

BALANCED BLENDED LEARNING: SUPPORT FOR DECISION-MAKERS

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Introduction

Saxion University of Applied Sciences is one of the largest institutions of higher education in the Netherlands, with over 27,000 students divided over three campuses in the East of the Netherlands. One of the focus points is embedding *Living Technology* in the educational programs and research – not merely as abstract pieces of technology, but rather as an integral part of living and working. The program ICT & Education has as the main goal to support the 11 schools with the implementation of technology in the educational programs. This ranges from optimizing the use of our virtual learning environments for learning, to increase the numbers of digital assessment and use of video. Despite the available support and the possibilities to use new educational technologies as a mean to increase more educational flexibility, educators do not use technology as often as our students would like to (Baas, 2013; 2014). The same studies show that the main reasons for not using new technologies are – as mentioned by our educators – a lack of knowledge, time and appreciation from their management. Research shows that leadership can have a positive influence on technology use, but it depends on the skills of the manager to co-create a vision on how to use technology in education (Albion, Forkosh-Baruch, & Tondeur, 2015). It demands specific competences and the use of one or a combination of multiple types of leadership (Figure 1; Tan, 2010).

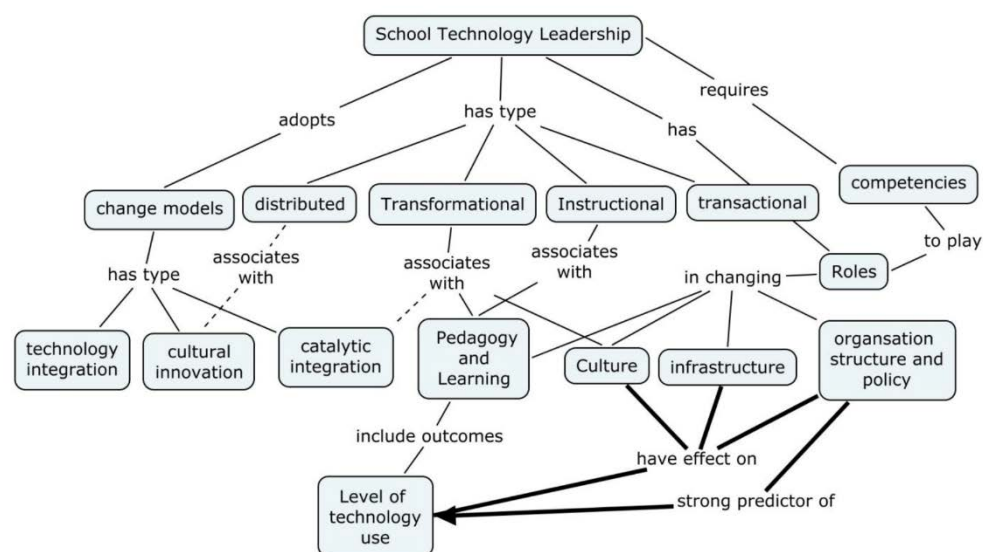


Figure 1. The influence of technology leadership (Tan, 2010)

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The last couple of years, we have been focusing on supporting the early adapters of technology in education. According to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory of Rogers (2003) adoption of new technologies or innovations do not happen simultaneously. Reaching the largest groups, the early and late majority, will enable us to successfully implement blended learning across the institution. Institutes need a vision and a strategic plan on blended learning if they want to reach this group, otherwise the adoption will be limited to the innovators and early adopters (Lee & Gaffney, 2009). Hence, it is important to enable managers to make decisions about technology in education to realise this ambition. This led to the design of a coaching trajectory.

Balanced blended education

The basis of our coaching trajectory is Kennisnet's "Four in Balance model" (2017) which consists of the four fundamental elements that needs to be in place in order to use ICT in education effectively. In addition, integration of technology can take place at the various levels that curriculum can be developed, namely from supra level (international) to macro (national), meso (school), micro (classroom) and nano level (individual) (Akker, van den, 2003). This has been taken into account when designing the trajectory. The coaching trajectory consists of the use of an online tool in combination of face-to-face meetings as in line with blended education so that managers can experience blended education by themselves.

Our online tool has five main elements. The first element is vision which encompasses the institutions (long term) vision and related goals regarding their education and the use of technology. The second element is about content and applications which is about all digital learning materials used and which systems or software is used within the university. The third element is expertise, the competences managers, teachers, support staff and students must have to effectively use the technology. The fourth element is infrastructure regarding the availability and quality of hardware, networks and connectivity with the institution's education system. In addition to this well-established model of Kennisnet, we choose to add the element of Leadership based on the grounds mentioned before. This resulted in the balanced blended education tool (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The elements of the online tool

In the meetings managers will use a theoretical framework to answer questions with each element in an online tool (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Answers on these questions in this module are saved and after all elements are discussed, managers finalize their answers so that an action plan on their envisioned use of technology in education can automatically generated (the light green element in Figure 2). Due to the fact that the focus of each school may be different, the meetings are also used to discuss these differences so that managers can learn from each other as well.

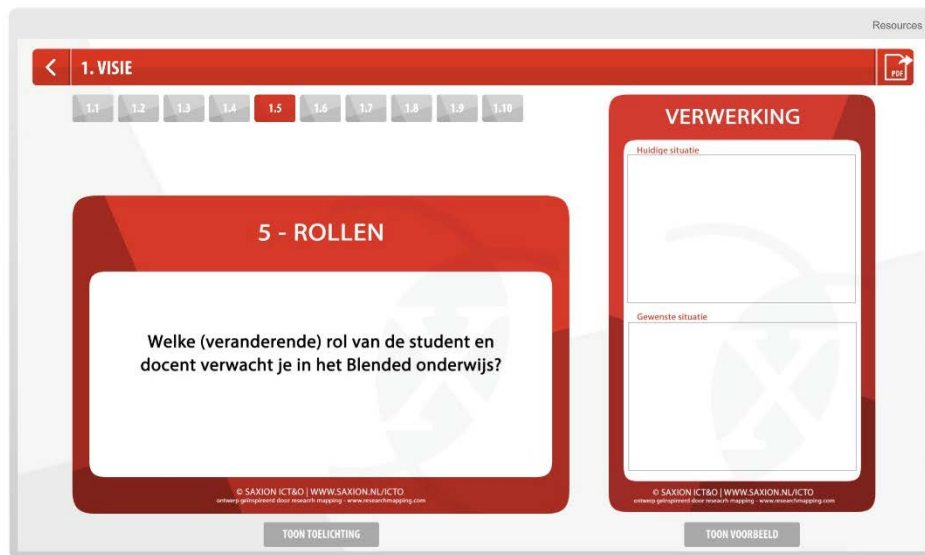


Figure 3. An example question within the element Vision with text fields on the right



Figure 4. Managers are given an explanation and an example for each question

Design of the trajectory

The blended coaching trajectory has been designed in Articulate with input and feedback of educational designers and researchers. All received feedback resulted in the refinement of the blended coaching trajectory. In the month April and May, the first group of managers (n = 6) will follow this trajectory which will result in an action plan on use of technology within their school. Feedback will be collected, and an evaluation is planned. The results will be available in June and we would like to present this at EDEN. The tool itself will be available with a Creative Commons license.

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