

# Blended learning spaces: Synchronous blending

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*Discussions of blended learning (BL) have generally failed to account for the synchronous combination of computer-mediated and face-to-face interactions that can occur within a blended learning space (BLS). This paper provides an overview of BLS use by a department of 51 teachers at a Japanese university specializing in foreign language learning. Data was collected via a teacher questionnaire (n=38, response rate=75%) and follow-up interviews. Compared to non-BLS lessons, BLS lessons had different lesson goals, different patterns of interaction, different types of homework, more variety of media, and more variety of input and output. BLS lessons also showed signs of increased learner autonomy and motivation.*

## Introduction

Blended learning (BL) is often defined as a combination of face-to-face (FtF) classroom learning and out-of-class, online learning. That is, the blending happens asynchronously (e.g. Banados, 2006; Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005; Kupetz and Ziegenmeyer, 2005; Neumeier, 2005; Rovai and Jordan, 2004; Stracke, 2007). In contrast, we define synchronous blended learning as a situation where online and face-to-face activities happen within the same class session and in the same classroom space. In language education, where learners may struggle to navigate web pages in a second or foreign language, and with the importance of face-to-face speaking and listening practice, synchronous blending has a variety of potential learning benefits.

## Blended learning

The fact that the **BL** literature focuses on asynchronous blending makes sense if we consider the training industry context, outlined by Oliver and Trigwell (2005):

There is an explanation for definitions that emphasise mixing online with face-to-face learning. The term ‘blended learning’ is most widely used within the training tradition, rather than within public education; there, its importance arises from the failure of purely online learning to meet the training needs of organisations (e.g. Driscoll, 2002). Blended learning is, arguably, a term introduced to redeem the millions of pounds invested unwisely in purely online training. It is, in effect, a compromise position that avoids the excess of either a purely online or a purely face-to-face model of training (p, 21).

Indeed, this “compromise position” could be financially attractive, allowing some of the financial and logistical savings associated with distance learning while mitigating student retention rate problems. There is evidence of BL programs outdoing distance programs in student retention (Harker & Koutsantoni, 2005) – and both distance and traditional FtF programs in sense of community among students (Rovai & Jordan, 2004) and student success rates (Dziuban & Moskal, 2001).

## Normalisation

Chambers and Bax (2006) use the term **CALL** “normalisation” to describe “a state where computers are fully integrated into pedagogy” (i.e. in the classroom), and “are used every day by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, like a pen or a book ... without fear or inhibition, and equally without an exaggerated respect for what they can do” (pp. 465–466, citing Bax, 2003). A seamless integration, they argue, should be the goal: “[Computers] will not be the centre of any lesson, but they will play a part in almost all. They will be completely integrated into all other aspects of classroom life, alongside coursebooks, teachers and notepads. They will go almost unnoticed” (p. 466, citing Bax, 2003). Levy and Stockwell (2006) call this “integration.” They describe established, integrated **CALL** as “... regular, everyday practice, with the technology component kept firmly in its place – in the background” (p. 247).

Chambers and Bax’s study seeks to identify impediments to, and suggest ways to increase normalisation. Their first two issues are, arguably, the most important: “**CALL** facilities will ideally not be separated from “normal” teaching space” and “the classroom will ideally be organised so as to allow for an easy move from **CALL** activities to non-**CALL** activities” (p. 470). A blended learning space (**BLS**) is a physical environment that provides for both ideals – no separate rooms and easy movement between technologies.

## Blended learning spaces

There is very little in the blended learning literature about spaces or environments. As Oliver and Trigwell (2005) note, “blended teaching methods may be helping to create the appropriate space of learning for some students. But if it is, it is still largely serendipitous, because the space of learning is not currently a focus in blended learning design” (p. 24).

44 While Neumeier (2005) defines blended learning as “a combination of face-to-face (FtF) and

computer assisted learning (CAL) in a single teaching and learning environment” (p. 164), in the context of her study, this single environment is a conceptual space which extends to include an online training phase outside of the classroom. With **BLSs**, however, blending is happening inside the classroom. Language teachers are blending face-to-face communicative tasks with online activities synchronously – within one lesson and within the walls of a single room.

Hanson-Smith (2007) describes such a classroom as an “instructional lab” (p. 43) with tables and chairs in the center of the room, surrounded by computer workstations. Hinkelman (2007) reports on similar “blended language learning classrooms” installed at his university that have desks in the middle of the room and computer stations around the perimeter – allowing lessons to flow easily between face-to-face mode and computer/online mode. Desks can be quickly moved to face the front, or face other students in pairs or groups – or can even be pushed aside for standing exercises. He describes a blended language learning task that combines eight online activities and six FtF techniques within the same period.

What is lacking in the literature, however, is a broad survey of how synchronous BL is taking shape in practice. This study is an attempt to fill that gap by investigating **BLS** use across an entire department.

## Site description

The term **BLS** has been used at Kanda University of International Studies (**KUIS**) since 2003 to describe classrooms that provide constant online access for students, computer-based multi-media tools, and flexible furniture for face-to-face activities (see Fitzgerald & Rosalia, 2004). **KUIS** opened six **BLSs** in 2003, and another four in 2009. At the time of the study, 150 different foreign language classes were being held in these 10 **BLSs** each week, representing 45% of all **EFL** classes taught by the staff of the English Language Institute (**ELI**).



Figure 1. A blended learning space at KUIS

**KUIS BLSs** are versatile classrooms equipped with a range of technology and accommodating up to 30 students. A typical **BLS**, as shown in Figure 1, has the following equipment:

- ✧ Teacher computer and **LCD** projector
- ✧ **A/V** cabinet housing a stereo receiver, **CD/DVD** player, **VHS** player, **MD** player, satellite **TV** receiver
- ✧ Speaker system
- ✧ Whiteboards at front and back of room
- ✧ 30 laptops with wireless Internet access
- ✧ Audio splitters (enabling students to listen to the same audio source together with headphones)
- ✧ Printer (connected wirelessly to the teacher computer and student laptops)

Student desks are on wheels, and fold up and stack together when not needed. The teacher computer can be wheeled into a corner if necessary. When the **BLSs** were designed, the goal was to build in as much flexibility as possible to accommodate different modes of learning. **ELI** founder Dr. Francis Johnson described the **BLS** concept at the 2002 **AILA** Congress as follows:

The Kanda instructional system has implications for the design and equipment of classrooms. Classrooms which facilitate individualized learning are desirably different from those which require students to move through a course in lockstep progression. At Kanda we have been fortunate to have been involved in the planning of new classrooms which are 'blended learning spaces'. These are rooms with wireless access to the Internet and have furniture which permits flexible group arrangements to accommodate the need for whole-class, small-group, pair, and individual study (Johnson, 2002).

Johnson breaks individualization down into: "flexibility of route, rate and mode of learning"; "choice"; and "responsibility." The 2009 **ELI** Handbook **BLS** definition includes individualization, interaction and interdependence, which have become pillars of the **ELI** curricula:

[**BLSs** are] classrooms designed to blend the best of traditional classroom teaching with the flexible advantages of state-of-the-art technology ... Kanda's '3 Is' of Individualization, Interaction, and Interdependence can be supported as students work in various group formations and/or with various media tools ... There is no need for a "computer day"; teachers blend technology into their everyday pedagogy (**ELI**, pp. 69-70).

What distinguishes the **BLSs** from other classrooms across campus are the laptop computers with wireless Internet available for each student, and what distinguishes them from traditional computer labs is that the laptops are not always out on the desks, but are housed in a cabinet in the corner of the room when not in use. A **BLS** can thus accommodate a variety of classroom setups (e.g. group discussion, class presentations, poster presentations, individual students at laptops, pairs at laptops, etc.).

## Research design

Our research questions were the following:

- ✧ What is happening in **BLS** lessons?
- ✧ How is teaching and learning different in **BLSs** compared to non-**BLSs**?

The study focused on teacher perspectives. Data collection was conducted via a survey and follow-up interviews. The survey was designed to get a broad snapshot of **BLS** use across the **ELI**, and all 51 **ELI** lecturers were invited to respond. Thirty-eight **ELI**ers responded, giving us a response rate of 75%. Survey questions (see Appendix A) asked lecturers about: their familiarity with **CALL** theory and practice, their access to **BLSs**, frequency of student computer use and types of **CALL** activities utilized in class, and a variety of factors influencing their decisions to incorporate student computer use into their lessons.

Our 38 survey respondents were teaching a total of 273 (90-minute) lessons a week at the time of the study, and 116 of those (42.5%) were in **BLSs**. For classes meeting twice a week, it was common to meet once in a **BLS** and once in a non-**BLS**. Respondents were teaching a variety of courses across the three departments. Table 1 shows respondents' weekly **BLS** lessons by course type.

Table 1: Courses taught in **BLSs** by survey respondents by course type

Course type	Year	Department	Course	BLS lessons weekly
<b>Oral communication</b>	1	English	Freshman English	12
		IC*	EIC I	3
	2	CSK**	Freshman English	1
		IC	EIC II	3
		ILC***	Sophomore English	3
<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>22 (19%)</b>
<b>Reading</b>	1	English	Basic Reading	10
	2	English	Advanced Reading	7
	<b>Subtotal</b>			
<b>Writing</b>	1	English	Basic Writing	11
		IC	Writing I	2
	2	English	Advanced Writing	13
		IC	Writing II	2
	<b>Subtotal</b>			
<b>Media literacy</b>	2	English	Media English	5
		IC	Media English	5
		ILC	Media English	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>			
<b>Content-based electives</b>	3 & 4	English	SOGO	13
		IC	EIC III	6
		ILC	SOGO	1
		CSK	SOGO	1
		<b>Subtotal</b>		

\*IC=International Communication

\*\*CSK=Chinese, Spanish and Korean majors

\*\*\*ILC=International Languages and Culture

After administering the survey, we conducted follow-up interviews with a selection of survey respondents. The interviews were designed to obtain more detailed information from particular teachers about their **BLS** lessons, and to hear their perspectives on how teaching and learning differ in a **BLS** compared to a non-**BLS**.

We selected ten survey participants randomly and approached them for interviews. Participants were asked to bring two lesson plans with them to the interview; one from a **BLS** lesson and one from a non-**BLS** lesson (and from the same course if possible). Both lessons were to have been taught within two weeks of the interview. This was to ensure that lessons were fresh in teachers' minds and to strengthen the validity of the study. Rather than allow teachers to choose a favourite **BLS** lesson, for example, we wanted a more realistic cross-section of **BLS** and non-**BLS** use.

Our interview questions (see Appendix B) asked teachers to define **BL** and **BLS** in their own words, and how being in a **BLS** influences teaching and learning patterns. We then asked them to walk us through both of their lessons, comparing them on the following criteria: learning objectives, choice of technologies, blending of face-to-face and **CALL** modes, and perceived success of the lesson/evidence of learning.

Interviews were audio recorded and lesson plans were collected. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour.

## Lesson plans

Interviewees brought **BLS** and non-**BLS** lesson plans from the following courses:

### Oral communication

- A: Freshman English, English department
- B: EIC I, IC department
- C: EIC I, IC department
- D: EIC I, IC department
- E: EIC I, IC department
- F: Sophomore English, ILC department

### Writing

- G: Writing I, IC department
- H: Advanced Writing, English department

### Media literacy

- I: Media English, English department

### Content-based electives

- J: SOGO, English department

**BLS** lessons are summarized below.

### *BLS lesson A: Freshman English, English department*

48 At the beginning of this lesson, students checked each other's homework in pairs. They were then given four useful expressions and were required to write dialogues using them. After

forming groups of four, they compared and corrected each other's dialogues. Students then reviewed vocabulary and expressions from a TV sitcom episode they had started watching in the previous lesson. They then watched the remainder of the episode, with the teacher pausing the video at times for students to take notes and discuss vocabulary and expressions and any other points of interest.

### *BLS lesson B: EIC I, IC department*

This lesson was part of a unit on globalization. In the previous lesson, the students had read articles and answered questions about a multinational company. In this lesson, they continued exploring issues about multinational companies. First, they warmed up by discussing the meaning of "having different perspectives" with a partner. Next, they discussed one positive and one negative influence of globalization from the perspective of a Japanese college student. Finally, students selected an article from a globalization-themed website. A handout prepared them for a group discussion on the article of their choice. The handout had the students think about the perspective of the article, points of agreement/disagreement, new ideas and perspectives learned. Before the group discussion, students summarized the article in their own words, made notes of new vocabulary and expressions, and wrote discussion questions.

### *BLS lesson C: EIC I, IC department*

This lesson was intended to help students develop the ability to discuss various aspects of foreign cultures. It began with a Moodle-based vocabulary quiz, during which students were given the freedom to work at their own pace, attempt questions multiple times, and even collaborate with others if they chose to do so. This was followed by a short presentation, in which the teacher projected images and videos illustrating different aspects of a chosen country's culture. This served as a model for the students' own presentations, which the remainder of the class was spent preparing. They worked in pairs to research an assigned country, using a list of web resources suggested by the teacher as well as any other information that they were able to find. The teacher reported that this approach allowed students a degree of autonomy, with enough guidance (in both the structure and content of their presentations) that all students were able to successfully engage in the task. The use of the Internet for research also provided exposure to a variety of authentic English-language material, which the students were required to comprehend and then assess the relevance of.

### *BLS lesson D: EIC I, IC department*

This lesson was the same as lesson G, without the vocabulary quiz at the start. The two teachers were working from the same course materials, and were at the same stage in the course.

### *BLS lesson E: EIC I, IC department*

This was a lesson on global conflict, part of a unit on global issues. The beginning of the lesson was spent reviewing the previous lesson's vocabulary and issues. The teacher then had the students take out laptops and headphones and search YouTube for clips related to

global conflict. At a set point in the lesson students had to come together in small groups and show each other the clips they had found. They then had to reflect on the content of the clips and discuss them.

### *BLS lesson F: Sophomore English, ILC department*

This lesson was part of an investigative unit in which students work together in groups of five or six to solve a fictional investigation. In this lesson, groups were continuing through a handout packet (at their own pace) that sets up the scenario, provides key vocabulary, and guides them through the investigation. Most groups were starting an activity featuring audio clues, which were provided on **CD**. To listen to a clue together, groups get out one laptop and connected headphones using audio splitters. Clues were puzzles that required group discussion and critical thinking. They often pointed to a particular place on campus, requiring groups to leave class briefly to take a photo of the location for proof. Once a clue had been solved, the group was given the next audio clue by the teacher.

### *BLS lesson G: Writing I, IC department*

The purpose of the lesson was to increase students' use of descriptive adjectives. It was a continuation of a previous (non-BLS) lesson on developing descriptive adjectives. The teacher began the **BLS** lesson by reviewing the handout from the first lesson, in which students read an example of descriptive adjective use from a novel and completed various writing exercises to expand adjective use, including a written description of a cat. Next, using the computer and projector, the teacher demonstrated an online thesaurus and the thesaurus feature in a word-processing program. The students then completed a mini-exercise replacing common adjectives with more descriptive ones. Finally, various famous works of art were displayed on the screen and students chose one and wrote a descriptive paragraph on an image of their choice.

### *BLS lesson H: Advanced Writing, English department*

The objective of this lesson was to write a literature review. Students used Microsoft Word, the Internet, and books brought to class to achieve this objective. The teacher explained that being in a **BLS** for this lesson is advantageous for a number of reasons. One reason is that students can choose from a wider array of strategies to solve problems with their writing. If students run into difficulty with grammar or spelling they can ask each other, or use the Internet to find the answer. The teacher also noted the utility of writing a literature review on a word processing program versus by hand. Word processing programs usually have a spell-check function which helps students to avoid spelling errors. Another advantage of being in a **BLS** that the teacher noted was that students who forget to bring the necessary books for their literature reviews can begin the task by using the Internet to track down relevant books and articles on their respective subjects; therefore class time is not wasted.

### *BLS lesson I: Media English, English department*

This lesson was part of a unit on media literacy. The teacher began by reviewing some common mistakes from the previous lesson's vocabulary test using PowerPoint. He then



showed a **TV** advertisement and asked students (sitting in groups of three) to discuss the roles of sex and male stereotypes in the ad. Next, he distributed a handout that contained two magazine ads and questions pointing to elements of sex and male stereotypes in the ads, which students discussed and filled out in groups. Students were then asked to get a laptop each and find Internet ads that featured sex and male stereotypes which they then presented to their group for discussion. Groups were then mixed so that students could present their ads to and discuss them with other students.

### *BLS lesson J: SOGO, English department*

This lesson was the second of a two-lesson sequence that examined music festivals in Britain. The first lesson had been in a non-**BLS** class and the teacher had had the students discuss their favorite types of music, music festivals in Japan, and music festivals they have attended; hypothesize about what music festivals in Britain might be like; and do a paper-based jigsaw activity on ten well-known British music festivals. In this **BLS** lesson, students worked in pairs on one computer. The pairs were given a handout that directed them to a website with information and links to the ten British music festivals studied in the previous lesson. The handout included questions about the content of the websites which students had to navigate through in order to answer. After completing the handout, students began a second task which had two pairs working together. Each pair chose one festival to investigate through the various websites for 20 minutes, after which pairs presented the information they found to each other. The final task of the **BLS** lesson had students visit a website with photographs of a music festival in Japan and answer questions about the photographs.

## Findings

### *CALL education and experience*

Survey questions about **CALL** knowledge and previous experience yielded a range of responses. Just under half of respondents (44.7%) claimed to have studied **CALL** in the past, with a similar number (47.4%) having used **CALL** as a teaching tool prior to their current job (see Table 2).

Table 2: **CALL** education and experience

Question	Yes	No
Have you ever studied <b>CALL</b> ?	44.7%	44.3%
Did you use <b>CALL</b> in your teaching prior to <b>KUIS</b> ?	47.4	52.6%
Have you ever used <b>CALL</b> as a language learner?	39.5%	60.5%
Rate yourself as a computer user:	Advanced	21.1%
	Intermediate	57.9%
	Novice	13.2%
	Beginner	7.9%

A slightly smaller number (39.5%) had experienced **CALL** in their own language learning. Interestingly, analysis of responses to these three questions revealed no significant correlations, suggesting that **CALL** education does not necessarily or automatically lead to **CALL** use. Similarly, a lack of **CALL** education does not prevent teachers from implementing **CALL**-based activities in their classes.

When asked to rate their own level of computer competence, a clear majority of respondents (57.9%) described themselves as 'Intermediate', followed by smaller groups rating themselves 'Advanced' (21.1%), 'Novice' (13.2%), and 'Beginner' (7.9%). Although respondents' interpretations of these labels and their assessments of their own competence are subjective, these results suggest a reasonably high level of confidence with computers. It might therefore be assumed that respondents' own computer competence is unlikely to be a constraint in their decision to make use of **CALL** during classes.

### *Student laptop use*

Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents reported that laptops were being used at some point in their **BLS** lessons. The remaining 13% reported no laptop use. Laptops were most commonly used for word processing, Internet research and watching videos (see Table 3).

Table 3: What do students do on the laptops in your **BLS** lessons?

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% of respondents incorporating activity</b>
Word processing	79%
Internet research	74%
Watching videos	66%
Listening to audio	55%
PowerPoint	55%
Surveys	55%
Moodle	50%
Collaborative writing	24%
Class administration	16%
Blogs	13%
Chat	11%
Email	11%
Other*	8%
Video/audio editing	5%
Social networking (e.g. Facebook)	5%

\*Other responses were: "compiling a glossary", "writing responses to forum questions", "designing quizzes", "making websites together", "internet ESL sites", "working with data using Excel," and "typing and vocabulary games".

That word processing was the most common laptop activity is not surprising given that writing courses had been assigned the most **BLSs** (see Table 1).

Laptops were being used less for social computer-mediated communication (**CMC**)/web 2.0 activities such as blogs, forums, chat and social networking sites – perhaps because **BLSs**

are already social environments with teachers striving to maintain orally communicative lessons (and laptops often being shared by students, for example). This may represent a major difference between traditional vs. synchronous **BL** – the former incorporating more social **CMC**/web 2.0 activities in the out-of-class phases.

### *Conceptions of blended learning*

While interview participants had a range of perspectives on **BL**, most definitions can be grouped into two categories based on what was perceived as being blended: FtF and **CALL**, and media/modes of input. Blending media/modes of input was the most popular definition (see Table 4).

Table 4: Common teacher definitions of blended learning

<b>Blending what?</b>	<b>Quotes</b>
FtF and <b>CALL</b>	<p>"A combination of traditional teaching with computers."</p> <p>"Learning that makes use of both technology and non-technology. They're blended ... you're not able to necessarily distinguish one from the other, so the technology and the regular instruction is, the ideal is that it's seamlessly interwoven."*</p> <p>"A blend of online teaching and learning and classroom-based teaching and learning that should seamlessly glide together in a blended learning space."*</p>
Media/modes of input	<p>"Use of multiple modalities – learning that can be supported by technology (e.g. DVDs, cable TV, CDs, MP3s, computers)."</p> <p>"Being able to learn from different sources, not just from the teacher. Like the Internet and websites, DVDs, music, videos..."</p> <p>"Using a variety of mediums and modes to facilitate the learning process."</p> <p>"A combination of audio and video as well as text ... instead of having just a text-based classroom."</p> <p>"An environment that uses different technologies for learning."</p>

\*These two definitions feature the seamless integration of technology described as **CALL** normalisation by Chambers and Bax (2006)

While the traditional **BL** definition, blending FtF and **CALL**, was represented, the majority of **ELI** lecturers felt that the blend of media and modes of input was the defining feature of **BL**. This is likely a product of their experience teaching in **KUIS BLSs**, and the flexibility they afford.

When specifically asked what a **BLS** was in their own words, this notion of flexibility was borne out. Definitions can be grouped according to the perceived defining feature: Access to computers and technology, **CALL** normalisation and flexibility – flexibility being the most common (see Table 5).

Table 5: Common BLS definitions

Defining feature	Quotes
Access to computers and technology	<p>"A classroom that has a laptop for every student and other facilities that the teacher can use, like the projector and other things that plug into the projector."</p> <p>"It's a slightly special kind of classroom, I think of the other classrooms as being more old-fashioned. The <b>BLS</b> classrooms are closer to the norm... how it should be... compared to the other types of rooms." / "You want the students to have access to computers and technology."</p>
CALL normalisation	<p>"A space where people can make use of the technology... 'blended' gives a sense that this is not an intrusion on the lesson- it's supporting it, and the use of technology, or other modalities is facilitated"</p> <p>"A classroom that allows us to access the Internet, use computers, whatever we want to, easily in the classroom"</p>
Flexibility	<p>"Flexibility, being able to manipulate audio, video and text, and the ease with which you can do it, also students are comfortable moving around into different groups"</p> <p>"A classroom that has computers, but you don't necessarily have to use them, but they're there if need be."</p> <p>"It's a space that will facilitate multi-modal learning, computers, etc. The environmental conditions need to be diverse."</p> <p>"A <b>BLS</b> is a space that makes use of both the non-technological items, such as the desks and the teacher, and at the same time makes use of technology. It may not happen every lesson, so some lessons may be a little bit more focused on the electrical stuff, some other lessons may be a little bit more heavily focused on human interaction, not to say that they are mutually exclusive."</p> <p>"It's a space that will facilitate multi-modal learning, computers, etc. The environmental conditions need to be diverse."</p> <p>"A space where you have different technologies for learning, compared to the old style classrooms."</p>

Both normalisation and flexibility are largely afforded by the laptop computers, which fold down and pack away easily when not in use – allowing quick transition to other modes of learning. Teachers capitalize on this flexibility in different ways, as illustrated by the **BLS** lesson descriptions above.

### *Differences between BLS and non-BLS lessons*

It became clear, after comparing **BLS** and non-**BLS** lesson plans with interviewees, that there were fundamental differences between them. **BLS** lessons had different lesson goals, different patterns of interaction, different types of homework, more variety of media, and more variety of input and output. **BLS** lessons also showed signs of increased learner autonomy and motivation.

**Different lesson goals.** A majority of teachers suggested that the availability of a **BLS** influences lesson goals. Many noted that they might concentrate on different skills depending on the room – for example, doing more listening activities on **BLS** computers (with students perhaps working in pairs and finding their own listening passages on the Internet), or more speaking when computers were not available. On several occasions, mention was made of the fact that the use of technology can sometimes become a lesson goal in itself, as teachers may be required to train their students before they can make use of unfamiliar hardware or software. One interviewee also suggested that the use of computer technology sometimes makes his goals more flexible, in that he is able to allow students to act more autonomously in finding their own materials and setting their own tasks to work on. Only one interviewee said that it does not matter which room is available, the same lessons goals apply regardless of the classroom. However, almost all teachers mentioned that having a **BLS** allows them to consider more options for class activities, although they might not always use technology extensively every time they teach in a **BLS**.

**Different patterns of interaction.** There was some concern among interviewees over the possibility that computers and other technology might present a barrier to communication in the classroom. The opportunities that computers offer for learner autonomy (with tasks being computer-mediated, rather than directed by a teacher, and students even able to select their own materials from the wealth of authentic text, video, and audio available on the Internet) seemed to lead to some teachers feeling redundant in their own classes. Often, this was by design, with teachers preferring not to come between students and their tasks unnecessarily; however, some interviewees expressed discomfort in not providing the level of input that is traditionally expected of a teacher. In some cases, teachers even admitted that they had spent time using a computer in class themselves for other work-related tasks, instead of paying attention to students.

A number of teachers expressed concern about students “getting lost in the computer” and interaction between students suffering as a consequence. One teacher also voiced the concern that when students pair up on a computer, it is likely that one student will take the lead operating the computer and the other student will lose interest in the activity at hand. However, this concern of having two students paired up on a computer was not unanimous among the teachers interviewed. Many teachers regularly pair students up on a computer as they feel it facilitates interaction.

**Different homework patterns.** When asked how a **BLS** lesson might change if it were taught in a non-**BLS**, teachers explained that the **CALL** activities would have to be assigned for homework instead. Some teachers were reluctant to assign **CALL** activities as homework, however, concerned that some students lacked the technical skills to be able to complete the activities alone. Teachers liked having the ability in **BLSs** to demonstrate how to navigate a particular web site, for example, that they might not be able to do on their own for homework. When in non-**BLS** rooms, some teachers allow students to leave class and work in computer labs or the library. The fear in these situations is that students are no longer working in an English environment, and discussion with classmates happens in Japanese.

**More variety of media.** Not surprisingly, the **BLS** lessons presented by interviewees incorporated a wider variety of media than the non-**BLS** lessons. For example, lessons in **BLSs** featured slideshows, videos, and other projected images for demonstration purposes.

Participants also had their students working on laptops in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel – and online in Moodle. All **BLS** lessons discussed incorporated the Internet at some point. On the other hand, lessons in non-**BLS** lessons were limited to traditional tools such as paper handouts, blackboard, and occasionally newspaper and video.

**More variety of input and output.** Interviewees were unanimous in their satisfaction with student exposure to input in a **BLS**. All cited the Internet – and many mentioned YouTube – as a useful source of authentic input for students. Common phrases from this section of the interviews included: “wider range of input”; “student choice”; and “authentic input.” One teacher also noted that students are able to control the pace and number of times they hear the input through the pause and rewind functions on media players.

In terms of student output, access to a word processor was mentioned repeatedly. One writing teacher suggested that the **BLS** better represents the situation in which most students will find themselves after graduation, as once in the workforce they will be writing with the aid of word processors that afford them the luxuries of spell check, grammar check, copy-and-paste functions, etc. In addition, one teacher mentioned that some students feel more comfortable interacting with the teacher and their peers through electronic means (e.g. email, forums, message boards) as compared to traditional face-to-face interaction. This phenomenon has been well documented in literature on computer-mediated communication (see Lam & Kramsch, 2002; Shang, 2007).

**Signs of increased learner autonomy.** When teachers were asked how being in a **BLS** influences their students’ learning, the common response was that it empowers them. When doing computer-based activities, interviewees noted that students are able to move at their own pace. One instructor noted that he can give a list of tasks to be completed during the lesson and “turn students loose.”

Interviewees believed that students are able to work at a smoother pace when they do not have to stop and wait for further instruction from the teacher; anything that is not finished in the class period can simply be completed outside of class. This creates an environment which is conducive to students entering what is called a flow state – a “state characterized by intense focus and involvement that leads to improved performance on a task” (Csikszentmihalyi, as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 174).

As discussed above, interview participants cited evidence of individualization of learning, with students being able to access their own input online and control playback of audio and video files themselves, and interdependence, with learners often working together at one laptop, or accessing online material to present to classmates.

**Signs of increased motivation.** There was a general consensus that students are more animated in **BLSs**. Some attributed this to excitement about the different modes of input available through computers and on the Internet. Perhaps it is also related to learner autonomy as described above. Interviewees generally felt that students are more motivated to learn in **BLSs** as opposed to non-**BLSs**.

## Discussion

56 The term blended learning means different things to different teachers. This is evident in the **BL** literature (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005), and was borne out in our findings. Likewise, a

**BLS** is different things to different teachers – at different times. Accommodating this was one of the main goals in designing the **BLS**s. The modular design, with furniture moving around easily and laptops moving in and out of lessons, means that a **BLS** lesson can take a variety of shapes depending on the course, lesson goals, etc.

In a **BLS**, it is possible to switch between FtF and **CALL** modes rapidly, with each mode aiding the other. Hinkelman (2005) refers to this as a “blended task.” Often the two modes happen simultaneously, as illustrated in **BLS** lessons described above.

It appears, based on our findings, that having access to the Internet on laptops in a **BLS** can have a significant impact on the nature of teaching and learning. In particular, it can promote learner autonomy. When teachers do not have access to **BLS**s, any **CALL** component must become homework, and we have the asynchronous model of blended learning prevalent in the **BL** literature (where the FtF mode is separated in time and space from the **CALL** mode). While a **CALL** lab can promote learner autonomy, it is not an orally communicative environment. The same could be said for the out-of-class **CALL** phase of a **BL** program – or **CALL** homework. **BLS**s, our findings suggest, promote learner autonomy in an orally communicative environment – balancing individualization, interaction and interdependence.

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## Appendix A

### Survey questions

#### Part A

1. Please enter your name
2. Have you ever studied CALL? If yes, please explain.



3. Did you use **CALL** in your teaching prior to Kanda? If yes, please explain.
4. Have you ever used **CALL** as a language learner? If yes, please explain.
5. Rate yourself as a computer user: (beginner/novice/intermediate/advanced)
6. How many *koma* per week are you teaching this semester?
7. How many *koma* per week do you have in a **BLS** this semester?
8. How many *koma* per week in a **BLS** would have been ideal? Please explain your selection.

### Part B

1. How often do your students use laptop computers for at least part of a **BLS** class? (always/usually/sometimes/rarely/never) If you answered “rarely” or “never”, please explain why.
2. I feel obligated to incorporate student laptop use into my **BLS** lessons. (strongly agree/disagree/no opinion/agree/strongly agree). Any comments?
3. I would incorporate more student laptop use into my **BLS** lessons if... (strongly agree/disagree/no opinion/agree/strongly agree).
  - a) students were more computer-literate
  - b) students were more enthusiastic about computer use
  - c) there was more support available to me as a teacher
  - d) it facilitated language-learning goals
  - e) other (please specify)
4. What do students do on the laptops in a **BLS** lesson? (email/Internet research/PowerPoint/Moodle/watching videos/listening to audio/word processing/chat/audio or video editing/blogs/class admin./surveys/collaborative writing/social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)/other (please specify))

### Part C

1. Do you have any additional comments about your **BLS** use, or **BLS** use at Kanda?

## Appendix B

### Interview questions

1. What is blended learning in your own words?
2. What is a **BLS** in your own words?
3. What **BLS** features do you use?
4. How does being in a **BLS** influence...
  - a) your teaching?
  - b) your students’ learning?
5. Does being in a **BLS** influence...
  - a) your choice of lesson goals?
  - b) the likelihood of you experimenting with new methods/activities/technologies?
  - c) your interactions with students?
  - d) students interactions with other students?
  - e) learner autonomy/choice/3 Is?
  - f) student motivation?
  - g) student confidence/willingness to contribute?

- h) student exposure to input?
  - i) student linguistic production?
  - h) other
6. Please walk me through your **BLS** and non-**BLS** lessons, and compare:
    - a) learning objectives
    - b) choice of technologies
    - c) blending of FtF and **CAL** modes
    - d) success of the lessons/evidence of learning
  7. a) How adaptable would your **BLS** lesson be to a non-**BLS** room?  
b) How might your non-**BLS** lesson plan change if it was to be taught in a **BLS**?
  8. How can we improve the **BLSs**?