Invited Expert Article

Blended learning materials for language acquisition

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how the development of principled blended learning materials can facilitate the acquisition of an L2. By materials development, I mean the design, production, and utilisation of anything intended to facilitate language acquisition. This could be a story, a listening activity, a debate, a photo, a video, a board game, a communication task, a blog, a discovery task, an advertisement, an e-mail or even a sequence of questions. By principled I mean informed by what we know from research and observation about what best facilitates language acquisition. By blended learning, I mean learning which makes use of both face-to-face and distance modes to facilitate language acquisition. And by the acquisition of an L2 I mean the gradual development of the ability to communicate effectively in a second or foreign language. To help learners achieve language acquisition I am advocating the principled design and use of blended learning materials. I am also specifying what I think are the four most important principles of language acquisition and for each one deriving and exemplifying principles and procedures of materials development.

Keywords: blended learning; communicative ability; language acquisition; materials development; principled


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BLENDED LEARNING

There are many definitions in the literature of blended learning. The two which I think capture the essence of blended learning most simply and accurately are:

‘Blended learning refers to a language course which combines a face-to-face (F2F) classroom component with an appropriate use of technology …’ (Sharma & Barrett, 2007).

‘[Blended learning] is a mixture of online and face-to-face course delivery’ (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007).

Sharma (in press) comments that a 'popular incarnation of a BL course is a 'hybrid' model where 50% of the course is delivered in a physical classroom and the rest is taken online. Of course, a blended learning course does not have to have this 50/50 split and the proportions of the two modes vary according to the needs of the learners, such contextual factors as the time and resources available, the experience and expertise of the teacher, and the inclinations of the learners.’ As Sharma (in press) also says, ‘BL practice varies considerably depending on context’ and he notes considerable variance of activities within blended learning materials when he says, ‘Language learning materials within BL (blended language learning) contexts have expanded from mere products (e.g. interactive exercises) to include ‘processes’ (e.g. asynchronous interactions and tasks).’ For other definitions, descriptions, comments, and examples of blended learning see Mishan (2013), Sharma (in press), Tomlinson (2019), and Tomlinson & Whittaker (2013).

The key thing to me about blended learning is that the different modes of delivery are complimentary and that the materials exploit the affordances of the two different media. In other words, for blended learning to be used to offer the best opportunities for language acquisition to the learners the materials delivered online have to take advantage of all the benefits of online delivery and the materials delivered face-to-face have to take advantage of all the benefits of face-to-face delivery. At the same time the online materials have to connect with the face-to-face materials and each medium has to enhance the value of the other. Online materials, for example, could be used to provide a rich and embodied experience of the target language in use through an interview, an advert or a clip from a film, or a dramatization of a scene from a play. Face-to-face materials could be used to provide readiness activities that activate the learners' minds in readiness for the online experience of language in use (e.g. the teacher talking about her first day at school and then leading a visualisation activity prompting learners to visualise their first day at school before watching a scene from a film in which a young child goes to school for the first time). The learners could then improvise a dialogue in pairs in which the mother asks the child about their first day at school prior to two pairs joining together in a group to write up the
conversation. The group could then send their dialogue to another group online for them to read and provide feedback on. For homework, the learners could individually write a short story about their first day at university before reading online a short story about a student's first day at university. Then they could do an online discovery activity investigating the use of a specific language feature in the short story (e.g. the simple past, the passive, rhetorical questions, or the use of similes). In the next class, they could form groups, share their discoveries, and then revise each other's stories before submitting them online for teacher feedback.

Ideally, materials should be blended so that the different modes complement each other and contribute to the achievement of the same goals and each mode should be used to best exploit its affordances. Affordances of online materials which could be exploited in the online components of blended learning materials include the possibility of using the material anywhere, the possibility of interaction with a variety of others, the ease of offering learner choice, the possibilities of localisation and personalisation, and the provision of multi-modal experience of the language in embodied use (i.e. with extra-linguistic features such as facial gestures, body language, proximity, eye contact, volume, pause and emotion strengthening linguistic meaning). Affordances of face-to-face materials include the possibility of achieving positive rapport, a stimulus of live interaction with the teacher and with peers (see Sato & Ballinger (2016) for the value of peer-to-peer interaction in socially cohesive collaboration), the encouragement and support of the teacher and of collaborating peers, the ability to seek clarification and elaboration, the provision of relevant and personalised feedback and the enjoyment of a social occasion.

Blended learning materials not only need to exploit and combine the best affordances of both modes, but they also need to be principled in the sense that they are driven by principles of language acquisition which are based on the findings of second language acquisition and classroom research and observation. In the next section, I will be specifying some of these principles and exemplifying some of the procedures which can achieve their application through blended learning approaches.

SOME PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR BLENDED LEARNING APPROACHES

Principle of Language Acquisition 1

A pre-requisite for language acquisition is that the learners experience language in use that is rich, recycled, meaningful, embodied, and comprehensible. Rich input consists of multiple and contextualised instances of the target language being used for authentic communication. This input needs to be rich in quantity and rich in quality. In other words, learners need as much
exposure to it as possible and it needs to reflect how the language is used for communication in a variety of contexts, registers, and styles.

The input needs to be recycled many times as research has revealed that language items (e.g. lexical items) and language features (e.g. the passive) need to be encountered multiple times before they can be acquired. Ideally, these encounters need to be spaced and be varied in context, users, form, and functions. This means that the typical coursebook focus on a form in one unit only is insufficient and that learners need to encounter the form throughout the course. See Nation (in press) and Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018, 2022) for research findings and advice in relation to recycling.

The input also needs to be meaningful in the sense that it means something to the learners, it connects with their lives and it is perceived by them to be significant. This is vital for language acquisition as it is signalled as salient to the brain and it facilitates affective engagement as well as sensory imaging during the mental processes of acquisition. If, for example, a learner reads about an activity they are familiar with and enjoy, they are much more likely to achieve connections that facilitate acquisition than if they read about an activity they have never experienced and know nothing about. See Schutze (2017) and Tomlinson & Masuhara (2022) for details on the mental processes of language acquisition.

Ideally, as much as possible of the language use that the learners are exposed to should be embodied in that the language is supplemented and reinforced by paralinguistic and non-linguistic features such as intonation, volume, pause, stress, punctuation, highlighting, facial gestures, body language, etc. Such features are considered by many researchers to communicate up to 60% of the meaning of any utterance. Unfortunately most coursebooks provide very little embodied language as they rely very much on the written word and often the accompanying recordings and videos are recorded from a script by actors who slow their articulation and provide extra stress to syllables. Unfortunately, teachers are told to reduce teacher talking time when in fact teachers can be a major source of embodied language if they chat with rather than lecture their learners.

It is essential that the language in use that learners are exposed to is comprehensible. This does not mean that the learners have to understand every word nor does it mean that the vocabulary of a reading or listening text needs to be pre-taught. What it does mean is that the language needs to be accessible in the sense that the learners can understand enough of it to be informed, entertained or instructed, and rewarded in some way.

**Principles of Materials Development and Adaptation 1**

When developing or adapting language learning materials it is important to bear in mind that the learners need as many materials as possible which provide learners with a lot of spoken, written, and multi-media texts affording
extensive experience of language in purposeful use. Such exposure is essential for durable language acquisition to take place (see Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021) and ideally, much of the exposure should be to authentic language which is being used for communication rather than for pedagogic instruction, as this helps to prepare learners for the realities of real-world use of the language for communication. Acquisition and preparation for real-world use are also aided if the language is contextualised, as the context can clarify the meaning when reading or listening, and awareness of the context is essential for appropriate and effective communication when speaking or writing.

It is also important to ensure that the learners engage in a great deal of interaction concerning their input. By communicating with each other in relation to the input the learners are recycling features of the text, deepening their understanding of the text, increasing their connection with the text, eliciting further input from their peers, and gaining experience of purposeful communication themselves. See Sato and Ballinger (2016) for research on the value of peer-to-peer interaction.

**Examples of Procedures 1**

1 Task-free activities in which the teacher, for example, tells a joke or anecdote, reads a very short story, sings a song, or performs an extract from a play or novel at the beginning of a lesson can considerably increase the learners’ exposure to language in communicative use. They are best performed live so that the teacher can make contact with and energise the learners with their familiar voice, with eye contact, and with dramatic gestures. Also when performing live the teacher can notice and clarify confusion as well as note and influence the apparent degree of motivation.

2 TPR Plus activities can also increase opportunities for optimum exposure to the language in use, as the teacher can use their voice and body to dramatic effect, can notice and rectify misunderstandings, and can make sure that the activities are potentially motivating and engaging. Such activities consist of the teacher telling a story, giving instructions to play a game, describing a mural for the learners to paint, providing an oral recipe, etc. The learners listen to the teacher and then respond physically (for example, by miming a story as the teacher tells it or by preparing and cooking a meal from the teacher’s instructions). These activities are much better done live as the teacher can monitor the students and make adjustments and the learners can help each other to understand as well as infect each other with their enthusiasm (especially in response to a very silly or exciting story).

3 Extensive reading, listening, and viewing are perhaps the most valuable ways of exposing learners to the language in use. They offer unlimited exposure in a potentially engaging way providing that the main objective is learner enjoyment and the learners are encouraged to read, listen to and view what they want to,
when they want, and how they want to. This pure form of extensive and enjoyable exposure has been found by numerous research projects to facilitate improved ability to read, listen, read, speak and communicate effectively in the target language (see Tomlinson, 2021).

It can be a good idea to introduce extensive experience of the language in use in the classroom to establish the habit but extensive reading, listening, and viewing are activities that can benefit from being placed in the digital and online components of a blended learning course. Not only can potentially engaging texts be placed online for learners to sample and choose from but learners can be helped to find their texts online and then recommend texts to their peers’ which they have enjoyed.

4 Live teacher talk can be the most positive contribution a teacher can make to their learner’s progress, providing the teacher talks with the learners and not at them. The teacher knows the learners and can make conversations with them localised, personalised, meaningful, and comprehensible. Ideally, conversations with the learners should be informal and interactive and can be with the whole class, with a group, or with individuals on a rotation basis. The teacher needs to respect the learners as individual and intelligent human beings, should not patronise the learners, should not force them to respond, and should make the conversations as interesting as possible.

5 Unstructured interaction is a term coined by Barker (2010) to refer to peer-to-peer interaction which is not mediated or monitored by a teacher. He concluded that there was insufficient time available on his course at a Japanese university for his students to gain enough exposure to English and enough opportunities to use English for communication. He, therefore, formed an English Club of volunteers from all his classes for which the only rule was that whenever a member met another member anywhere outside the classroom they would talk to each other in English. The members wore a distinctive badge and for a year they communicated socially with each other in English. He tested all the learners in his classes on their communicative ability before and after the experiment and the learners who had joined his club dramatically outperformed those who had not in, for example, lexical richness, number of utterances, and length of utterance. I advised students at a University in Addis Ababa to do something similar and they organised it themselves and later reported on its success. These two initiatives were out of class but live and face-to-face. It would be possible on a blended learning course to follow the same principles with procedures involving digital interaction between members of an institutional, national, or even international social club.

6 Looking Out for English is a vital component of any language course. It involves materials used in the classroom ending a unit by requiring (or at least encouraging learners) to follow up and continue the unit outside the classroom.
For example, learners who have been investigating the form and functions of the phrase ‘in case of x …’ could be asked to photo any signs containing this phrase they can find in their city or find authentic examples of the phrase being used on the web. The learners then bring their examples to class (or send them to peers) for further group investigation of the phrase.

For a discussion of the value of getting learners to look out for English see (Pinnard, 2016), Tomlinson (2014) and Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021).

7 Text-Driven Approaches are those which are driven by a potentially affectively and cognitively engaging written or spoken text rather than by a teaching point, topic, or theme. The activities derive from the text as do any language learning points. This increases the learners’ exposure to authentic language use and recycling of the text in the activities, as well as increasing the likelihood of learner need and motivation. The different components of a text-driven unit are designed to connect to the text, to the learners' prior experience, and to each other, with some activities being more suitable for face-to-face enactment and some more suitable for digital delivery. For example, the learners might do a readiness activity to activate their minds in relation to an extract from a film about leaving home in which they visualise, talk to themselves, and then discuss their own experience of leaving home for the first time. The actual film extract is then delivered to them digitally as well as an activity inviting them to respond mentally and then in writing to what the main character thinks about and says in the film. The next day the learners share their responses to the film in groups and then write and perform the next scene from the film in which the main character is spending his first night away from home. For homework, the learners do a digital activity in which they watch the extract from the film again and identify a particular pragmatic feature of the main character's use of language. Then they are provided with the relevant extracts from the film and asked to make discoveries about the use of the specified pragmatic feature. In the next class the learners in groups discuss their discoveries and then make revisions to the script of their ensuing scene. Finally, each learner writes the script for a film sequence focusing on their own home leaving and e-mails this to a monitoring partner for suggestions for revisions. Each learner then makes final revisions to their individual and group script and e-mails them to the teacher for feedback.


**Principle of Language Acquisition 2**

Learners need to be affectively engaged in their language experience. That is they need to feel emotion during and ideally after the learning experience. They need to laugh, cry, feel exhilarated, feel disappointed, be excited, apprehensive,
happy, sympathetic, provoked, moved, and empathetic. What they do not need is to feel neutral, safe, and unconcerned. They also need to be cognitively engaged so that they are stimulated to think for themselves, query, investigate, ponder, to come up with ideas and opinions, create, invent, to solve.

The main point is that learners need to think and to feel and to do so with a willing investment of sustained attention, energy, and enthusiasm. See Schutze (2017), and Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018, 2021) for a discussion of the vital importance of affective and cognitive engagement.

**Principles of Materials Development and Adaptation 2**

1. Base materials on texts or tasks that are likely to achieve affective and/or cognitive engagement. Do not base them on language teaching points, topics or themes as that makes it much more difficult to find or create authentic and engaging texts.

2. Make use of activities that get learners to deepen and articulate their feelings as this leads to the creation of connections in the mind, to a stronger and more durable record in the brain of language taken in for processing whilst and after experiencing the text and to a greater likelihood of retrieval during language production (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021).

3. Stimulate affective and cognitive responses through literature, controversial and provocative texts, personalisation, and localisation.

4. Ask open-ended questions which invite differing responses rather than closed questions for which the answer can be taken directly from the text.

5. Encourage disagreement as this stimulates thought and typically promotes richer language use than agreement.

6. Focus the learners’ attention on salient features and issues of the content of the texts rather than exclusively on their language.

7. Avoid mechanical activities which do not require thought or stimulate feeling.

8. Set achievable challenges which help to raise the learners’ self-esteem.

9. Make the learning environment and the learning materials as attractive and enjoyable as possible.

In a blended learning approach the live, face-to-face components can best be used to encourage and support the articulation and sharing of thoughts and feelings, to provide immediate feedback when requested or needed, and to provide opportunities for further rich and engaging input from interaction with peers and with the teacher. The digital and online components can best be used to make the learning environment attractive (through the use of visuals, colour, music, animation, etc.), to provide a bank of potentially engaging texts to select from, to provide a variety of voices expressing different views, to facilitate out of class interaction and to provide focused and even individualised feedback.
Examples of Procedures 2

Some of the activities and approaches I suggested for Principle 1 can also be used to facilitate affective and cognitive engagement, for example, Task-Free Activities, Text-Driven Approaches, and TPR Plus. Other approaches which can stimulate engagement include Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Problem-Solving Approaches, and Process Drama.

Task-Based Language Teaching involves the learners being given a non-linguistic task to perform, usually in collaborative groups working together towards the same goal(s) and making use of their existing linguistic resources to do so. These tasks can be fairly trivial (e.g. spotting the difference between two drawings) or they can be such that they can challenge thought and stimulate feelings of satisfaction and success (e.g. designing their ideal school, inventing and promoting a device to save water, creating a game which provides young children with enjoyable physical and mental exercise). See Long (2015).

Content and Language Integrated Learning involves students learning a subject or skill (e.g. mathematics or dancing) through the medium of the target language. This approach typically focuses on the content being instructed but also gives help with understanding and producing the language involved, as well as providing a massive amount of contextualised and comprehensible exposure to the language in communicative use and multiple opportunities to use the language for communication. If the content is made interesting and enjoyable it creates opportunities for affective and cognitive engagement. A very similar approach is known as CBI in the USA and Canada.

See Snow & Brinton (2017), Sylven (2019), and Tomlinson & Masuhara (2021) for more information.

Problem-Based Approaches (Ansarian & Teoh, 2018) involve setting groups of learners' problems to solve (e.g. how to reduce the amount of traffic passing the school at speed; where do fish keep their money?). The learners use the target language in discussing possible solutions to the problem and then in presenting their final solution to another group informally, to the class formally, or in writing, for example, to a newspaper. If the topic is localised and significant for the learners as well as being challenging then there is a good chance of affective and cognitive engagement. This is also true if the problem focuses on a provocative issue (such as preserving old buildings in the locality v replacing them).

Process Drama involves the learners acting out a spontaneous drama from the teacher’s prompts about the context, issues, and characters in the drama. Once the teacher has specified these features they usually become a character in the drama themselves. If the issues in the drama are provocative then the acting out of the issues can become very affectively and cognitively engaging (see Park, 2010).
In addition to the approaches outlined above, the playing of games which involve the use of the target language requires the learners to think and stimulate emotions such as enjoyment, excitement, and fulfilment can have great potential for achieving affective and cognitive engagement.

**Principle of Language Acquisition 3**

Language learners can benefit from noticing salient, recycled, or problematic features of their input and from discovering how, when, and why they are used. This is particularly beneficial if the learners experience the input first globally and holistically and achieve engagement before any reflection and analysis take place.

**Principles of Materials Development 3**

1 Use experiential approaches in which the learners first of all experience the language in use and then move gradually from apprehension to comprehension (Kolb & Kolb, 2017), to a personal response, to reflection, to analysis. This is a process that facilitates the mental processes of language acquisition which typically involve taking in salient utterances of the input, strengthening them with connections, associations, and interpretations, storing them in short-term memory, moving them to long-term memory if they are further strengthened by recycling or use and making generalisations about their form and functions throughout this process (see Schütze, 2017; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021).

2 Use discovery approaches in which the learners are helped to notice and make discoveries for themselves about the form and functions of language features that they have recently experienced in use (Tomlinson, 2018).

**Examples of Procedures 3**

1 Text-driven discovery activities are ideal for helping learners to notice and make discoveries about the form and functions of language features in authentic use. This is especially true if the learners have first of all been engaged whilst responding to a written, spoken, or multi-media authentic text, have then further responded to the text by developing and articulating their personal thoughts, emotions, and interpretations, and have then produced a related text themselves. At this point, if they are asked to go back to the text and make discoveries about a particular linguistic form (e.g. the passive), discourse feature (e.g. reported speech), or pragmatic feature (e.g. making suggestions) then there is a strong likelihood of the learners making discoveries which will help them in the future. This is especially so if the learners are also invited to investigate the same form or feature in other authentic texts and to revise their use of the form or feature in the texts they have developed themselves. See Tomlinson (2013, in press) for further discussion of the potential value of discovery activities.
2 Task-driven discovery activities consist of post-task activities which invite the learners to go back to their task performance and to notice and make discoveries about forms and features that were salient or problematic in their discussions, in any texts which were experienced, and in presentations or reports they made. Recording discussions provides useful data for discovery activities as does keeping a file of any texts experienced.

3 Analytic discovery activities consist of the learners being given a text and then being asked to make discoveries about a specified feature of it. This could be a linguistic form as in an activity in which half the groups are given many texts and asked to find and make discoveries about the use of 'some' and the other half are given texts and asked to make discoveries about the use of 'any'. Each 'some' group then forms a larger group with an 'any' group and the learners share and develop their discoveries before comparing them with what it says in a unit on 'some' and 'any' in a coursebook. The focused feature could also be a pragmatic feature and the activity could consist of the students investigating the language which advertisements use to persuade people to buy their products.

4 Research activities involve the learners in finding authentic exemplars of a particular form or feature being used for communicative effect, compiling a mini-corpus of the use of this form or feature, and then coming together to make discoveries about how, when, and why it is used.

In a blended learning course digital and online materials can best be used for providing access to relevant, engaging, and potentially revealing written, spoken, and multi-media texts. They can also be used to facilitate exchanges of texts and discoveries between students and to store and provide access to group discoveries which can be revised and shared at any time. Face-to-face activities are best used for pair and group explorations and discussions as well as for teacher feedback and support. They are also useful for pair and group text production and the presentation of findings. As always, online materials can provide a lot more access and experience whereas face-to-face activities can provide a lot more stimulus and interaction.

**Principle of Language Acquisition 4**

Learners need opportunities to use the language for contextualised and purposeful communication.

**Principles of Materials Development 4**

1 Provide many opportunities for the learners to produce language to achieve intended outcomes. These opportunities could be unstructured as in spontaneous conversation or social media exchanges or they could be structured as in activities that encourage or require the learners to communicate to achieve particular purposes (for example, an activity in which adult learners write a story
for young children, an activity in which the learners write instructions for how to play a game they have developed or an activity in which learners try to persuade other learners to help them to do something).

2 Make sure that output activities are designed so that the learners are using language rather than just practising specified features of it. Authentic language production has a non-linguistic purpose and requires the use of language appropriate to the context and purpose(s) of the communication. Its main goals are appropriacy and effectiveness. Practice has pedagogic rather than communicative purposes and it is usually made easy by providing the language feature to practice and by removing the need to be contextually appropriate and communicatively effective. It can help learners to improve accuracy and fluency to some extent but provides poor preparation for real-world communication.

3 Design output activities so that they help learners to develop their ability to communicate fluently, accurately, appropriately, and effectively. These are the interconnected skills of real-world communication and all of them need to be developed to become a successful communicator in the target language. If a learner is unduly hesitant, uses an excessive number of fillers, and frequently pauses during a conversation, the interactant(s) are likely to lose interest and possibly terminate the conversation. If a learner makes a few mistakes when speaking or writing for communication it does not normally interfere with communication but a plethora of mistakes can make the communication uncomfortable or even incomprehensible. If a learner uses inappropriate language (e.g. uses colloquial language in a very formal situation) then the interactant(s) can be confused or even offended. If a learner does not achieve the intended effect then they have failed to communicate, even if their utterances are grammatically perfect.

4 Make sure that the output activities are fully contextualised whether the communication is real or is real-life-like (as in a simulation, scenario, or improvised drama). By this, I mean to ensure that when the learners are asked to use the target language for spoken or written communication they know whom they are communicating with, where they are communicating, how they are communicating, why they are communicating, and the purpose for their communication. For example, they could be phoning a nearby restaurant to book a table for six people that evening because it is their friend’s birthday and they want to arrange a surprise party and to make sure they have a table booked and a birthday cake ordered for dessert.

It is vital that learners have a lot of experience with contextualised communication in the classroom and online as this is the best way to maximise the likelihood of appropriate and effective real-life communication.

5 Maximise opportunities for learner-learner communicative interaction (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). According to Sato & Ballinger, many other researchers in Sato &
Ballinger (2016), and to my experience in the classroom, learner-learner interaction is the most effective way of promoting communicative confidence and effectiveness, especially if learners are working together in socially cohesive and collaborative groups towards a common goal. It seems that learners tend to play safe when interacting with their teacher and with native speakers and aim to avoid making errors rather than to communicate effectively. On the other hand, when interacting with their peers they tend to take more risks, be more creative, use longer utterances, take more turns, initiate topics and ideas, use richer vocabulary, seek clarification and elaboration and help each other to achieve effective communication.

In a blended learning course both face-to-face and online modes can be used effectively to create opportunities for learner communication, with the ideal being learners interacting face-to-face during initial brainstorming and drafting, producing, disseminating, and monitoring subsequent drafts online and then meeting together again to discuss, finalise and possibly present their conclusions, solutions, ideas or proposals.

**Examples of Procedures 4**

1 Creative writing can be a wonderful opportunity for learner development of communicative ability if the learners are given a stimulus and encouragement to be original. This is especially so if learners respond to a stimulus (often a potentially engaging text), brainstorm ideas either mentally or in interaction with other learners, write drafts, monitor their own and other learners' drafts, and then produce individually, in pairs or in groups a final creative artefact. Many of these stages can be done effectively online but in a blended learning course I would also encourage face-to-face sharing of ideas and initial drafts.

2 Storytelling is best done live because of the stimulus which can be provided by reactions, responses, feedback, and interaction. One of my favourite activities is the circle story in which each member of a group of four sitting in a circle is given a consecutive number. Number 1 is then given the first sentence of a story to repeat. Number 2 provides the second sentence, Number 3 the third sentence, Number 4 the fourth sentence, Number 1 the fifth sentence, and so on round and round the group until the teacher stops them. The groups then try to recreate their story, making small changes as they go along to improve it. Then they tell their story to another group before answering that group's questions about their story. The teacher has been listening in to the stories and invites one of the groups to tell their story to the class. As they tell their story the teacher writes it down and displays it to the class before inviting the learners to suggest changes to the language or the content which might make the story even more effective. Finally, in class, the students copy the final version of the story which is on display, and then write an ending individually for homework.
I would do the final stage online so the learners can share their stories with other learners but all the other stages I would do in class face-to-face.

3 Task-driven preparation and presentations can be very effective means of helping learners to develop communicative ability, provided the learners are allowed to make use of their existing linguistic resources and are not given language items or features to practice. The initial stages are best done face-to-face but the other stages can be done online and disseminated to group members and others for responses and feedback.

4 Project work can also be very effective, with initial discussions done face-to-face, research and drafting activities done online, and presentation activities done either face-to-face if spoken or online if written.

6 Process dramas are very much spontaneous activities with their success depending on face-to-face stimulus and interaction.

5 Unstructured interaction in which learners agree to communicate with each other socially in the target language can be done face-to-face whenever members of a club meet each other outside the classroom or online whenever a member is available.

7 Text-driven approaches are my favourite way of helping learners to develop communicative competence because, as in many real-life communication activities, they provide a stimulus and purposes for communication as well as involve the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing skills. They are also ideal for use on a blended learning course as the different connected stages naturally determine their optimum mode of delivery (e.g. reading, listening, viewing, and individual writing activities online, discussion and oral creation, and presentation activities face-to-face).

For discussion and exemplification of the above activities see Tomlinson & Masuhara (2018, 2021). For other principles of language acquisition and materials development see Tomlinson (2016).

CONCLUSION

Ideally, blended learning courses should not just be used as an expedient to save time or money or to react to a shortage of teachers and classrooms or an emergency medical situation. They should be used as the optimum way to deliver a course and should be designed so that those affordances best achieved through oral interaction are delivered face-to-face and those affordances best delivered and resourced remotely are delivered online. This is only really successful though if the different stages of a unit are connected and integrated both progressively and retrospectively so that the unit achieves connections and recycling, is meaningful to the learners, exposes the learners to a rich variety of language in use, provides opportunities for learner discoveries about the use of language items, features or strategies already experienced, provides a variety of
opportunities to use the target language for communication and, above all else, is consistently affectively and/or cognitively engaging.

REFERENCES


Authors’ Brief CV

Brian Tomlinson is President of MATSDA, a Visiting Professor at the University of Liverpool and a TESOL Professor at Anaheim University. He has recently co-authored with Hitomi Masuhara *The Complete Guide to the Theory and Practice of Materials Development for Language Learning* (Wiley, 2018) and *SLA Applied: Connecting Theory and Practice* (CUP, 2021).