

# Active Blended Learning

## What do students think of it?

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Active Blended Learning: Theory, Research and Practice Conference  
Wednesday June 30<sup>th</sup>

**Virginia Teixeira Antunes** - Independent consultant

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# Institutional context (Northampton)

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- 1261 – original University of Northampton
- 1265 – original University dissolved
- 1924 – Northampton Technical College
- 1975 – Nene College
- 1999 – University College Status
- 2005 – Full University Status ...*840 years on...*– 12,000 students; 1,500 staff; three Faculties.
- 2014 - Move to Active Blended Learning (ABL) as new pedagogy

In 2018 we moved to a new purpose built campus:



**Waterside**  
Our brand new £330 million campus.

- Designed to adapt to 21st century teaching.
- Full range of integrated learning environments.
- 24/7 library and learning zone.
- Low environmental impact.

**Now Open**  
Discover the campus  
360° Tour

The banner features a photograph of the modern, multi-story Waterside campus building with large windows and a glass facade. The text is overlaid on a dark blue background on the left and a white background on the right.

Ethically driven,  
employable graduates



Framework of  
graduate  
attributes

Innovative,  
scalable  
learning and  
teaching



Active  
Blended  
Learning

Assessment  
review



Learning outcomes  
and assessment  
practices consistent  
with students'  
needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> C

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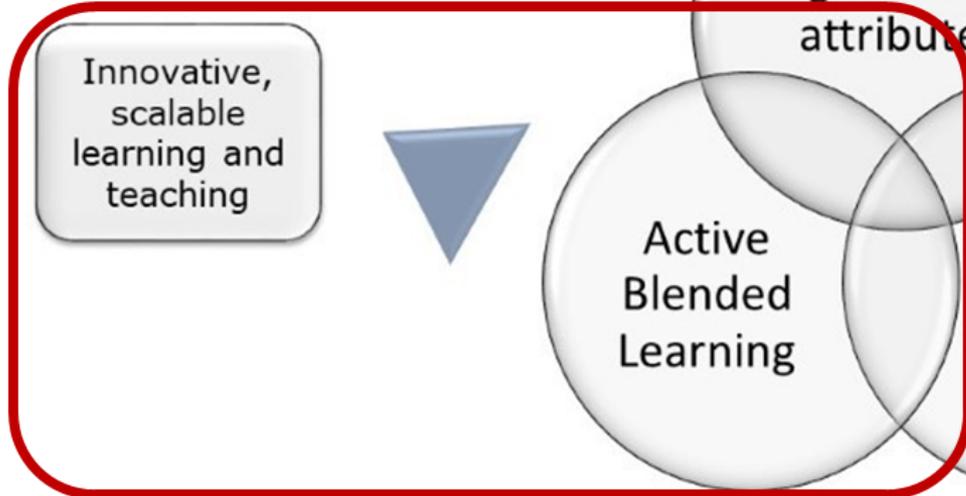


Active  
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# ABL – a definition

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Active blended learning is a pedagogical approach that combines sense-making activities with focused student interactions (with content, peers and tutors) in appropriate learning settings – in and outside the classroom.

ABL focuses on engaging students in knowledge construction, reflection and critique, the achievement of learning outcomes and the development of learner autonomy.

<https://www.northampton.ac.uk/ilt/current-projects/defining-abl/>

# ABL means that students...

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- Learn through **activities** that develop their **subject knowledge** and confidence in applying **professional skills**
- Discuss ideas, experiment, work in teams and receive feedback
- Develop digital fluency
- Benefit from flexibility in relation to time, place and pace

## A course follows an ABL methodology if it:

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- Is taught through student-centred activities to develop knowledge and understanding, independent learning & digital fluency.
- Has a core, collaborative face-to-face component, explicitly linked to learning activity outside the classroom.
- Helps to develop autonomy, digital citizenship and employability skills.

Source: [ILT website](#)

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graph TD; A((Pre-session sense-making activities with embedded content and resources)); B(( )); C(( )); B --> A; C --> A;
```

Pre-session  
**sense-making**  
**activities**  
with embedded  
content and  
resources

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graph TD; A((Pre-session sense-making activities with embedded content and resources)) --> B((Real-time session (webinar): analysis, discussion, critique, Q&A and goal setting)); B --> C(( )); C --> A;
```

Pre-session  
**sense-making  
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**Real-time session  
(webinar):**  
analysis,  
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goal setting

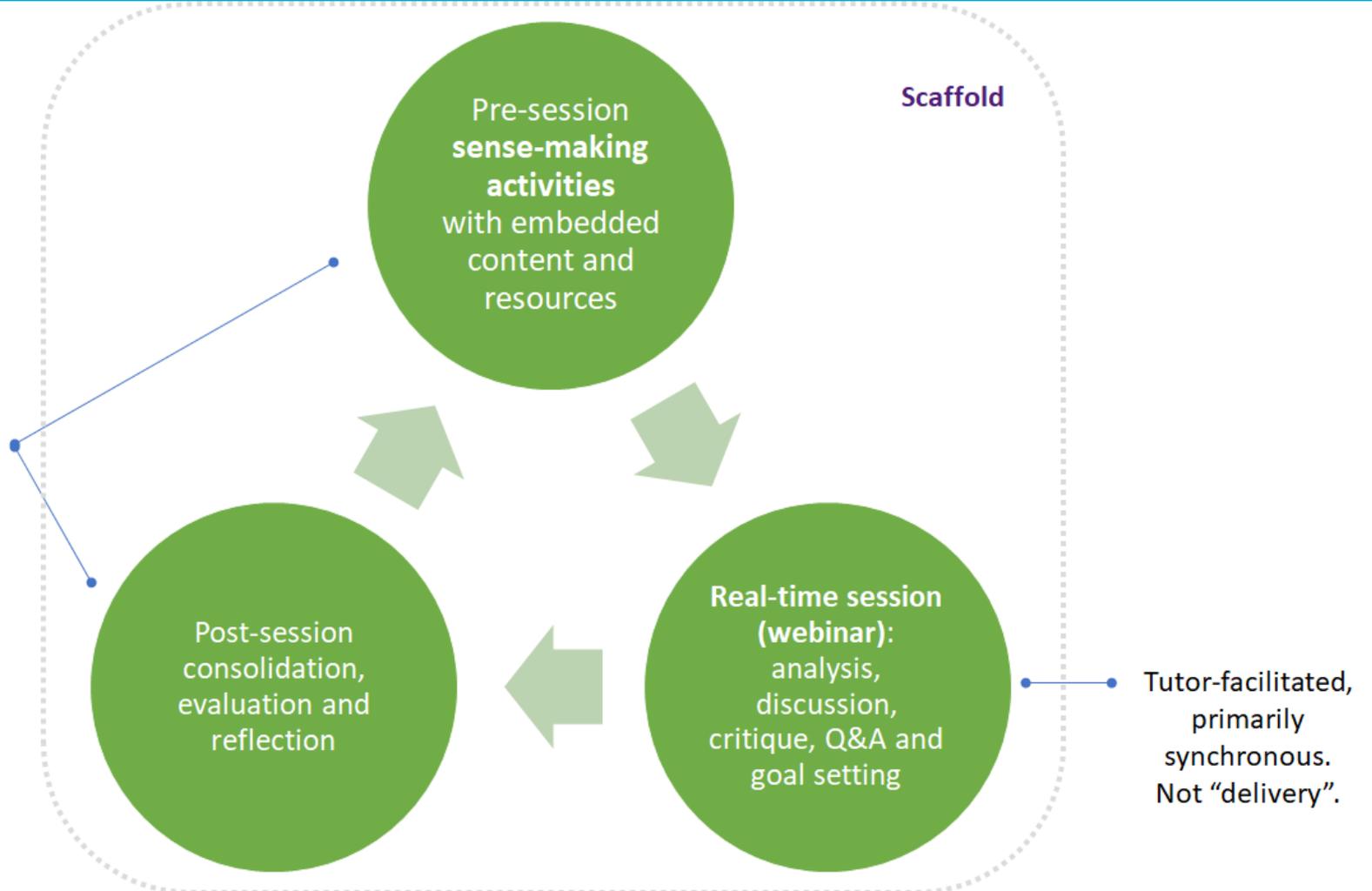
Pre-session  
**sense-making  
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**Real-time session  
(webinar):**  
analysis,  
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critique, Q&A and  
goal setting

Post-session  
consolidation,  
evaluation and  
reflection



Tutor-  
moderated,  
primarily  
asynchronous



**Scaffold**

Real-time session  
**(webinar):**  
analysis,  
discussion,  
critique, Q&A and  
goal setting

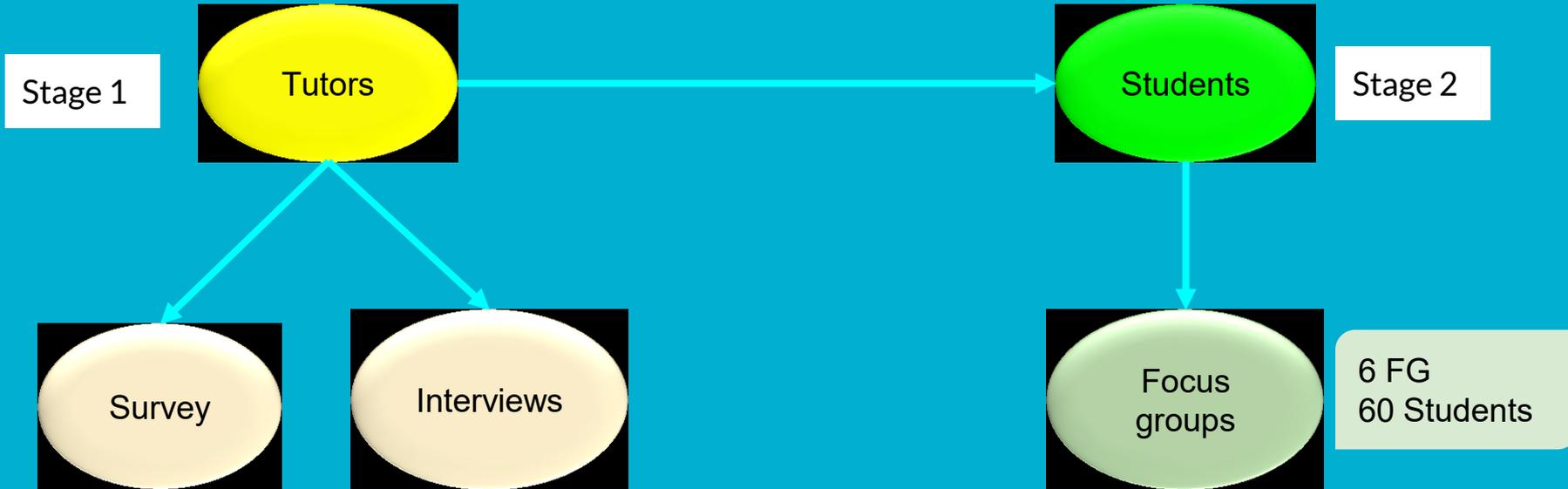
Tutor-facilitated,  
primarily  
synchronous.  
Not “delivery”.

Post-session  
consolidation,  
evaluation and  
reflection

Pre-session  
**sense-making  
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with embedded  
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# Our study

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# Research questions

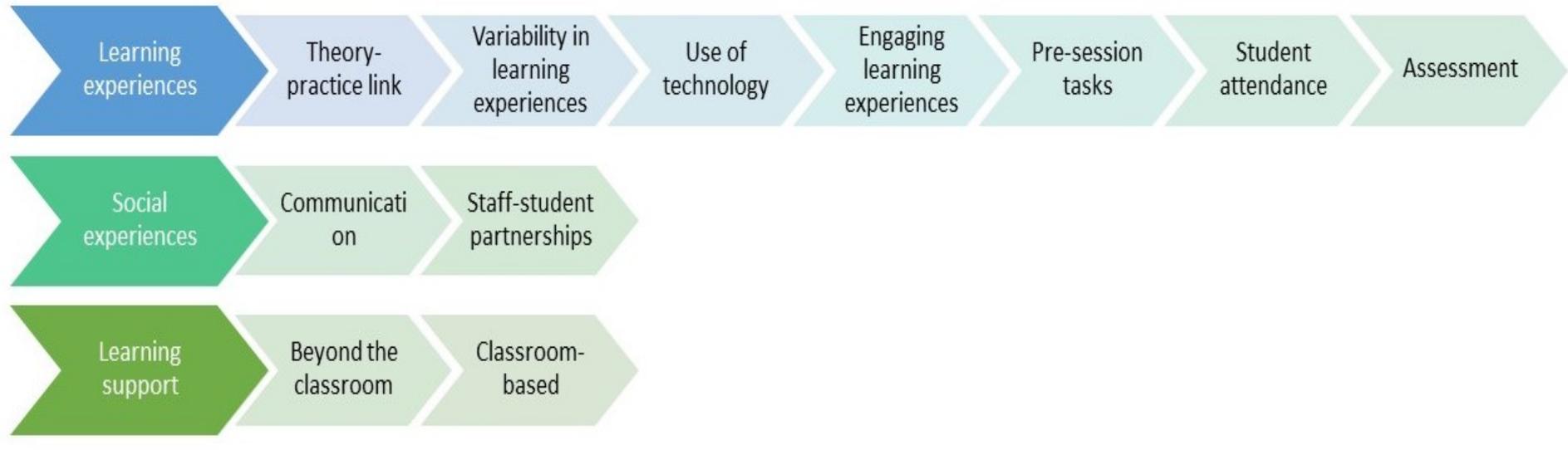
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(1) What are students' **perceptions of ABL** in relation to their learning, social and support experiences?

(2) What are students' **perceived enablers and barriers** to successful learning experiences?

# Findings

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# Findings

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Learning experiences

Theory-practice link

Variability in learning experiences

Use of technology

Engaging learning experiences

Pre-session tasks

Student attendance

Assessment

Social experiences

Communication

Staff-student partnerships

Learning support

Beyond the classroom

Classroom-based

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# The Big issue

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Student engagement



# What matters to students?

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- Learning experiences beyond the classroom
- Tasks and assessments linking theory and practice (employability)
- F2F sessions with “added value”

## **BUT ALSO...**

- Social interactions and communication (synchronous and asynchronous)
- Tutors who go the “extra mile” (personal traits)

# So...

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→ Tutors-students as partners

→ Digital technology as a tool to:

- ◆ Blur boundaries (asynchronous / synchronous)
- ◆ Promote interaction (with peers, tutors and content) within and beyond classroom

# Quality learning experiences not enough

Academic support



Pastoral support



Holistic L&T experiences

(engagement, interaction, belonging, retention, satisfaction...)



# References

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Armellini, A., Teixeira Antunes, V. and Howe, R. (2021) Student perspectives on learning experiences in a higher education active blended learning context.

*Techtrends*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-021-00593-w>

Teixeira Antunes, V., Armellini, A. and Howe, R. (2021) Beliefs and engagement in an institution-wide pedagogic shift. *Teaching in Higher Education* [online first]

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1881773>