



onTrain

Online Training, the treasure within

C. Course design
3. Course design

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project reference: 2018-1-ES01-KA204-050702

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Let's start



Teachers and instructors are aware of the capacities of technology in the classroom, and most of them are already implementing technology in their instruction. But how to do it? Which is the best way to deliver training, how to organise it? Which activities? How to engage learner?. Although there is not a unique and strict methodology that needs to be followed, there are some designing principles that can be applied when designing a course.

What am I learning here and why?

To make the most of your educational activity it is necessary to be aware of the different possibilities available, take into consideration previous restrictions and, of course, benefit from the computer-mediated education. In this chapter you will be able to explore course methods, starting from the one that slightly implements technology (blended learning) to the one that is fully carried out online (online learning) and you will get to know their most distinguishing traits. This will allow you to choose a methodology that better adapts to your learners' needs. Also, to know the potentialities of content delivery platforms and community-based platform will be useful to design the content of the course and to give it a purpose.

What content will I find here?

You will discover here the pros and cons of using certain ways of course design and you will get to know which elements are necessary to implement a technology-based instruction in the classroom. Also, you will see how it works a community building platform and to make the most of it. Likewise, you will learn about two methodologies in which technology is applied to some extent, those are: blended learning and online training.

Content-delivery platform



The most basic use of the e-learning platform is a content delivery platform , that is a place where you can put PDFs, videos and other files that are useful for your training. Students can find a centralised place where to collect materials. Nowadays, even the paper-based books and learning books still “predominate” not any trainer should avoid the advantage of providing other learning resources.

It is good that trainers develop and tailor the materials depending on the specific target needs, but then when creating the e-learning platform content, trainers start to become swamped because of the vast amount of work that it represents. That makes the e-learning course design to be perceived as something that is a titanic work, but nothing far from reality. Consider it this way; on the Internet there are a lot of resources, mostly informal (as videos, or blogs). It is certain that some of them could be fake or low quality, but now the work of the trainer would not be to create content, but to find the most appropriate sources of information that will be used for the students during the learning. Therefore, start to provide links to other resources

(as blogs, videos, magazines, etc.) that enrich the learner experience; your only task is to revise those materials so they are trustful, and teach your students to use extra materials and keep reading optional resources depending on their interest.

In this sense, a content-delivery platform where there would be only text (as a PDF version of a book) then becomes a rich and varied resource of knowledge.

To sum up, it is a space shared with a specific user group where you can upload documents in a specific format and send forum messages.

Watch out! All material on the Internet is not valid. We must be careful and from where we can get the information should be reliable sources. For example, public libraries or universities. If you have any ideas, you can share it in the online forum.

Technology in the classroom

The impact of technology in schools has been quite significant, especially in the last 20 years. Computer and tablets have replaced books and any question we might think about can be answered via the Internet. Teachers have become aware of the paramount of integrating technology in the classroom, so they are providing now technology-based instruction to feed students with technological skills. This way, teachers are also preparing them to the upcoming labour market or other contexts where people has to use technology for sharing, collaborating or simply enjoying.

The widespread adoption of technology has completely changed the way instruction occurs and has bring up many benefits to the learners. By embracing and integrating technology in the classroom, we are:

1. Preparing students for their entrance to the workforce and future careers. If used correctly, technological gadgets and applications they support, will help students to develop their students' digital citizenship skills which are really necessary nowadays.
2. Boosting the interaction between their classmates and instructors/teachers by encouraging important soft skills such as collaboration and communication.
3. Settling our student up for a successful life outside the classroom. Most students are willing to use technology in the classroom because it makes the learning experience more interesting and enjoyable.
4. Enabling access to a wide range of information. Thanks to technology, when questions come to mind, we can access a wide range of information quicker and easier than ever before.
5. Meeting the needs of students of all learning styles. It is an effective way to help students to learn at their own pace.
6. Aligning daily life activities with today's instruction. Technology is a part of our lives, too. Therefore, this is a good opportunity to provide them the tools they need in the present century to cope up with their daily life activities and routines.

Technology in the classroom is more beneficial than traditional instructional methods, teacher becomes the encourager and adviser. Also, it is a new way to enhance the learning experience and create new opportunities.

In courses, technology can be adopted in different ways ranging from low to high involvement:

1. As a source for supporting look for information and quick search, which will be equivalent to the traditional books and dictionaries.
2. As an engaging activity during teaching to promote bi-directional information flow. This design is usually used by trainers as a way to get feedback while offering a traditional presentation. Examples of this method makes possible increased participation of the student during a one-way lecture. A good example of a tool used for this purpose would be kahoot.com
3. Increase capacity of traditional teaching-learning methods by adding technology mediated resources, as videos, images, games, simulations, graphical resources, other websites, etc.
4. Increase impact of learning results. Once in the classroom students have produced some results, technology makes it possible not only to disseminate that results, but also to be re-used, shared outside the classroom, and exploited. Examples of this are publishing a blog after a group has produced a learning experience or publishing a video of the activity. To make public that learning outcomes can not only reinforce the learning, but also provide a sense of aim, creativity, and receive positive feedback or even negative, that without a doubt, will make it possible to acquire other social skills.
5. Reinforce group dynamics. Traditional group dynamics are very fluent thanks to oral communication and the use of quick flow of information. You must be very careful on including technology in an already well-designed group activity, but you can carefully add technology-based interactions, that is not a full activity. For example, putting post-its on a board for a brainstorming session or other creative activities and using shared boards that allow going further is a good face-to-face group activity. In this example, it would be possible to add votes, images or comments to the virtual post-its. The main potentiality of this method would be to enrich your already existing activities by adding extra information (such as images, addresses of other websites, videos) while also making it possible for your learners to add information (feedback as comments, votes, further websites, etc.).



Examples:

- In this webpage you can find lessons and resource: <https://www.teachhub.com/benefits-technology-classroom>
- In the blog there are different topics related to learning and technology, but here you will find information about education technology: <https://tophat.com/blog/6-pros-cons-technology-classroom/>

Community building platform

On adult education, compared to young students, there is an intrinsic interest on the topics that are being learnt, they are more self-directed, motivated because they wish to learn about the topic (and not so on get a degree as on young) and also they have more experience (because of job or living experience). Due to these learners' characteristics, there is a huge potential on promoting social learning.

The next level of interactivity on online platform is based on allowing the learners to share a space to express their thoughts, ideas and concerns. To promote this social learning that could lead to building a community can be done in a simple way by offering a forum, but also, promoting its use and exploitation, please refer to the chapter about collaborative activities to learn how to get this.

Face-to-face learning, that is the one that takes place in the classroom, still is the main environment where education occurs; online place is only additional. Still, think on the advantage of having this simple tool available: by promoting a community among the students, they will be able to learn from each other, support themselves and even keep learning and sharing once the course finishes.

Community building can happen in a short term, or medium-term activities, think about a one-day-conference that afterwards offers the attendees the possibility to share their doubts and suggestions, or a several weeks course.

Blended learning

Here we are starting to move to the virtuality by including some training-learning activities using asynchronous methods mediated by technology. Those are mixed with face-to-face training which happens in classroom. Some methodologies as flipped classroom rely on this method and now you can take advantage of both.

This course design makes it possible to mix the best of both worlds: the real and the virtual classroom. For the virtual classroom, there are available a lot of methods, techniques and tools. We are going to focus in this chapter on specific course design considerations.

1. Sometimes it could be difficult to rely on virtual side of this blended learning in case some learners have difficulties on access to computer, tablet or the Internet. Have prepared a plan "B" as access to computers on library or in the school. It could also be difficult for students with low digital skills, so better to restrict to easy and simple tools and move to complex ones if students feel comfortable.
2. Start by designing simple and easy to access activities to be done from home. As simple as accessing websites, reading, looking videos, etc. Propose that kind activities together with simple worksheets that could be done in paper and reviewed in the face-to-face part of the teaching. Only if students feel comfortable on those tasks then you can move to online shared documents, cloud spaces to upload files, or other creations by the learners.

3. Face-to-face activities are good for quick exchange of information and feedback thanks to visual and verbal communication. On the other side, virtual activities are good for reflexive learning that is applied in written communication: explain, justify, propose, discuss... all that from a well-structured way. That would complement perfectly the face-to-face interaction skills.
4. Online activities can be very consuming, both for the learner and for the trainer. That includes not only the design but also the assessment and evaluation. Blended learning design must be centered to support the face-to-face education, which is mainly the one that receives the main effort and value. Once you start to put more importance to the virtual part, it starts to become online training.

Examples



Following are some examples of how a course content could be delivered to the students. As a first step, the content should be introduced, facilitating the understanding and the first settlement of knowledge (the basic knowledge).

Example 1

It is common the presentation of resources (texts, videos, graphics, etc.), which the student will be able to read and be able to participate in a forum, in case of doubts, if he wants to contribute ideas or just comment on something that has been relevant or interesting to him. There may be optional material, but it must be clear which of this is optional (there may be confusion and the belief that everything is mandatory). The teacher should introduce the materials, explain why they are interesting on appropriate and in what way the student should approach them when they will read them (in any case, avoiding a memorisation, but rather an understanding and creation of links or relations in facts that are close to the student).

Afterwards, we propose several activities that should be included not only for the learner to acquire the main skills and competences of the subject, but also to potentiate that learning by collaborative, discussion, creative, etc. activities as described in the previous sections.

Example 2

Do the comprehension activity (analysis, synthesis, debate, discussion...). For a set period, a forum will be opened for students to participate based on the teacher's proposal. Under no circumstances should the teacher's question have a definite answer (for example: in what year was America discovered?). But it must give rise to group dynamics, which are used to understand and relate, with answers of colleagues and contributions, and the "copy-and-paste" of Wikipedia is not possible, for example:

- a. Indicate in order and justify who you think are the main parents in the European Union.

- b. How do you think the process of colonization of America would have changed (1 paragraph), if it were the Englishmen who would have discovered this new continent?
- c. The natural park (...) is being degraded as a result of tourism, but if it were not for the income of that tourism it would be hardly sustainable. What actions can be taken?
- d. What do you think was the main factor? Relationship?
- e. It summarises the text/ video (link to a PDF, video, etc.) very briefly (1 paragraph). This forces you to do an understanding task and at the same time decide what idea / message is important, and then (in a later task) make comparisons (within a work group, or in pairs).
- f. Allow learners to collaborate in groups and organize themselves. They will not only learn collaboratively, while sharing points of view or discovering things through discussion. Other competences as leadership, understanding and communication will be acquired.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Spot the difference



In a discussion group, with your classmates try to clarify following questions:

1. Advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face learning and online. Agreed among the group which is the main advantage and disadvantage of the face-to-face and virtual learning. The fact of having to decide four single characteristics within a group makes it possible for the participants not only to share their ideas, but also to defend and try to clarify and convince others.
2. How would you solve the previous disadvantage using blended learning? Share your thoughts with your classmates and reach an agreement.

Exercise 2: Time to reflect



Based on your subject or topic you are going to teach, which open questions would you propose for your students to discuss/practice the course content?

- What would you propose to increase the creativity and motivation of your learners in your topic?

TIP: Try to find which is your learners' interest. You can ask them or simply allow them to share in a first step the things they like or why they are learning such topic.

Summary



In this chapter you have learnt several modes of applying technology in the classroom and design a course by taking advantage of using different techniques and approaches. While designing a course, using technology in a seamlessly way is critical, including technology-based learning processes and activities, but not making a complete change on the way you teach. Having a full virtual course is very risky and could drive to withdraws of the students and what is worst: barriers for future ICT-based learning. As a summary: think on teaching methods you feel comfortable and start to include technology based small activities in your course design. As it goes better, take then advantage of the ICT tools as new opportunities for potentiating learning, not because ICT is nice and fancy.

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