Essentials in Planning for High-Quality Blended Learning

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Fostering Quality Schools
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The global pandemic has forced us to confront unprecedented challenges. Teachers, principals, school support staff are doing heroic work to offer stability for students and families during this crisis by rethinking response and instruction. School and district leaders must continue to take strategic actions that require a nimble and agile response as new information arrives. Strategic planning requires complex choices that have a direct impact on student outcomes for years to come.

Many school districts have changed instructional direction overnight. Reaching all learners continues to be a challenge. The impacts of unfinished learning[1] affect all students, especially our most vulnerable, Multilingual and culturally diverse learners. One theme arising from this crisis is evident, we have an opportunity to rethink how we deliver instruction. As we shift to meet drastic conditions, developing a dynamic response plan is crucial. Components of the plan should incorporate the research, recommendations, and direction for grade-level instruction with social and emotional learning (SEL) practice, and culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Without a holistic approach, leaders run the risk of compounding unfinished learning with summer learning loss, at rates unfathomable for our most vulnerable learners.[2]

Accelerate Don't Remediate

Educational studies such as post-Katrina[3] learning loss, cautions leaders about the impact of remediation on student learning. According to this report, schools that focused mostly on skill recovery rather than teaching grade-level content found that students were less engaged and

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[1] Unfinished learning refers to any prerequisite knowledge or skills that students need for future mastery that they don't have yet. Not all unfinished learning has the same effect of students' ability to access grade level content. In some cases, it simply requires more time or effort from students.

[2] Kuhfeld, Megan, et al. "Projecting the Potential Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures on Academic Achievement." *EdWorkingPapers.com*, www.edworkingpapers.com/ai20-226.

[3] What Post-Katrina New Orleans Can Teach Schools About Addressing COVID Learning Losses | Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2020).

scored lower overall on assessments. Students did better when they received an accelerated learning approach where grade-level content was supported. This accelerated learning[4] approach requires that students consistently receive grade-level materials, tasks, and assignments along with appropriate scaffolds that make the work accessible. Skill development happens in the moment they are needed, and not in isolation.

Return to School Scenarios and Blended Learning

School Districts are investigating return scenarios such as, in-person, "hybrid" models, and fully remote models. The hybrid approach, a combination of in-person and online, has been in practice for years. It's called blended learning[5] and there is a research-and-evidence base to support implementation. Blended learning delivery models and scheduling variations require key shifts in practice, as well as planning and preparation. Redesign often requires more time than is anticipated.

Blended Learning: *What it Is and Isn't*

Our world is **technology-rich**. However, technology-rich does not always equate to high-quality authentic learning. If we truly want to improve learning, layering technology onto antiquated tasks isn't going to cut it. However, setting an inclusive learning environment, sequencing relevant tasks, and targeting support to address the skills students need today (and beyond) will improve the learning experience.[6] Making it work requires weaving collaboration, communication, and a growth-mindset.
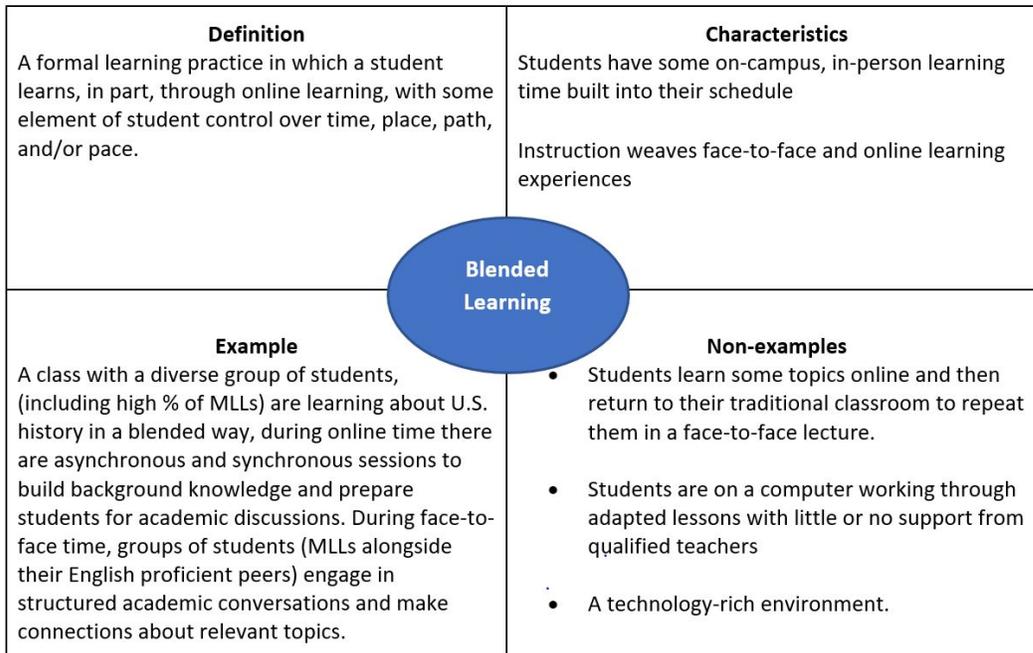
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[4] Steiner, D. (2020). Steiner & Weisberg: When Students Go Back to School, Too Many Will Start the Year Behind. Here's How to Catch Them Up — in Real Time.
[5] A brief history of Blended Learning
[6] From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope. (2020). Retrieved 23 June 2020, from http://nationathope.org/

Since there is no universal definition for blended learning it is helpful to think of what blended learning is and what it isn't -using a **_frayer model_**.

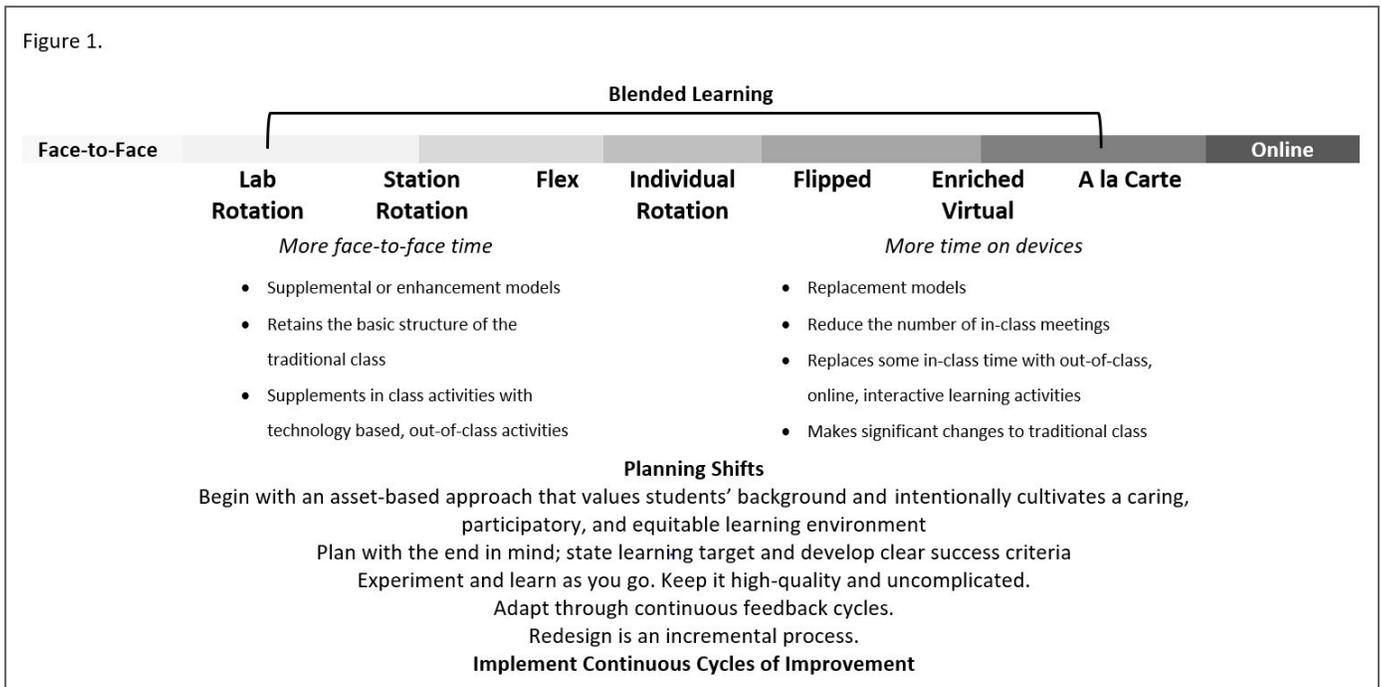| Definition	Characteristics
A formal learning practice in which a student learns, in part, through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace.	Students have some on-campus, in-person learning time built into their schedule Instruction weaves face-to-face and online learning experiences
Blended Learning	
Example A class with a diverse group of students, (including high % of MLLs) are learning about U.S. history in a blended way, during online time there are asynchronous and synchronous sessions to build background knowledge and prepare students for academic discussions. During face-to-face time, groups of students (MLLs alongside their English proficient peers) engage in structured academic conversations and make connections about relevant topics.	**Non-examples** • Students learn some topics online and then return to their traditional classroom to repeat them in a face-to-face lecture. • Students are on a computer working through adapted lessons with little or no support from qualified teachers • A technology-rich environment.

Blended Learning Models

There are generally seven (7) blended learning models[7] that describe a combination of face-to-face and online learning. The blended learning models can be organized along a continuum based on face-to-face or online learning time (Figure 1). This description is also organized by 'time on device' and by criteria for supplemental to or replacement of _traditional_ classroom structures. When selecting a model, it is helpful to think about what the student experience will be, how targeted support will fit in, as well as flexibility to sustain another long-term closure with minimal disruption to student learning.

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[7] https://www.blendedlearning.org/models/

Figure 1.

Blended Learning

| Face-to-Face | | | | | | | Online |

| Lab Rotation | Station Rotation | Flex | Individual Rotation | Flipped | Enriched Virtual | A la Carte |

More face-to-face time   *More time on devices*

- Supplemental or enhancement models
- Retains the basic structure of the traditional class
- Supplements in class activities with technology based, out-of-class activities

- Replacement models
- Reduce the number of in-class meetings
- Replaces some in-class time with out-of-class, online, interactive learning activities
- Makes significant changes to traditional class

Planning Shifts
Begin with an asset-based approach that values students' background and intentionally cultivates a caring, participatory, and equitable learning environment
Plan with the end in mind; state learning target and develop clear success criteria
Experiment and learn as you go. Keep it high-quality and uncomplicated.
Adapt through continuous feedback cycles.
Redesign is an incremental process.
Implement Continuous Cycles of Improvement

Students and educators benefit from working together to co-plan, co-facilitate, and co-review student learning. Ultimately, it is within the the educators' sphere of influence to leverage intentional planning and available technology to streamline the learning process for students through the balance of direct instruction, (synchronous and asynchronous) sound formative assessment practices[8], community building[9], and high-quality academic discourse. Intentionally implementing new technology and tools for learning-centered purposes, we can not only adapt to the changing world, but also increase our ability to both teach and learn."[10]

Shifts in Mindset: Social and Emotional (SEL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

Moving forward, it is imperative that Social and Emotional (SEL) and Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) are at the core of instruction. All students bring funds of knowledge to learning

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[8] Formative assessment is a **deliberate process** used by **teachers and students during instruction** that provides actionable feedback used to **adjust ongoing teaching and learning strategies** to improve students' attainment of curricular learning targets/goals. Michael B. Horn and Heather Staker, Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014).

[9] Elements, E. (2020). The Ultimate Personalized Learning Guide. Retrieved June 2020, from https://www.edelements.com/personalized-learning

[10] Stein, J., & Graham, C. (2014) *Essentials for blended learning*. p 18.

including, their own background knowledge, experiences, and skills needed to navigate their world.

Both SEL and CRT share the importance of creating consistent routines and procedures that allow for a caring environment, student voice, and flexibility as much as possible. Predictable structures and routines promote a sense of safety that helps students, especially those who have experienced trauma or struggle to regulate emotions.

School districts should devote time to building community, reflecting on experiences, and listening to students' ideas and concerns. It's also important to think about how your own experiences and culture impacts your teaching practices. This reflection develops a mindset that strengthens relationships with all students, including those from different backgrounds than your own[11].

SEL and CRT in the Planning Process

Culturally responsive teaching is a lens and a practice. It requires educators to raise expectations for students, increase rigor, target supports, and include student voice. Formative assessment processes identify the skills students need to complete higher-level tasks and communicate ideas. Instruction provides targeted support woven throughout the rich and rigorous tasks so students learn, practice, and apply new skills. Take note that for some students, especially with blended learning, this may be the first time they have been challenged in this way. It is vital to pair a welcoming culture that understands that mistakes are part of the learning process.

As you develop return plans and/or blended learning plans, look for ways to increase relevance. Get a better sense of your students' life experiences, connect those ideas to the curriculum planning process. Incorporate ways to activate students' background knowledge when introducing a new topic, emphasize an inquiry that invites students to identify a question or a problem to solve. Design research projects that allow students to focus on issues in their own

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[11] Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain. (2020). https://crtandthebrain.com/about

community and encourage students to present their work publicly. The table below describes actions to include in your planning process (i.e., Welcoming students and valuing their contribution , scheduling for student learning- not for convenience, paying attention to the topics or activities that students find most engaging).

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Adapted from CASEL Return Guide[12]	Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) *Adapted from Understood* [13]
7 SEL/CRT Anchor Competencies[14] Build trusting relationships Foster self-reflection Foster growth mindset Cultivate perseverance Create classroom community Practice cooperative learning skills Respond constructively to conflict across differences	
Ensure every student has at least one caring adult at the school All teachers identify ways to help students process through reflection, discussion, and collaboration Establish systems to address students' developmental needs **In early childhood programs:** Provide young children with simple strategies for exploring, discussing, and regulating their emotions. Read alouds offer an easy way to prompt conversations about how big changes make them feel. **In elementary school:** Support students in developing relationship-building and conflict-resolution skills by helping them co-create shared agreements for their new class or distance learning environment. **In middle school:** Offer adolescents an opportunity to reconnect and create a sense of closure from the previous school year, such as by	Identify students' assets- the individual and shared strengths across groups of students All students bring language assets and skills to the classroom. Be mindful of the different communication styles, patterns, and norms. Deepen understanding of conversational and academic register. Multilingual learners have linguistic skills that are often overlooked when they are evaluated only for their mastery of English. Some African American students regularly switch between dialects. This skill requires high levels of linguistic, social, cultural, and cognitive ability, but it often goes unnoticed. Find out about local leaders in your students' communities and what has been most inspiring to them. Give students frequent opportunities to share information about their experiences, lives, and

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[12]CASEL Return and Renew Your Community Guide New SEL Guidance
[13] Culturally Responsive Teaching: What You Need to Know. (2020). Retrieved 24 June 2020, from
[14] http://crtwc.org/anchor-competencies-schema/

writing letters to their former classmates or teachers, or discussing with peers how the last few months will impact their perspectives as they enter a new grade. **In high school:** Provide older students with a way to reflect on and document their experience and what they've learned about themselves during the pandemic, either through journal writing, artwork, music, or other creative outlets.	cultures.[15] Learn how to say and spell students' names correctly. Select and include diverse instructional materials. Think about ethnicity, language, ability, gender identity, and socioeconomic experiences. Watch out for materials that perpetuate stereotypes or insulting depictions of diverse communities.

Effective Instructional Planning for Blended Learning

Educators cannot make assumptions about student experiences. We must ask:

What has your experience been like with remote learning? What is on your mind as you think about what school will be like this year? What are your biggest hopes or worries? What has our school done well during the past months, and what could we have done better? How might you like to contribute as we prepare to transition to a new way of learning? What will help you learn this upcoming year? What can we do to make school feel even more like a community that cares for you?

Incorporating student perspective builds community and offers key insight into relevance. When planning for blended learning courses and units, start with the end in mind. Focus on the learning target and identify the desired results: what do you want your students to know and be able to do at the end of the course/unit? This will help you to tailor course materials, develop learning activities and assessments, along with the technology to seamlessly integrate the learning experience.

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[15] Avoid asking too many direct questions about families' personal lives as you get to know them. Some families may have concerns about sharing personal information-develop trust.
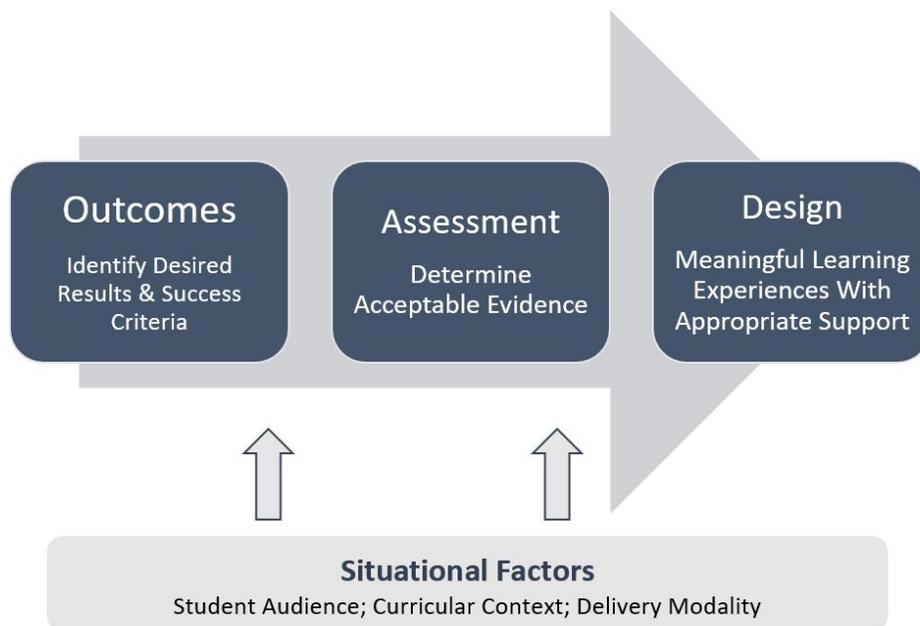
Adapted from Backward Design (Fink, Wiggins, G., & McTighe 2005)

Taking a Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) approach ensures that each aspect of the course is aligned with learning goals, engages and supports students, and provides the best fit for online and face-to-face time for students to achieve those goals.[16]

- **Effective use of Asynchronous time:** Well prepared instructional moves in which students are guided through activities with prompts for self-reflection guided preparation for academic discourse and discussions.
- **Effective use of time for Synchronous time:** Students engage in activities that build on their preparation (i.e.,literary analysis,, solving complex problems, debate, and examine the nuances and context of the material) to increase the opportunity for formative assessment.

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[16] Blended | Teaching Commons. (2020). Retrieved 16 June 2020, from https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/gallery/blended

Staying on track and what to avoid with planning and implementation for Multilingual and culturally diverse learners:

1. You will need to know:
   - How to facilitate & manage online interaction
   - How to assess students' online work
   - How to integrate online and face-to-face teaching
   - How to use the technology
   - That you must get started planning early- design requires more time than is often anticipated.
2. Ground Instruction in What We Know about Language and Content Learning[17]Remember to keep in mind what we know about language acquisition and content learning for MLLs (Steven Weiss). Read over Understanding Language's Key Principles for ELL Instruction. For example, focus on:
   a. Providing opportunities for students to interact with each other over video/audio in small groups/pairs to make meaning of texts. Of course, texts can be written or multimedia (e.g. a video on climate change). Gather some of this formative student evidence and consider student strengths and areas for additional support.
   b. Ensuring that students can use all of their linguistic assets to learn. Yes, they can use google translate for webpages. But they can also use their agency by finding primary language texts or videos that cover similar information. Have students identify and share videos in their primary language on key topics (e.g the water cycle).
   c. Depth, not breadth. Choose high level understandings and help students to see the connections across ideas and disciplines.
   d. Providing students graphic organizers or guiding questions before reading complex texts so they can organize information into meaningful chunks. In this way, students can make meaning from texts beyond their independent level without understanding every word.
   e. Underscoring the relationship between the new content, language and/or analytical skills (e.g. argumentation and explanation) and what students have learned previously.
   f. Asking students to reflect on what works and doesn't work from them while learning online.
3. Focus on Generative Disciplinary Practices: While bits and pieces types of skill building apps might have a place in students' daily routine (e.g. digital vocabulary cards), integrated instruction should really promote students' ability to argue, justify, define, explain, etc. within a variety of disciplines. These practices are invaluable to students across grade levels and content areas. Use third party skill building apps judiciously.
4. There's no single standard for planning a blended course - think of producing concrete learning modules that have a beginning launch, scheduled support, and a culminating activity or project. Experiment as you go and keep it uncomplicated.
5. Focus on design, not technology-avoid overloading the course. Focus on the balance of online and face-to-face components.
6. Collaborate - you need a partner or a team. Talk with and get advice from experienced Blended learning mentors. Discuss your problems and progress with colleagues, whether they are using a specific model or not. Get feedback from students and families.
7. Clear and visible success criteria: Manage your students' expectations and explain and justify format of course and assignments. Make sure that students understand the connection between work delivered online and in-person. Make all assignments and other course expectations as explicit as possible right from the start.
8. Anticipate technology stumbling blocks: Consistency in design creates a smooth navigation for students resulting in less anxiety for them- more efficient time on task

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[17] DoS and Don'ts of Educating Multilingual Learners in Remote/Hybrid Environments — Proximal Path. (2020).https://www.proximalpath.com/improving-mll-education/2020/6/3/dos-and-donts

9. Be flexible! Making adjustments where needed. Ask for feedback from your students often and take their responses seriously. Don't organize too tightly- but stay current and keep copies of everything.

Avoid these (adapted from Dos and Don'ts of education Multilingual Learners in Remote Environments)

- **Assessment of Students:** Do not rush to use diagnostic tests to determine what students have lost during remote instruction in order to remediate their learning once they are back in school. Instead, consider ways to accelerate their learning once they are back in school (see TNTP's excellent COVID-19 School Response Toolkit). Use formative assessment practices to determine next steps in instruction on knowledge, skills and language that is both substantive and generative (will be used in novel contexts in the future).
- **Don't overwhelm parents** with lists of online resources that students can use. Parents are looking for guidance and direction, not unlimited choice. Don't put the burden on the parents of MLLs to be their child's teacher. Instead, ask parents to engage with their children in any language they choose in activities such as cooking/baking, making up stories, playing board games, etc.
- **Deficit Thinking:** Be careful not to frame the need to support MLLs in deficit thinking, e.g. a "lost generation", that they will never catch up, etc. Consider the implications of this deficit approach on students when they return to school. Frame discussions of instructional practices by reminding everyone of the immense (and often untapped) capacity that these students have to make meaning with their peers, come up with novel solutions to problems, communicate effectively across a wide array of audiences, etc.
- **Modeling Assignments:** Don't provide lengthy, written descriptions of an assignment without providing a complementary video explaining what students are supposed to do. Modeling sample responses (creating a video of an exemplary, or not so exemplary response) can go a long way to help students grasp what they are being asked to do.
- **Inappropriate Use of Written Texts:** Don't choose texts that are "inconsiderate" for MLLs if possible. Texts are inconsiderate if they contain many superfluous tangents, include unnecessary jargon, are poorly organized, and use metaphors and analogies that are clearly beyond students' lived experiences. If an inconsiderate text is indispensable, consider additional scaffolding supports (e.g. video accompaniments, chunking reading and providing guiding questions for each section) that students will need to make meaning from the text.
- **Myopic focus on Language Proficiency Levels:** Don't limit students to interacting with only their peers at the same language proficiency level. Students learn by hearing and trying to create "stretched" language in the face of attempting to accomplish a worthwhile task with their peers. Don't be constrained by only providing students language frames at their perceived proficiency level. Remember that good instruction is always beyond a student's current independent level, where appropriate supports are provided. There are times for grouping students homogeneously (in a jigsaw reading

project, where different groups receive readings at differing levels of complexity), but consider the power of heterogeneity during remote instruction.

Resources:

6 Key Principles for ELL Instruction

https://ell.stanford.edu/content/six-key-principles-ell-instruction

7 Social and Emotional Culturally Responsive Teaching Competencies
http://crtwc.org/anchor-competencies-schema/

CASEL Return Guide for SEL
https://casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CASEL_Leveraging-SEL-as-You-Prepare-to-Reopen-and-Renew.pdf

Culturally Responsive Teaching: What we need to know

https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching

Choosing a Blended Learning Model

https://www.blendedlearning.org/choose-the-model/

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Evidence Base for How We Learn: Aspen Institute
https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/09/SEAD-Research-Brief-9.12_updated-web.pdf

High-Quality Blended Learning Models and Examples:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BdZ-K_-JuSRHa5w6E4DM2tnNL8jv-gKfXNoUlOE6Qtk/edit?usp=sharing