

How to Blend C-Learning and E-Learning into Individual Learning Paths for Adult Learners

Hilde De Rijbel
CVO Antwerpen-Zuid
Belgium
hderijbel@cvoAntwerpen.be

Sophie Van der Avort
CVO Antwerpen-Zuid
Belgium
svanderavort@cvoAntwerpen.be

Koen DePryck
CVO Antwerpen-Zuid, Institute of Knowledge Management
Belgium
kdepryck@cvoAntwerpen.be

Abstract: This session presents and illustrates some of the conditions required to compose a balanced blend of contact and distance learning, based on our experience in adult education. In order to create a stimulating learning experience, it is imperative to avoid the pitfall of focusing on theoretical content delivery during face to face sessions and offering exercises through the electronic learning environment. We demonstrate how developing and implementing powerful interactive learning objects became a pedagogical challenge by creating individual learning paths.

Introduction

Government-funded formal education in Flanders (Belgium) does not allow for 100% distance learning. When legislation was introduced to make blended learning possible, the imposed ratio of contact versus distance was 50-50. It wasn't until this academic year, that courses could contain larger distance components.

Our center in Antwerp was one of the pioneers to introduce distance learning in the context of adult learning. We were well aware of the pitfalls we could expect and we were looking for a model that would allow us to blend contact and distance learning in such a way as to retain the advantages of both components. Beyond the well studied problems of introducing e-learning in any context, the "official" anxiety to abandon the contact aspect of courses had a detrimental effect on how teachers thought about blended teaching. They were constantly tempted to apply the didactic models of contact education to the whole of their course, including the distance part.

Many studies indicate the advantages of blended learning in terms of lower dropout rates and success in achieving their learning goals. There is obviously nothing wrong with blended learning, but its implementation may be even more challenging than the introduction of 100% distance learning.

We ended up elaborating on the concept of learning maps and learning paths, in the end giving us the added advantage of being able to implement highly individual learning trajectories for all students.

Theory vs practice

The example we use to illustrate our best practice is taken from our language department but the concept and methodology apply across disciplines.

Traditional classroom didactics often exist in a continuum between two extremes. Theory as well as a first round of practice are done in the classroom, students then go home and practice some more. The other extreme requires students to do some theoretical preparatory work in advance and apply that background during practice in the classroom.

A model appropriate to blended learning must allow for individual trajectories combining contact and distance learning. In practice this is hard to implement because of logistic constraints, especially on contact hours. Careful design of the different components is therefore essential. In that context it turned out to be important to make essential learning blocks/goals available in both the distance and contact format.

It was important to use modelling tools that teachers—most of the time unfamiliar with distance learning—would feel comfortable with when designing their courses and planning their lessons. Visio turned out to be exactly such a tool. In our session we demonstrate the process from quick preliminary sketches on paper over a set of individual learning paths formalised in Visio to the implementation in a specific open source learning environment (Dokeos).

References

DePryck, K. (2005). *Getting started with ODL*. Apeldoorn, Garant.

Entwistle, N. (1990). *Handbook of educational ideas and practices*, London and New York, Routledge.