Key Principles and Practices of Effective Design for Blended and Online Student Learning

Based on Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987), The Nature of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice (OECD, 2010), How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching (S. Ambrose et al., 2010) and The Three Principles of Universal Design for Learning (National Centre for Universal Design for Learning) – the following 7 principles have been expanded to apply to online/blended learning examples.

1. Encourage Contact between Students and Faculty
   - Send welcoming email to students before class
   - Provide helpful instructor contact info
   - Hold virtual office hours for video/synchronous chats
   - Post weekly video summaries of course/topics/what was learned
   - Email individual students throughout semester to stay in touch
   - Post timely notices, announcements and inspiring messages for students to let them know you are there, thinking of them etc.

2. Develop Cooperation Among Students
   - Create variety of mixed smaller discussion groups over course
   - Foster discussions and sharing of ideas among students early on
   - Post debate concepts to spark emotions, passion and interest
   - Provide a student space to discuss, without instructor
   - Ask students to complete profiles so they get to know each other
   - Use wikis, blogs, journals, portfolios for students to work together
   - Provide for peer assessment of activities and assignments
   - Allow for synchronous video conferencing discussions

3. Encourage Active Learning Techniques
   - Implement rich projects and reflective portfolios for demonstration of learning
   - Engage students in authentic and meaningful learning activities outside of digital learning environment
   - Stagger release of content/activities when specific criteria are met
   - Use the assignment tool for uploading work for assessment
   - Use quizzes and self-assessments for developing mastery
   - Use discussions, collaboration tools, wikis, blogs, classroom response systems/polling, shared documents for active learning
   - Ask students to create new learning and content such as authoring their own textbook, producing a video, engaging in a community action project etc.
4. Give Prompt and Targeted Feedback
- Be timely and detailed in your feedback
- Return assignments within a week with focus on feedback than grade
- Give students personal video or audio feedback on work so they hear and see you
- Let students know frequently and in varied formats how they are doing, where they can improve, what are strengths
- Use rubrics (single point or varied) for grading assignments and projects
- Use low-stakes assessments to provide feedback

5. Emphasize Time on Task
- In syllabus, welcome email or announcements let students know how much time they should be spending on course activities, homework and assignments, when activities take place, etc.
- Clearly outline learning outcomes for course and alignment with assessment
- Pay close attention to student progress and frequently share feedback with students
- Assist students in managing time, assessing learning strategies that work best, learning how to study etc.
- Create a checklist of weekly tasks to assist students staying on track
- Break larger tasks into smaller chunks to allow students to be successful throughout the course/project
- Encourage students to brainstorm work for a project, build project plans for time and work etc.
- Share helpful digital tools for academic learning and building awareness of successful strategies

6. Communicate High Expectations
- Be clear with students about expectations for learning (criteria, exemplars etc.) especially about how much and how frequent they need to access online environment, what does participation look like etc.
- Always provide clear explanations of modules, assignments, and assessments (create video to explain)
- Develop suitable marking tools for demonstrations of learning
- Encourage students to self-assess on criteria before submitting work
- Be clear with format and style of discussion forum posts, number, quality and what a good post looks like

7. Respect Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning
- Provide course content and feedback in varied ways throughout course
- Allow flexibility in demonstrations of learning (e.g., write essay, do a podcast, create a web site, undertake a project they are passionate about etc.) in multiple means and expressions
- Provide an option of tools and techniques for students to be able to complete an assignment or activity
- Encourage students to develop new ways of personalizing their learning
- Release learning activities according to learning needs