



## PARTNERSHIP FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM – PHER

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### Case Study: Embracing Blended Learning for Enhanced Student Outcomes

#### Background

Dr. John Stevens, a newly appointed instructor at Greenfield University, faced the challenge of delivering a successful course in a low-resourced educational environment. With limited access to state-of-the-art technology and support, he was tasked with teaching a course on Educational Psychology to adult learners. Dr. Stevens had a traditional approach to teaching, believing that strict control over the course flow would ensure student success. However, he soon encountered significant obstacles that would reshape his teaching philosophy and approach.

#### Initial Challenges

From the outset, Dr. Stevens decided to release course modules on a weekly basis, intending to maintain control over the course pace and ensure that students stayed on track. He was unaware that several of his students were members of a band that had a major competition during the third week of the course. As the competition approached, these students requested access to the course materials in advance, but Dr. Stevens refused, adhering strictly to his planned schedule.

This decision led to frustration among the students, who felt unprepared for the week they missed. They lodged complaints with the head of the department, Dr. Karen Mitchell. Dr. Mitchell understood the challenges faced by adult learners and advocated for more flexible learning options. She met with Dr. Stevens to discuss the issues and recommended that he consider a more learner-centered approach.

#### Department Chair's Intervention

Dr. Mitchell explained that adult learners often have diverse responsibilities and that allowing them greater control over their learning could significantly improve their engagement and performance. She suggested that Dr. Stevens publish all course modules at the start of the term and provide alternate assignment options to cater to the varied strengths of the students. She emphasized that these measures would not only accommodate the students' schedules but also motivate them to persist in the course.

Dr. Stevens, initially hesitant, agreed to investigate further. He reviewed literature on blended learning and learner motivation, discovering that student autonomy, relevance of content, and flexibility in learning pathways were critical factors in enhancing student motivation and performance.

#### Implementation of Changes

Armed with this new understanding, Dr. Stevens decided to redesign his course for the next term. He published all the modules at the beginning of the course, allowing students to access the content at their own pace. He also introduced alternative assignments, enabling students to choose tasks that best aligned with their interests and strengths. Additionally, he incorporated more interactive elements, such as discussion forums and collaborative projects, to foster a sense of community and engagement among the students.

#### Outcomes and Reflections

The impact of these changes was evident. Student grades improved significantly, with the average course grade rising by 15%. More importantly, student satisfaction ratings soared, with many students appreciating the flexibility and relevance of the course content. The band members, in particular, were

grateful for the ability to work ahead and manage their academic responsibilities alongside their extracurricular activities.

Dr. Stevens noted a marked improvement in class participation and the quality of assignments submitted. The students were more motivated and invested in their learning, often bringing in real-world experiences to enrich class discussions. The sense of ownership over their learning journey had empowered them to excel.

Reflecting on the experience, Dr. Stevens acknowledged that relinquishing some control and trusting his students had been challenging but ultimately rewarding. He realized that in a blended learning environment, flexibility and student autonomy are crucial for fostering motivation and success, especially for adult learners juggling multiple responsibilities.

## **Conclusion**

Dr. Stevens's journey highlights the transformative power of adopting a learner-centered approach in a blended learning environment. By providing students with greater control over their learning and offering diverse, relevant content, he was able to improve both student performance and satisfaction significantly. This case underscores the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to student needs in higher education, particularly in low-resourced settings.