that process of watching about 90 minutes of video, you should have understood the basic concepts. Remember that's the first thing we want them to get, then what we do is we give them a quiz on a Thursday to test that.

They've really understood all of these concepts. It's, it's harder than that, this knowledge because now we're layering on top all of the concepts from all five or six or seven videos. We do that on a Thursday and then they get their feedback and their marks immediately. And then on the Friday, they come to campus and they do what we call our Flipped Friday lecture. And that then is their first in person activity. Uh, which is what makes this not an online course, but a blended course. And there, this uses a, we call it flip Friday and I didn't realise, but some students were gonna get confused and they ask, does it only happen every second Friday? But that's not what the flipped is. The flipped is a flip classroom approach, right?

So flipped classroom is something that, uh, know about. It's about, um, learning the concepts before you come to class and then learning to apply them in class. Right? And that doesn't have to be an online process. It can be that you read the, read about the concepts and then come to class.

Nawaal:

Are you getting better attendance for that?

Jimmy:

Uh, well, I, I actually haven't checked lately because right now it's somebody else doing the flip Friday. But what, what happened last year is it followed the same pattern that my experience of in-person learning tends to follow, which is lots of people come and they enjoy it and they seem to be getting lots out of it. And then the first test hits like in week five or six. And then suddenly people stay home because they're worried about tests and they want to study for those. And then, um, and then they never, it never picks back up, you know, so we've got to try to solve that problem.

But let me tell you a little bit about flip Friday if I can, uh which is that they come in and they sit down and we immediately pair them up and they are given a question that they have to work through as quickly as possible. The idea here is they benefit from peer learning and they also have to work um under time pressure, which is something that is a serious challenge in, in financial reporting. And then after about 25 minutes, we stop, I run around trying to answer questions and, you know, he helping out on an individual level, which is also nice because now they get to ask the question, the burning questions of the lecturer in person.

And then um for the last 20 or 20 or so minutes, we ran a 90 m quiz where everybody, each team has a phone and they're answering these quiz questions on the phone as quickly as they can. And there's a whole kind of hullabaloo because people get quite excited about who's, who's ahead and who's on the

leader board and what just happened there. Uh And, and they, if they, if they're really smart, they can kind of learn from the answers to the first questions. Realise, oh, I got that wrong, but that's gonna change an answer in a later question.

And so let me, let's quickly work together here and I try to give them a bit of time to do that as well. So it's a very fun experience for most students. And um, yeah, and also a, a kind of rich learning experience and an entry into applying these concepts.

And then over the weekend they do their questions that they must then submit on the Monday. And then after that, uh, the tutors will have a look at those questions, grade them on a, on a kind of completeness, not correctness but completeness. And then there will be a tutorial, a double period tutorial based on that previous week's work in the following week. And so they end up with about half. I mean, it's very hard to say how long people spend on the online activities because like I said before, they could watch it on 1.5 times speed or they could watch it twice. And that's a, that's a factor of three difference, right? So it's very hard for me. But I would say that if you just watched them once on regular speed, you'd spend about the same amount of time watching videos as you spend in person. And so I think that makes it kind of truly blended.

I think I used to say that just having my course on Vula back in the day before COVID, I had a kind of blended course because there were online components. But those online components were pretty small, uh pretty thin really. And uh I would, I would now say, well, that wasn't really a blended course.

Nawaal:

Yeah. And what is the students um experience? Like, how do your students feel because I know that you've done some research. Um and also you give them badges. I always think about those girls, those gold stars that my six year old gets. And I really, I'm like, are you, do you think the badgers are giving you that level of like, you know, feedback and just enjoyment? Talk to me about the student experience from their side?

Jimmy:

Well, I'm gonna try to separate that out into two into two questions. The first is how do students feel about this? Um And then I'll get to the badges. So just on the whole last year, I decided I did want to get some kind of empirical data and write a paper. And I and um a colleague of mine, Emma Whitelaw have written a paper that we're hoping it is gonna be published soon about this. Um And as a result, we did a kind of very extensive survey of uh the student attitudes and perceptions of the blended learning. And I was very nervous, I must admit on the morning they hate when I went to kind of get this 100 videos that you've made.

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I put a lot of effort into it. Um And, and I was kind of, we, we just asked him this straight up question, you know, like this is called blended learning. Try to explain why and on purely online would look like this and purely blended would look like uh sorry, purely in person would look like this. Which one do you prefer?

Right. It's like really open ended question. Try to make it as easy as possible for them to go. Hm. This isn't really for us. And I was so delighted because 79% of people said that they would prefer the blended, which is, yeah, it was really great. And then I, I thought that the kind of closest competitor, you know, in the race, I thought the one that we were chasing was the, was the face to face and in transport and music over. Um And actually it turned out that there was 11% that said they'd prefer purely online and it was only 7%. I think that said that they prefer in person. And there were a few that said they didn't know Um And so yeah, that was a kind of very ringing endorsement of it. And we had asked them specific questions about different features of this course.

And yeah, I just quickly spit out some of those. We got very, very positive uh kind of feedback about the light board videos. I think 96% of people kind of agreed with a prompt that this was helpful for their learning. Um The knowledge checks. I also mentioned that people love them. 88% of people were big fans of the, of the knowledge checks. Um Even those weekly quizzes, right? Which count for marks, right? Students really tend to like they're not keen on that sort of thing, right? They'll do it because they have to. And even that uh we had 86% of people saying that, that it was really valuable for their learning. Um The flip classroom was, wasn't as popular, I must admit. And, you know, that's something that, you know, going forward, we want to work on trying to work out how to make that more effective. Um And then one disaster was the discussions, right? The Q and A tool. Yeah, people just, I mean, I already knew they weren't really using it because you can see how many people are looking at who, who, who are, you can see how many people are asking questions and also see how many people are, are looking to see Oh, what questions have been asked and what are the answers? And it's, it's always a tiny fraction of the course. And so that was, you know, that was very kind of ra rated very low. Um But overall it was just amazing feedback, a real endorsement of this blended model.

And then can I get your badges? Yes. Ok. So I can't wait for the badges. So this place you have to explain for people that have never had a badge in the concept of uh higher education, what a badge means and what it looks like. I was amazed, I was speaking just the other day at silt and people started talking about badging because it's a thing. I didn't actually know it's a thing. Yeah. Yeah. I guess I actually, I think the idea it came from gaming, right? I'm not a gamer, but I do know about kind of badges and, and I know that there

are a way to incentivise people. And what I was trying to think about last year was I know that one of the big problems with online education and all of the problems with online education bleed into blended learning, right? Because there's such a big online component. One of the big problems with online learning is people's self-discipline, right? And motivation. And so one thing I hope you heard as I was describing the student experience is how we help with the student discipline, which is keeping them on track. You need to have finished those videos by Thursday because now you're writing a quiz on this Thursday, right? And then you have to get that, that tutorial submission in by Monday. And so we, we're not kind of giving them long times to kind of figure out. Ok, when am I gonna do this? We kind of keep them on track. Right.

So, what I thought was there are a few things that I think they absolutely must do, they must watch all the videos, answer all the knowledge checks, they must submit their questions and they must come to tutorials. Actually, the truth is I'd like to add in, attend the flip Friday, but I can't because I can't get the data, right? I've got no way to know who came to the flip Friday.

But the beautiful thing about having a large online component in the course is you've got data. So let me measure these four and let me reward them, reward the students that have done them, right? And the way I did that, I mean, I, don't wanna admit this because students might be listening to this, but it's like it's not actually valuable, right? It's not like I'm giving them a prize or money or like something to eat. I'm just sending them an email that says, man, you did so well, so great to see that you've done all of these four things. Keep it up and here's a special, it's, it's a, it's a, it's a little moving image of somebody celebrating.

I try to change it each week. And, I think above it says FR1 in week one, you know, um a little play on words with the one and the woon and um and I think students just appreciate it. So, like, as I say, it's kind of worth it and I'm sure they know that right, which is why I'm willing to admit it on a podcast. But, but it's just nice. It's nice when someone says, hey, well done pat on the back, you've done what you needed to. I do think there's something about the acknowledgement that you get in getting an email from you because if you're in a class of like how many um students are in your class and if I last year when we did the badges for the first time, we had almost 1000 students, right? So how am I feeling? Like Jimmy sees me, you know, as a student just with a number. And I really think that that's the beauty of also having blended in that some way.

You can have a touch point with them and they can feel acknowledged in a face to face class. How would you gonna go? You did good, you did good, you did good. Like it just for me, there's the affordances of having the data, having the blended approach and then being able to then recognize that those particular students really have done well and, and stuck to the structure because what it's not, um what you're giving

me is that everything is very structure and the instructional design around it. What you're telling them to do within a particular time is really specific to the course.

I feel like there's a student experience and a student pathway that really takes into account the students agency uh with respect to the badges. One other nice feature of it, which makes it better than something else I've done in the past is that it's really only positive reinforcement. Uh What I did in the past was I had this kind of traffic light system. Uh There was worse data because it wasn't online. So I didn't really know whether they were engaging with the, the teaching. Um But I was uh assessing what I could and then I'd give them either a red orange or green depending on how they were doing it. And um and I found that as we, we get quite a lot of positive feedback about it because people would say that it did motivate them and it made a difference. But there was also quite a lot of negative feedback because people would say how bleak it was to find out every week that they were read once more, you know, whereas this, this badge is, you only get a message if you got the badge.

Right. And, yeah, I suppose, you know, you might be sitting there waiting, I send them out at eight o'clock on a Sunday. Um, they might be waiting there hoping that you're gonna get the badge and you don't, but I think most students aren't like that. Right. They like, they'll think about the badge if. they get the email and they won't think about the fact that they didn't get one if there's no email, no, there is data to say that the negative reinforcement fails because um the online high schools have used the, the triage system with the robots and it has caused a lot of actual depression and just students not being happy to be on the red or on orange. So for me, it's aspirational. The badges should be aspirational.

Nawaal:

Ok. So tell me about the research and what it's saying about the marks in terms of your assessments?

Jimmy:

Yeah, exactly. I was thinking that if there are any other lecturers listening to this podcast, they might be thinking, well, it's no surprise students like to have more freedom and their way of learning. And, but does it actually make a difference to how they perform? And that was you know, the major outcome of our research that Emma Whitelaw and I did, um, we analysed students marks. Tthe marks were higher in 2022 than they had been in 2018 and 2019 when we ran a fully in person course. Um, but that on its, on its own doesn't mean very much because maybe we had better students in 2022 or better prepared students or whatever it might be.

So, in fact, uh this is where Emma, my co-author was so helpful because she knows how to eliminate those sorts of factors that might bias the results. And so she controlled for all sorts of variables to do with uh the scores that people come in with and the NBT's and the um gender and all sorts of things that might make a difference uh to how people did. And amazingly, students, when you, before we did any of those controls, the average mark was 4.5% higher uh in 2022 in the blended course than it had been previously during fully in person learning.

And then with all the controls, it did come down a little bit, but it came down to 3.6% higher, which when you think about it, given that the average is somewhere around 60 that's like a 7% increase in student marks, which is just phenomenal.

Nawaal:

I'm amazed. What do you think that's attributed to? I mean, specifically, well, I think it's the benefits of blended learning and I don't think there is a specific thing but I, I think I, if I try to point to one, it would be the fact that students get to learn much more in the way they want to than the, or in the way that that is good for them than in an, a fully in person environment just on.

I mean, other lecturers might listen to this and be like, there's no way I can do what you do. Firstly, it's a humanities, um, course or it's, you know, something that's to do with music or philosophy. What would you give them in terms of your advice on how to approach a blended?

Jimmy:

Yeah. Uh Look, I, I'm somebody who doesn't try to pretend that I have any idea how, what's best for other people. You know, other people must kind of figure out what's best. And as you say, you know, a lecture in humanities or in drama or in science, you know, they just know so much better about how to put across their material than I do so all respect to them. And I, I don't feel like I have a lot to say about the kind of technical aspects of what they can offer.

But what I can say is that if I were listening to this podcast now, I would pro and, and I was just running an in person class, you know, just the same way that we always did before COVID. I would, I would listen to this description of this blended course and think yes, is, it is like a huge thing and what people must understand is that that didn't get created whole cloth by me or, and my team, right? It, it was something that evolved step by step. And so, you know, it started out those two videos that I told you about that I filmed in 2019, that's still part of the offering, right? Um And then in, yes, in COVID, I realised I didn't want to do the whole voiceover

powerpoint thing. And so I built my own light board and I filmed the videos, but those videos were not great in 2020 I had to do quite a lot of work on them in 2021 and some more work in 2022 to, to get them better and, we didn't have a whole bunch of the other features. Um at, at, at that point, you know, 2020 was like very skinny. We were all running just to try to, you know, get whatever we could to students and there were big gaps and, and we've slowly managed to fill in those gaps with those transcripts and with those recommended activities. And now the badges have come along and, and adding back the in-person and thinking about the flip Friday, like all of this happened one stage at a time.

Nawaal:

So, yeah. Well, I mean, I'm glad you said that because I feel like it's not an easy task, but it's also not impossible. And I feel like it's also one step at a time and there's a lot of services out there, you know, like we were a service that inadvertently just put you on this road, but I never imagined what having a light board internally would do for your course. So, you know, it's the same with the platforms. We don't know what the platform can do at a level of customisation.

Evan:

Nawaal, for lecturers are listening, you mentioned that support perhaps indicate where they can find that support within the university for creating blended um courses.

Nawaal:

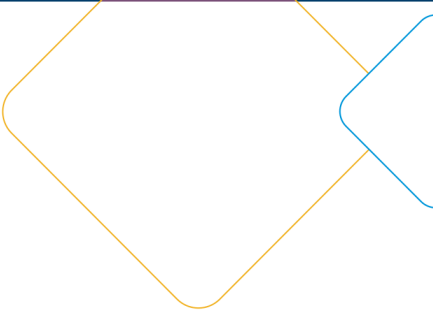
OK. So we are running a series. We'll, you know, CILT has a lot of resources. We're also looking at the ability to make videos. We have our own internal studios for lecturers to come and record, not just on the light-board, but just all different types of courses. There's a green screen in the one button studio at so and just find us on our website.

Evan:

So thanks. So yeah, if for lecturers listening out there and feeling they want to embark on this journey and looking for support. I think CILT is perhaps the first touch point, there's great facilities, great support. Um So perhaps reach out to CILT and then take it from there.

Jimmy:

I mean, can I just quickly say that I haven't given, I haven't given anyone any, any credit in this podcast so far. Um But like, yeah, I mean, firstly, I do wanna give credit to all of my kind of partners and my team in FR1 over the years, I have not done this on my own by any means. And maybe the one person I'd like to just give a real shout out to is Carla Fourie, who was my kind of co-convenor for, I think, three out of



the four years that we've been doing, I've been on this journey and, and she's had a massive input. And uh yeah, the other big group that's made a huge difference is CILT. Absolutely, Evan, it's the right advice. If you're thinking about doing something innovative, then CILT is the place to go. They, they were massively helpful. Even the light board I built myself, Stephan Steyn from CILT was on the other end of Teams talking me through how to edit, how to build a thing, you know, how to think about the audio and all of those sorts of things. Now, nobody else has to build a light board. We're not in a pandemic anymore. You can just come here and use the one. But like it's, CILT is the place to go. Thanks.

Nawaal:

Thanks, Jimmy. That was great.

Evan:

Thanks. Nawaal and Jimmy. Thanks for this discussion. I think it's um been amazing, really insightful and thank you to the listeners for joining us on our podcast and stay tuned for the next episode.

That's a wrap for this episode of the learning exchange podcast. Thanks for joining us. Keep the exchange alive and we'll see you in the next episode.

This episode was produced by Mishka Reddy, Azraa Dawood and Rafeeqah Galant and brought to you by the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at UCT. [Listen to us online.](#)