NEWS BULLETIN

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NETWORKED LEARNING AND CHANGE

By Tracy Mollins

Many definitions of blended learning include the concept of Connectivism – the idea that learning happens in networks. Networked learning uses a mix of technologies and interactions to create learning environments where learners are actively involved in the learning process and are encouraged to construct their own understandings and knowledge. Connectivism also means expanding learning circles beyond the classroom.

As learners, we make meaning by understanding how ideas and concepts are connected and we diversify our knowledge by developing learning networks. We strengthen learning when we connect our knowledge to the new things we are learning and express our ideas in networks.

As Etienne Wenger says:

We are essentially social beings. We live in societies, of course; but more fundamentally perhaps, it is our participation in social communities and cultural practices that provides the very materials out of which we construct who we are, give meaning to what we do, and understand what we know.[1]

George Siemens, a Connectivism founder, put it this way:

We cannot stop the desire to know. The desire to know is balanced with our desire to communicate, to share, to connect, and our desire to make sense, to understand—to know the meaning.[2]

Adopting a networked learning approach can mean a change in practice. As one Toronto literacy practitioner put it in 2015:

In traditional methods the instructor lectures, assigns work and assesses learners. In today's world, and in literacy to some extent, this has changed. Technology offers more information

than an instructor can have. The instructor's role is to lead students to access that information. The instructor is a facilitator that presents learners with options and gets feedback about how those options are working. The instructor is a learning expert and tech support - like tech support who specializes in learning - a guide on the side.

Instructors as networked learners can find a community of practice at their fingertips to help us think about our relationship with technology, how to use technology to enrich our practice, and how to develop our "guide-on-the-side" role.
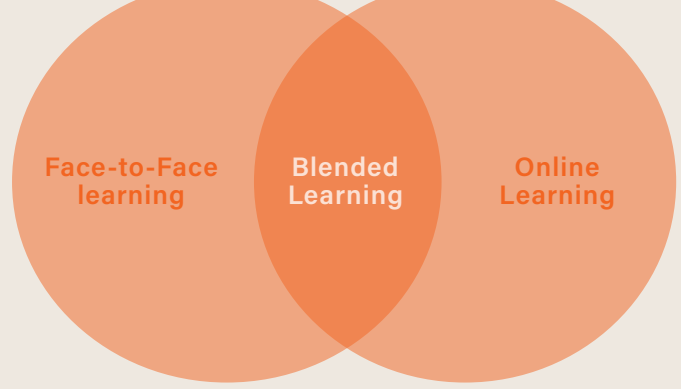
But, as with all change, there are challenges. The strategic brainstorming phase of making change is something that experienced practitioners do skillfully. Choosing, implementing, evaluating, and revising methodologies and practices is the challenging part. We need to be prepared to fail – or partly fail. Ideas that are still in our head or beautifully laid out somewhere are still good ideas. It is when we try to turn the ideas into practice that things get messy. We need to be prepared for the mess and, most importantly, we need space to experiment, to explore and to adjust our thinking and our practice as we deepen our knowledge and experience. We need time to engage in a process of reflective practice.

If you are thinking about making a change to a networked learning model, remember that support organizations are here to help. Please get in touch with your ideas and let us help with the messy bits.

1   Etienne Wenger, *Communities of practice: where learning happens*, Benchmark Magazine, Fall Issue 1991 - http://www.ewenger.com/pub/index.htm
2   George Siemens, *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*, December 12, 2004- http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm

BLENDED LEARNING AND LBS

Face-to-Face learning   **Blended Learning**   **Online Learning**

By Rhonda Davis

Blended learning is an education program (formal or non- formal) that combines online digital media with traditional classroom methods. It requires the physical presence of both teacher and student, with some element of student control over time, place, path, or pace.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blended_learning

BENEFITS OF BLENDED LEARNING:

- Learners may access more learning time than could be provided by either method alone
- Enhanced student engagement through mixed media and interactive programming
- Increased flexibility for students allowing them to progress at their own pace online and to access some material when in-person support is not available
- Ability to review challenging material in-person, as needed
- Less face-to-face instruction required, which makes it possible for in-person service providers to serve more learners

http://literacybasics.ca/training/training-delivery-methods/

MISCONCEPTIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING:

- Students work in isolation—to be considered blended learning, students need opportunities to interact with peers and the instructor in live, real- time settings.
- Blended and online learning are less work than face-to-face instruction—blended learning can require more time and effort from all parties
- Online learning is only for gifted students—the truth is all students benefit from blended learning models

http://www.gettingsmart.com/2016/08/6-common-misconceptions-about-blended-learning/

7 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF BLENDED LEARNING

1 **Have a plan—**blending the delivery mode of your training courses is a strategic change that requires careful planning.

2 **Take baby steps, one target at a time**—systematically approach the execution process & learn from your mistakes.

3 **Involve staff and students in the process**—ask students and staff what they need or want, provide for feedback and comments.

4 **Set clear learning goals**—all activities should contribute to the right learning goals, also set clear expectations for students from the start.

5 **Have the right teaching resources**— material & resources for teaching online are very different from traditional ones, interactive & engaging material can enhance the learning experience.

6 **Make the system work for you**—the right processes & workflows put in place will ensure that your courses are compliant.

7 **Monitor, refine, and repeat**—keep a close eye on the data collected: numbers & feedback can tell you whether the learning goals are fulfilled or not.

For the Employment Ontario Information System Case Management Systems (EOIS-CaMS) data entry purposes, blended learning refers to a combination of face-to-face through and LBS service provider with e-Channel delivery only.

e-Channel is Ontario's online adult literacy program. It's a free service for adults who want to improve their skills. This web-based means of delivering literacy training provides:

- Opportunity to reach learners who choose or are in need of self-directed service
- Services in four cultural streams—Aboriginal, Francophone, Anglophone, and Deaf
- Courses for learners preparing for apprenticeship and postsecondary education (ACE-Academic and Career Entrance)
- Further access for persons with disabilities and for those who live in rural and remote communities
- Additional courses local agencies may not be able to offer
- Opportunity to try online learning
- Supplemental learning from another instructor

http://literacybasics.ca/training/training-delivery-methods/

WEBINAR: BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCESSFUL ONLINE TRAINING

By Rachel Anne Normand

In the wake of all the free webinars being offered by the online community of practice and e-Channel providers to Literacy and Basic Skills practitioners in Ontario, F@D's manager, Rachel Anne Normand, facilitated a workshop on January 25th entitled How to Make it a Win. Using a participatory approach, Rachel Anne encouraged participants to reflect on best practices that would make mixed-mode training a success for both the learners and the trainers.

She began the webinar with a roundtable during which all the participants were invited to talk about their experiences with distance learning education. The answers were used as a springboard to discuss strategies that would strengthen the strong points being raised and highlight the areas to be improved. The most common barriers included weak computer skills, and a lack of motivation and access to the tools needed to take an online training course. On the flip side, flexibility and the wealth of courses available were the most frequently noted positive aspects.

Following that, participants who had already offered mixed-mode training to their learners were given the chance to explain why they had selected this option. They cited the following reasons:

- Providing the chance of working with different trainers and thereby experiencing other teaching styles ;
- Providing various means of engaging in learning;
- Proposing time slots that better meet the needs of learners;
- Improving the course offering available to clients.

The crux of the webinar then followed: a discussion about best practices to ensure the success of online training for both the learners and the trainers. Instead of simply presenting best practices, Rachel Anne invited participants to think about their best practices and to propose a few. As a result, participants were able to learn more about successful methods that have already been used and validated by their counterparts. The following table outlines the proposed strategies:

STRATEGIES THAT TRAINERS CAN USE TO ENSURE THAT ONLINE TRAINING IS ENJOYABLE FOR...	
...THE LEARNERS	...THEMSELVES
Proposing courses that learners tend to find interesting.	Following an online course to experience the "learner's" perspective.
Learning about the various mixed-mode training options (modes and courses) offered to learners.	Conducting system tests before the first course in order to learn how to resolve any technical issues.
Encouraging learners to read the instructions provided and to watch the video tutorials for using the learning platforms, all while offering support to access them as needed.	Contacting the online service provider to create a relationship based on support and feedback.
Ensuring that a person is on site to support the learners with the technology.	In the same way, creating a relationship with the trainer of the online course so that the learner feels he or she has the support of a team.
Offering online courses in small groups.	Sharing digital learning resources with their counterparts, thereby providing their learners with different experiences.
Exposing learners to a range of technological tools, so they become more comfortable taking courses online.	Using volunteers who can offer learners support with the technology, thereby freeing the trainer to perform other tasks.
Inviting learners to observe a group taking an online training course so they can see that it is not as intimidating and as difficult as they might think.	Preparing a contingency lesson in case of major technical problems that would postpone or delay the course for 10 minutes or more.

At the end of the webinar, participants reviewed what they had taken away from the discussions:

- Several resources and forms of support are available to trainers and learners to ensure the success of a mixed-mode training course;
- A mixed-mode training course frees up the trainers and makes it possible for them to carry out other tasks, such as preparing course material and providing individual tutoring;
- Taking the time to support learners benefits both parties;
- Creating links with online service providers ensures a positive experience for everyone.

To conclude the session, participants summarized the advantages of mixed-mode training. In particular, one participant stressed that this type of training provides learners with a more complete learning experience, while allowing them to develop various technological skills and making them more at ease working in a digital environment.

Needless to say, this workshop piqued the interest of many. The online service providers hope that the series of webinars supported the trainers and that they feel well equipped to provide their clients with mixed-mode training.

You can access the recording for this webinar and (and all other webinars in the Online Community of Practice series) **here**.

DIGITAL LITERACY

By Robyn Cook-Ritchie

Digital literacy is a broad set of skills necessary to participate in a rapidly expanding knowledge society. It includes the knowledge and skills to use a range of digital devices, the ability to interact with digital devices through software applications, and competence as a good digital citizen. The scope of the term digital literacy is vast and touches on virtually every aspect of life in today's fast paced and quickly evolving world.

The acquisition of digital skills for adult learners has become increasingly important in all five learner goal paths. The need for basic digital skills in order to function effectively across all aspects of life is ubiquitous. Digital literacy is essential for adults to communicate in and navigate through the workplace, in education settings and in day-to-day life. Adults need to have the fluency of digital skills that allow them to find, communicate, evaluate and use digital information in a safe, effective and meaningful way.

The world is quickly becoming more automated and digitized. In order to function, individuals need to be able to get information from digital devices and communicate with digital devices in almost every aspect of life. Literacy and basic skills delivery agencies are positioned to offer programming that supports learners who need to acquire basic digital skills so they can achieve their goals.

The current *Literacy and Basic Skills: Service Provider Program Guidelines* state:

> The Ministry does not prescribe content or curriculum. It does require that service providers demonstrate that their LBS programming will prepare the learner with the skills and abilities for achieving a required credential, meeting the entry expectations of an external institution, or gaining other learning requirements for successful transition to their goals.... Skills in using digital technology are essential for success in employment, education and training, and independence. All learners must have the opportunity to develop competency in the use of digital technology. The LBS program funds the teaching of digital technology, including computer skills and particular computer software applications.[1]

The recent IT Refresh funding offered to LBS agencies speaks to MAESD's commitment in supporting the full integration of the Use Digital Technology competency, one of six competencies outlined in the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework, in LBS programming. The program guidelines support digital technology as an integral part of programming delivery.

The increasing demand for digital skills in the workplace, in education settings, and in the day to day life of citizens in general, has resulted in service delivery agencies developing unique programming to meet these needs in both traditional and non-traditional ways. For example:

- In many classroom or small group settings (e.g. a literacy or numeracy class), digital literacy has become an integral component of daily programming. Computers, tablets and smartphones are commonly used to support learning, find and communicate information.

- Blended learning opportunities are being supported in service delivery agencies by teaching the digital skills needed to access online content. Learners may have the literacy or numeracy skills to interact with the actual content of an online learning class but lack the digital skills needed to access and interface with the content. Examples include learners in e-Channel courses or learners preparing to access online secondary school credit classes.

- Digital skills are also being taught in a focused way through a variety of targeted training programs specific to learner needs. Digital basics classes cover topics such as hardware, online security and safety, software applications and social media. Point of sale training acquaints learners with hardware and software commonly used in commerce. Some agencies also offer software specific training such as Word or Excel classes to help learners acquire specific technical skills sets related to their goals.

Whatever the approach to teaching digital literacy, what is most important to note is that it is one of the six competencies currently addressed by the LBS program in Ontario and it is recognized in the program guidelines.

[1] Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Literacy and Basic Skills: Service Provider Guidelines, October 2016, pages 28-29, [Online]. [http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/lbs_service_provider_guidelines.pdf].