# What is blended learning?

A blended learning approach combines face-to-face instruction with remote, technology-mediated instruction. The technology is often a computer with an internet connection but it can include cell phones, touch screen mp3 players or tablets, videoconferencing, smartboards and other emerging electronic media that can connect to the internet. This approach recognizes the value of blending traditional ways of learning with newer knowledge spaces—for example, combining the use of online forums and traditional journals to express and explore learning.

The goals of blended learning are those of all adult literacy education: to provide realistic, practical opportunities for learners and instructors to make learning independent, useful, sustainable and continuous.

Blended 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.

Learners can expand their circle of learning and their community of interest beyond the classroom walls. One powerful outcome of blended learning for adult literacy learners is finding out that there are people in similar circumstances who have had similar experiences across the city, the province, the country and around the world.

Online learning can give learners access to "experts" in a way that may not be possible with face-to-face presentations—instructors still invite guest speakers from local community resource organizations but they expand the range of perspectives and knowledge available to learners by linking to
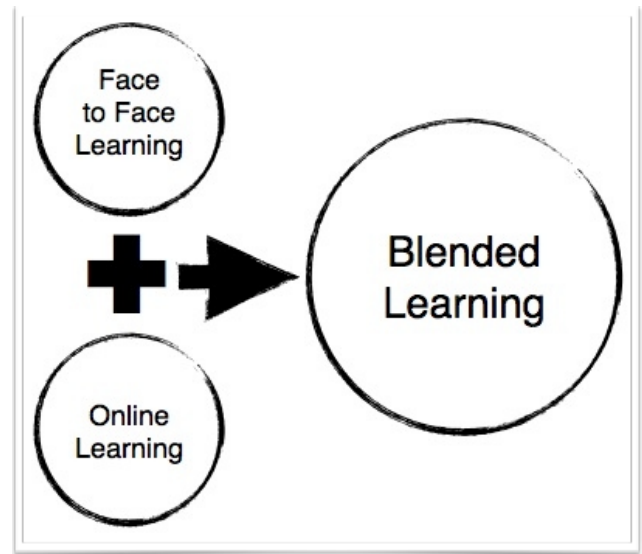
We are essentially social beings. We live in societies, of course; but more fundamentally perhaps, it is our participation in social communities and cultural practices that provides the very materials out of which we construct who we are, give meaning to what we do, and understand what we know. - Etienne Wenger[1]

It was good. I did not think it would be very good but I liked doing online when other people who I can talk to were doing it too. I don't know if I would like only online if I could not talk to other people face to face too. - adult literacy learner

If I run into problems, I know where I can go for information. ...The best and fastest way to find stuff is through the computer ...I've dug up information in one day that would've taken me three weeks before. - adult literacy learner

I learned that is such a place online were I can ask a question … without fear of making waves. - adult literacy learner

It's more confidential, more private. You don't have to expose your wrong answers to everyone else.. - adult literacy learner

online videos, podcasts and other resources. On Monday a class learns about local community health resources from a community health worker, on Tuesday they explore issues of social justice and leadership by listening to Bishop Desmond Tutu and on Wednesday they learn about current workplace health and safety practices from other learners and workers in an online chat.

As learners become more experienced in blended learning, they start to develop their own indexes, bibliographies and resource lists. Learners make meaning by understanding how ideas and concepts are connected and by developing networks. They demonstrate learning in creative and innovative ways if they can express ideas and concepts in their own spaces and through their own expertise (for example, hosting online chats or discussions).

> I liked being able to do the course from home anytime during the week and at school too and having enough time to think about what I was going to write. - adult literacy learner

> It would be real interesting. You could find out their interests. Maybe there's someone who's interested in the same things as me ... especially if they're close to the same age group. - adult literacy learner

> I'm waiting for the chat room to open up ... to get to know other learners... to get to talk to different people – find out where they're from. Maybe we could help each other. - adult literacy learner

> 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. - George Siemens[3]

Some principles of blended learning come from George Siemens'[2] work on connected learning:

- Learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions.
- Learning is a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources.
- Capacity to know more is more critical than what is currently known
- Nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning.
- Ability to see connections between fields, ideas, and concepts is a core skill.
- Decision-making is itself a learning process. Choosing what to learn and the meaning of incoming information is seen through the lens of a shifting reality. While there is a right answer now, it may be wrong tomorrow due to alterations in the information climate affecting the decision.

> To learn more, see the annotated bibliographies at Alphaplus: alphaplus.ca/en/web-tools/online-tools/

[1] Etienne Wenger, "Communities of practice: where learning takes place", *Benchmark Magazine*, Fall Issue 1991, Downloaded from www.ewenger.com/pub/index.htm

[2] George Siemens, *Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age*, December 12, 2004, Downloaded from www.elearnspace.org/Articles/connectivism.htm

[3] George Siemens, *Knowing Knowledge*, 2006 Downloaded from www.elearnspace.org/KnowingKnowledge_LowRes.pdf