Backup Material for Organizational Development & Training
Making the Case for a Blended Learning Environment

Blended learning is defined as the combination of different learning techniques. In the standard educational model, blended learning often refers to the use of laboratory equipment or computers to complement the class sessions and strengthen the teaching process through practice and the application of theories learned in class.

In the world of eLearning, blended learning refers to the complementary use of eLearning in the standard education model, due to the benefits it offers on a broad scale, to name a few, self-paced learning, testing and quizzing, monitoring and feedback.

Online Versus Face-to-Face Versus Blends

In 2010 the U.S. Department of Education reported an updated meta-analysis because technology had evolved considerably since 2004.

The report summarizes experimental comparisons of learning among pure face-to-face instructor-led training, pure Internet-based online learning, and blends of both. **The study concludes that,** "In recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blends of online and face-to-face instruction with conventional face-to-face classes, **blended instruction has been more effective**. When used by itself, online learning appears to be as effective as conventional classroom instruction, but not more so" (p. xviii).

Why Is A Blended Approach Better?

The main advantage of blended learning is the opportunity for instructors to make use of the features unique to each delivery environment that optimize learning. For example, in a class for new supervisors on hiring interviews, learners first complete an interactive online self-study self-paced lesson that presents guidelines and examples for constructing job-relevant and legal questions. A follow-on face-to-face class uses social presence by emphasizing role-play exercises on conducting the interviews and evaluating interviewee responses. In other words, using media blends lets the learning professional employ the unique benefits of each.

1) Learner is more engaged using a variety of content types

In the instances that the material presented is easy to grasp, an illustration is oftentimes a good way to help the learner sink-in the information faster. Another good way to have that effect is presenting the learner with practical examples of the theory taught.

Therefore, blended learning, using eLearning as the complementary method to enhance the traditional education model, uses a plethora of different material types, namely video, audio, visually enhanced presentations, helps keep learners engaged and makes sure that all material is easily understood and learned, something that is not always the case in the fast-paced environment of a physical classroom.

Within a blended learning environment, employees/learners can access training in smaller modules, or "chunks" of learning better suited to their own workloads and time constraints. Online coursework can be designed to present the learner with real-life workplace scenarios that might be encountered routinely, or in special circumstances. These online scenarios can provide the learner with choices which would then "branch" to the next issue/problem/decision based upon how the learner answers. Instant feedback, embedded in the online program, can be provided to the learner to assist them in their decisions or chosen "actions" throughout the learning program.

Research supports that providing learners with realistic, branched online learning environments is then best supported by shorter classroom training that supports and augments the online coursework by providing the opportunity to actually practice the skills learned online.

2) Different learner, different learning style

Clearly, no learning professional can make every learner happy. However, diversifying teaching methods is a good way to approach the issues that arise when offering an online course to a possibly large amount of individuals from all over. Blended learning complements both environments and helps all types of learners in various ways:

a) Time is always an issue in a physical class environment; you will either be restricted by a two- or four- hour limit and getting all the information across can be a difficult trivial task, especially when facilitating understanding is of essence. Blended learning allows for students/trainees their own time to assimilate it without the pressure of keeping up with the rest of the class.

b) Quizzing and Testing online allows for trainers to have more time to educate in the physical classroom environment. It earns the educator extra time to facilitate contact with students and answer questions, address concerns and make sure that everyone's issues are being resolved.

3) Instructor has the ability to assess learner trends and act accordingly

As advanced as technology may be, some things are just not doable in the physical education environment, and that's where the benefits of blended learning shine. Two of the many reasons that eLearning is very appealing to instructors is that it allows updating and tweaking of material on-the-fly. An awesome feature that some Learning Management Systems (LMS) offer is Reporting. Reporting is not only good because it allows for a graphical representation of information found within the LMS, but it's also a good way to have a quick overview of what learners are doing, how far they've progressed, how they score in different kinds of testing methods, amongst others features.

By trying out different methods of testing, quizzing, and even different types of material, a trainer has the ability to tweak around how much emphasis he/she gives on traditional types of material in eLearning (such as text and video), and how much he/she wants to diversify using other types of material or testing methods.

Blended learning greatly affects the way feedback is facilitated. Feedback is something that can be prepared online, and harvesting all the benefits that blended learning offers, provide that feedback to learners in the physical environment, simply using information the Learning Management System offers, in the forms of reports or automatically generated feedback.

Feedback is also very important for learners; it's the primary indication of performance and progress, which means that it's important to allow the trainer to have both the right tools and appropriate time to prepare feedback so as to assess and attempt to improve learners' performance as much as possible, spending as little time as possible.

5) It can make learning fun!
Learning is not a one-sided all-serious process. Simply adding an entertaining twist to online/mobile material is more likely to increase the engagement level of the learners. By fun I don't mean that learning should be set aside, but the combination of the two, through the usage of different and more interactive material (like presentations that are not just pages filled with bullet-points) but also through the usage of "Gamification". The end-of-day result should be to allow the learners to have access to information from anywhere, effectively empowering them to take learning into their own hands, create their own schedule, and enjoy the process by doing something interesting.

References
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