

Blended learning: Increasing personal study options

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For many South African families, home study and home-schooling during hard lockdown were a shock to the system. For the majority of South Africans it was almost, or completely impossible due to the dire lack of resources. Many found it challenging; whilst others found it was revelatory; but almost certainly it was a mixed bag. As homebound parents supervised home-schooling, many got their first direct-experience and insights into how their children learn. Restrictions, limitations and compromises shone a particular light on how we all learn in different ways.



Worldwide, out of pure necessity, online education got an extraordinary boost during the early months of the pandemic. For many parents, educated exclusively in classrooms and lecture halls themselves, the online education environment that their children had to traverse was an eye-opener. They saw their children interacting with peers in virtual classrooms, connecting with their teachers one-on-one on digital platforms and learning lessons on their own because the content was the teacher. The results were varied; and some parents could only long for their children's return to their brick and mortar schools and campuses, while others noticed that their children were doing well, even thriving.

Acting on these 2020 insights, SACAP (the South African College of Applied Psychology), a SA frontrunner in innovation in education, has announced the launch of SACAP's 2021 personal study options which incorporates blended learning. "The 2020 lock-down highlighted what SACAP has long known," says Zerina Royeppen, SACAP's MD. "Everyone studies differently. There are significant limitations for a bricks and mortar campus monolithically-designed for group learning to cater for the diversity of student needs. Our younger generations expect and need their uniqueness to be recognised. Royeppen continues, "A person-centred approach to learning has been a driving force for SACAP. It's why we invested in the development of our online campus and its faculty many years ago. Studying online at SACAP wasn't conceived as offering 'an alternative', but rather meeting our students' real-world needs. For years, it's been a solid mainstream option, as well-developed and as well-resourced as our on campus learning option. It holds equal status, and that's why when the pandemic forced everyone online, we were able to offer all our students continuity in their studies as an immediate response to the Covid crisis. Our online campus was already robust, and well functioning, allowing us to transition all of our on campus students and their educators online within the very first weeks of lock-down."

For SACAP, the opportunity exposed by the pandemic came in exploring blended learning for more person-centred options by moving away from the binary discourse of bricks-and-mortar versus online. Each approach to learning is unique, taking the best of each, synthesizing how SACAP educators and students have viscerally experienced the necessary move to the online environment during hard lockdown.

Royeppen, says, “The SACAP On Campus, Online Flexi and Online Live options are distinct learning approaches to allow students to benefit from interaction and collaboration with their educators and fellow students while enabling them to engage with other learning activities on a deeper self-directed level.”

1. **On Campus** combines face-to-face classes on one of SACAP’s physical campuses in either Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town or Durban with online resources and activities outside of class time. This is ideal for students who prefer the structure of a fixed class schedule with face-to-face educator and social interaction along with the opportunity to deepen and embed their knowledge in their own time.
2. **Online Flexi** offers an active, engaging and collaborative learning experience for students who want the freedom to manage their weekly course requirements and their other life commitments, while still benefiting from interaction and learning activities with an expert educator and their virtual classmates. This learning approach is ideal for students who are self-motivated, independent and value the flexibility to pace themselves throughout the week. Experienced online educators and the online support team ensure that students will never feel lost or alone.
3. **Online Live** is a hybrid approach to online learning that combines weekly real-time virtual class engagement with self-paced online learning resources and activities. Students benefit from the interactive and social aspect of the virtual classes, plus the freedom to work through learning resources and other online activities at a pace that suits them best. The real-time online classes allow for immediate feedback from their online educator and classmates, while they still have time during each week to direct their own learning, in tune with their other life commitments.

“Parents, who have had their work lives changed in 2020 due to enforced working-from-everywhere, have been making their own discoveries around their own work habits, productivity and capacities for concentration and effective digital communication,” Royeppen concludes. “They can relate this to their observations and experiences of their children learning and studying alongside them at home. As families, and as communities, we have become more focused on figuring out what works best for us and our children; and therefore, more interested and open to finding new and better solutions that suit our unique blend of personal strengths, lifestyle choices and goals for our future.”

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