

SS: Why Blend?

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5.1 Blending in Social Science Teaching

The first question you should ask yourself before embarking on the journey of blended teaching is “Why blend?” Teachers who are still searching for their answer to this question may end up spending a lot of time and energy implementing changes that do not serve any larger goal or purpose.

Guiding Question: Why Blend?

“Why blend?” Teachers must have a meaningful answer to this question. It is not sufficient to blend just because it is popular or because others are doing it.

Teachers Talk: Self-directed Education



Mark Stevens

Blended teaching gave me a way to allow students to be self-directed in a meaningful way. An essential skill of learning is to learn to direct your educational future. Blended learning—by its very nature—gives students more responsibility to be engaged in a tiny, little, seventh-grade way.

Blending takes time and effort and should be undertaken with clear pedagogical purposes. Instead of deciding to blend because a gadget or tool is new and eye-catching, we can consider aspects of the PICRAT framework (see <https://edtechbooks.org/-lrr>) and ask:

- What do I want my learners' relationship to tech to be? (Passive, Interactive, or Creative)
- How do I want the technology integration to alter traditional practice? (Replace, Amplify, or Transform)

As Mark Stevens suggests above, we can also consider our overarching desires and goals for our students. These pedagogical questions and goals can guide our answers to "Why blend?"

Blended teaching can also help us become better teachers, prompting us to change our attitudes, dispositions, and approaches. Brooke and Mark discuss how they experienced these changes.

Teachers Talk: The Teacher I Want to Be (4:24)

A video player interface. On the left is a video thumbnail showing a woman (Brooke Davies) in a classroom setting with a 'JAZZ' poster. A large red play button is centered over the thumbnail. To the right of the thumbnail, the title 'The Teacher I Want to Be' is displayed in large white text, followed by the name 'Brooke Davies' and her title '~ Social Studies Teacher' in smaller white text. At the bottom left of the player, the 'EdTech Books' logo and the URL 'https://edtechbooks.org/k12blended2' are shown. At the bottom right, it says 'Licensed under CC BY' next to the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license icon.

The Teacher I Want to Be

Brooke Davies
~ Social Studies Teacher

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[Watch on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k12blended2)

Reflection Questions: How did Brooke use blended teaching to become a better teacher? In what ways would you like to improve as a teacher? How can blended teaching help you do so?

Teachers Talk: Changes within Myself



Mark Stevens

Every time I think of my blended learning journey, I hear a line from The Grateful Dead's song "Truckin'": "What a long, strange trip it's been."

It started back in 1995 when I wanted to use this new thing called the internet to get access to history documents I could get no other way. I was using the one data line that came into the school using a 2,600 baud modem. Over time, I received two iMacs for my own classroom and used them in a kind of station rotation way so students could access letters written by soldiers during the Civil War.

Several years later, after submitting a proposal based on what I had learned at a conference about using computers to make the in-class learning better, I was given a 15-computer mobile lab.

Blended learning really began to influence instruction as it does today when I was able to find meaningful sources on the internet. Imagine how much better history can be when students see a video made by Thomas Edison of cows going into a meatpacking plant in Chicago in 1897 or see and hear Jimi Hendrix playing the "Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock in 1969. It is the combination of sources like this in a blended approach that allowed one of my students to say, "I can see the Harlem Renaissance happening in my head."

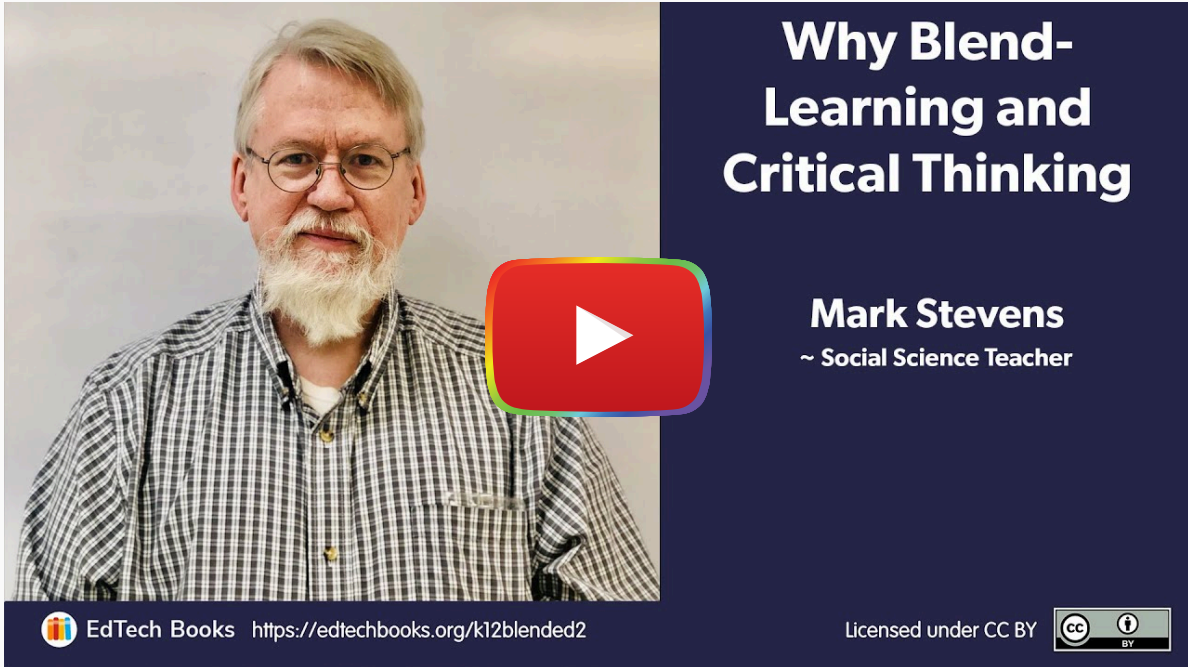
5.2 Reasons for Blending

There are three primary reasons teachers choose blended teaching. Usually at least one of the following is primary in the mind of the teacher choosing to blend:

- **Improved learning outcomes**—Blended classrooms can increase personalization, allow for more individual and small group instruction, and make better use of classroom time.
- **Increased access and flexibility**—In blended classrooms students have access to materials anywhere and anytime. In addition, they have access to resources and activities that are unavailable to them without an online component.
- **Increased efficiency/cost**—Blended classrooms can help students complete learning activities in less time and with less energy, reduce printing costs, and help students stay more organized (less likely to lose assignments).

Mark Stevens found that blended teaching helps him teach critical thinking skills.

Teachers Talk: Supporting Learning and Critical Thinking (5:42)



Why Blend-Learning and Critical Thinking

Mark Stevens
~ Social Science Teacher

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Reflection Question: Name three ways Mark Stevens supports critical thinking through blended teaching. Could you do some of the same things in your classroom?

Brooke Davis found that blended teaching helps her provide greater access and flexibility for her students.

Teachers Talk: Stop Losing Students



Brooke Davies

The original reason I was drawn to blended teaching was that I was losing a lot of my students to absenteeism and tardiness. Some struggled with low level skills, not knowing the English language, difficulty reading, difficult home lives, and special education needs. The diversity in my classroom tends to be pretty large. And I was struggling. My higher academic level students were bored and my lower level academic students were getting nothing out of my class. My middle students were maybe getting something. I wondered how I could get them all engaged with this big stratification in my course. Blended teaching offered an opportunity to do that.

Table 1 below shows some simple social science examples. Notice that each example may allow a teacher to achieve multiple purposes simultaneously.

Table 1

Examples of Multiple Purposes for a Blended SS Activity

Blended Example	Blended Purpose
Enables students to convey learning through multi-modal products that feature primary and secondary sources—images, text, maps, videos, sound clips, and more.	Learning Effectiveness: Students show more engagement when they get to use a variety of media to show learning. They are also more likely to learn well when they learn from different sources, including images, videos, text, and audio files.
	Access & Flexibility: Students have ready online access to historical photographs, for instance, or instructional film clips. In addition, they can access both the sources they are studying and the products they are creating anywhere, anytime.
	Increased Efficiency/Cost: Resources collected online can be efficiently and creatively shared with classmates and with teachers.
Facilitates student interaction with historical sources and promotes the skills used by historians: sourcing, corroborating, and contextualizing.	Learning Effectiveness: The internet brings countless primary sources to students' fingertips. Access to more sources allows greater personalization. It also allows students to do what historians really do: gather sources, recognize and account for point of view, identify corroborating and conflicting evidence, and build logical and defensible interpretations.
	Access & Flexibility: Access to a wider array of primary sources allows students to weigh evidence and understand contexts before passing judgment.
	Increased Efficiency/Cost: Instead of purchasing packets of primary source materials such as photographs, maps, or text selections, all of which are limited in scope, online resources offer more resources at little or no cost.

Blended Example	Blended Purpose
Promotes collaboration among students over the historical interpretations they construct together	<p>Learning Effectiveness: Historical literacy is the ability to construct meaning with multiple sources (print, visual, audio, video, etc.) and to communicate those ideas to others. Historians know that historical documents do not have only one interpretation, but students often do not, believing a historical document has "one right answer." Sharing ideas online encourages the back-and-forth necessary in encouraging this exploration.</p> <p>Access & Flexibility: Teachers can "see" the collaborative process in online documents, and encourage student thinking through feedback.</p> <p>Increased Efficiency/Cost: Peer and teacher feedback can be shared in real time and without the need for students to print out draft after draft.</p>

Think about why you would like to blend your classroom. In your blended teaching workbook, write your thoughts, creating your own purpose.



Blended Teaching Workbook

Write a brief statement about why you want to blend your classroom. Which purposes and outcomes are you most interested in for your blend? Access your Workbook here. Make sure you save your copy where you can access it as you go through the social studies chapters.



5.3 Common Challenges to Teaching/Learning in the Social Sciences: Problems of Practice

Your choice to blend will be more meaningful to you and your students if it helps you address challenges that you and your students face. We refer to these challenges as "problems of practice."

Definition: Problem of Practice

A problem of practice is a current problem or challenge that you believe could be improved through blended teaching.

In the following videos, Merinda and Ashley address problems of practice their blended classroom has helped them overcome. Can you describe what they are?

Teachers Talk: The One Doing the Talking (6:06)



The One Doing the Talking

Merinda Davis

~ Innovative Learning Coach

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[Watch on YouTube](#)

Reflection Questions: Think about the many reasons Ms. Davis has for blending her classroom. Do any of her reasons apply to your classroom? Which ones? How could you introduce a blend into your classroom that would highlight some of the same advantages?

Teachers Talk: Efficient, Self-paced, Mastery-based (5:46)



Why Use a Blended Classroom

Ashley Brown
Social Science Teacher

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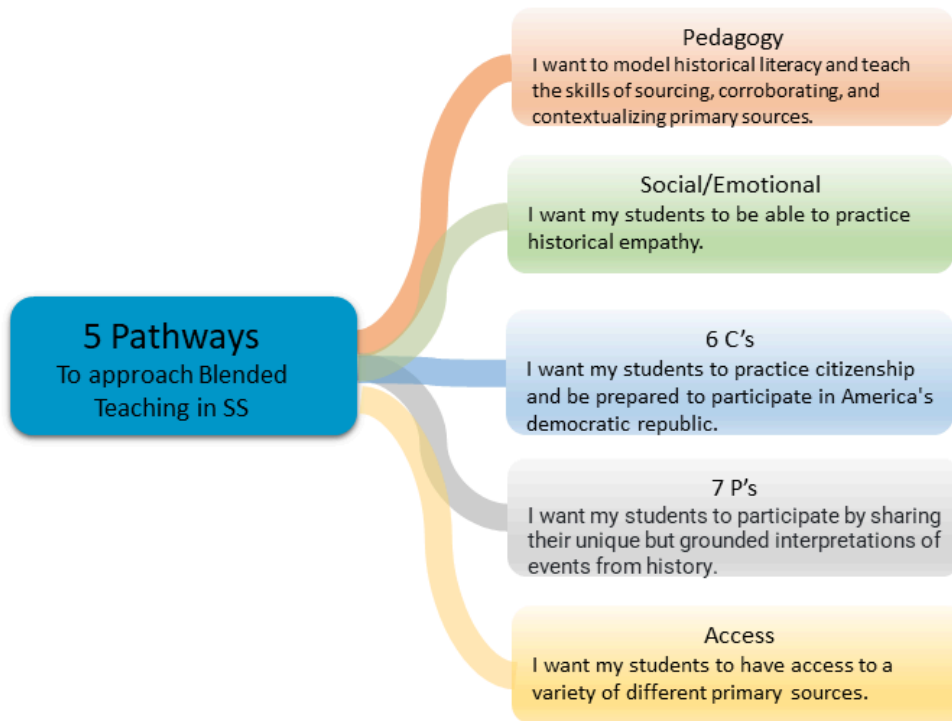
[Watch on YouTube](#)

Reflection Questions: How does Ashley help students learn while helping other students? What other benefits does a blended classroom give her?

Problems of practice can fall under any of the three purposes outlined in section 5.2 above. However, the most meaningful and powerful problems of practice for social studies teachers deal directly with improving learning outcomes for their students. To review the five pathways to approach blended learning, revisit them in [Chapter 1: 5 Pathways](#)

Figure 1

Problems of Practice in Social Sciences.



The exact examples shown above may or may not be challenges in your current approach to teaching. But within these five pathways there are surely problems of practice that are relevant to you. Think deeply about those pathways and identify specific challenges you face. Then begin to explore what online approaches may be combined with your in-person approaches to make a better experience for your students and you alike.

If all this sounds a little overwhelming, it does not need to be. Start slow, add a little at a time. Soon you'll find your classroom changing in ways you like and want to do more of.

Teachers Talk: Burnout



Brooke Davies

Burnout is real, so you have to go slow. I did not do that when I first tried blended teaching. It was really frustrating and overwhelming. It's still easy to feel overwhelmed. I want to be overprepared and ready to go. I don't want to go with the flow. My learning coach helped a lot. She would say, "You don't have to try that yet. That's going to be way too much work." So, I think that going slow, having someone there, whether it's a coach or a collaborative team member to do it with you can really help you transition into blended teaching.

Finding Your Problems of Practice

So give it a try. Review the five pathways to identifying problems of practice. Now look at your own practice and try to identify a couple of challenges that you can consider as you continue throughout these social science chapters. What pedagogies and social/emotional student outcomes would you like to improve? What qualities of deep learning (the 6 C's) or characteristics of strong blended teaching (the 7 P's) can you better incorporate into your classroom? How can you offer your students increased access to resources and opportunities?



Blended Teaching Workbook

Identify 2-3 problems of practice (PoP) that you can use as you consider blended options for your classroom.

Note: You should identify several problems of practice (PoP) because not every PoP has a good blended learning solution.

If you haven't already opened and saved your workbook, you can access it [here](#).

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