

How to Make it a Win

in Blended Learning

Facilitator: Rachel Anne Normand, Program Manager



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Sarah Stocker (Contact North): These sessions are brought to you by the Learning Networks of Ontario in partnership with e-Channel. Sarah Gill from the Adult Education Association in Hamilton, will introduce today's presenter.

Sarah Gill: Welcome everyone. Just to give you a bit more background in terms of the Online Community of Practice webinar series, it began as a collaboration between Contact North and the Learning Networks of Ontario, and now it has expanded to include some of the support organizations as well, such as Community Literacy of Ontario and the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading. Contact North conducted a survey earlier this year that identified the need for more training around blended learning. Fortunately, the e-Channel providers were willing to partner with us to offer the first four webinars in this series. The fifth and final webinar in this series takes place February 22, and it's called « Tips and Tools from the Front Line ». In this session, you'll put the icing on the cake to add to your knowledge about blended learning. Best practices will be discussed along with successes using digital tools for their learners.

It is now my pleasure to introduce today's speaker, Rachel Anne Normand, a consultant and trainer with COFA. A graduate of French literacy and education, Rachel Anne enjoys combining her passion for language and teaching by focussing on content development and workshops. Her involvement with the coalition dates back to 2011 thanks to the many projects she has worked on through her language services company. Writer, editor and trainer, Rachel Anne is dynamic. Her professionalism and creativity make her

an incredibly valuable member of the field. I'd like to welcome Rachel Anne, and I turn it over to her.

Rachel Anne Normand: Hi everyone! Thank you, Sarah, for the lovely introduction. I'm really excited to be here today. I'll give you a bit more background about me. Since the beginning of this whole process, I have had a promotion and am now the Program Manager at F@D. Thank you to Contact North for hosting this webinar series. Today, you will see that I use a participatory approach, so please feel free to answer some questions in the chat box or to raise your hand and ask for the microphone. We will distribute your input following the webinar. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions!



I will give you some background information. As mentioned, I am from Le service de formation à distance pour adultes de l'Ontario.

So, Who are we and what do we do?

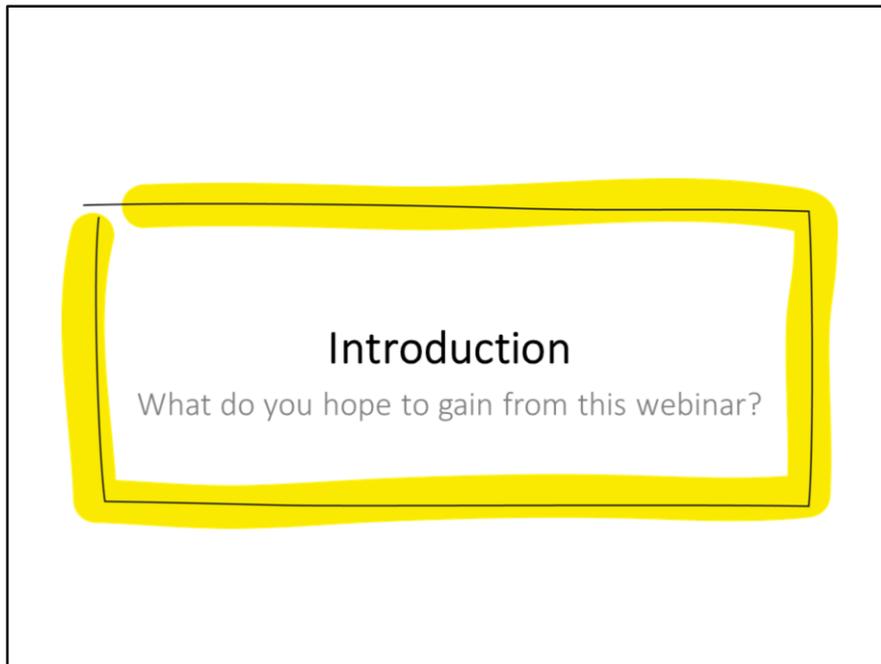
OUR MISSION	WHAT DO WE DO?
<p>To offer French Ontarians with literacy needs the possibility to reach their learning objectives by following courses that are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • either given entirely online, or • given partly online and partly in-class in a learning centre. 	<p>F@D offers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • free courses to develop writing, mathematical and computer skills; • referrals so that the learner may profit from the best possible learning experience; • an evaluation before registration in order to help determine which course would best fit the learner, as well as another evaluation after their course to verify what they have learned; • individualized learning plans clearly stating the steps to follow in order to reach learning objectives; • follow-ups to verify learner satisfaction.
	

The F@D's mission is to offer French Ontarians with literacy needs the possibility to reach their learning objectives by following courses that are either given entirely online, or given partly online and partly in-class in a learning centre. That's what we call blended learning. We are here today to talk about blended learning! In the Francophone sector, we work closely with our centres. If there are centres from the French sector online today, I want to thank you for using our services.

So what do we do? We offer:

- free courses to develop writing, mathematical and computer skills;
- referrals to centres or other services that the learner may profit from the best possible learning experience;
- We follow the entire process that you follow in your centres
- an evaluation before registration in order to help determine which course would best fit the learner, as well as another evaluation after their course to verify what they have learned;
- individualized learning plans clearly stating the steps to follow in order to reach learning objectives;
- follow-ups to verify learner satisfaction.

I'm here to talk about all of those things today to see how we can make it a win for everybody. How can we see that it is not a duplication of service? How can we work together to offer the best learning approach and process for our learners?



I'd like to start off by asking you a question.

What do you hope to gain from this webinar? Why did you register? I want to get a sense of why you are here today. When you saw the publicity for this webinar, what was your motivation to attend?

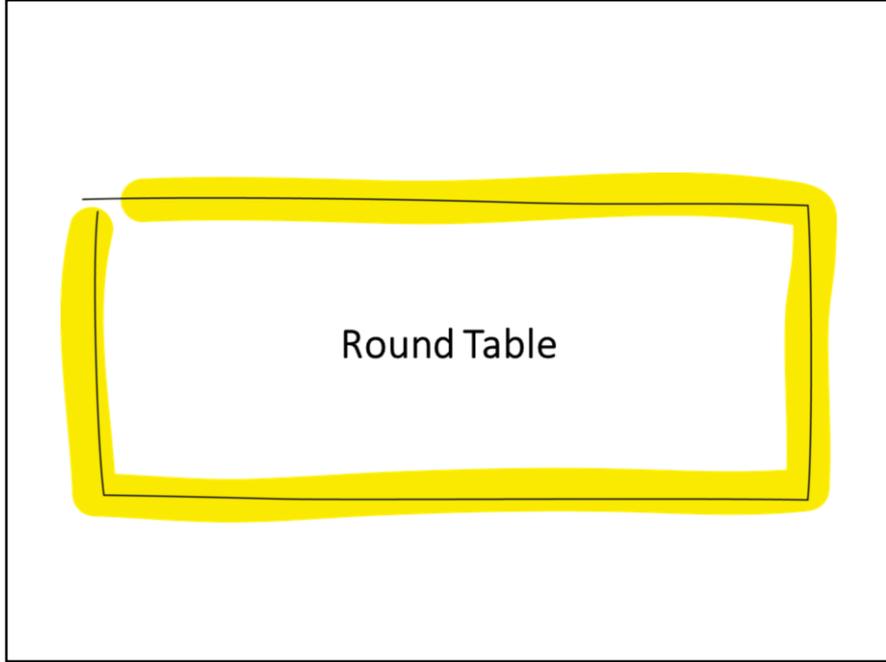
Participant Responses: To offer more options to our learners
To be able to support our learners better with less frustration for everyone.
How to sign up learners for two programs.
We would like to use blended learning more at our location.

I'm loving these answers! That's exactly why we created this webinar series – to see what we can do to help centres and demystify some myths.

More responses include: a better understanding about the e-channel learning process; to get tips and tools to help your learners; to be more efficient in giving our services; to get more information about blended learning and how to use it in my program.

Excellent. I am loving that you are participating. I will continue to ask questions and get you involved. Yes, I will lead the discussions and give tips and offer ideas based on my experiences, but mainly I want you to come up with the answers!

I will start off right away with a round table.



We are going to have a poll. I will show you the question next.

Round Table

@ Have you ever taken an online course? If so, briefly talk about your experience.

F@D

Have you ever taken an online course? If so, briefly talk about your experience.

Thank you to those who are responding to the poll. 96% have taken an online course, which is great. I am seeing that pretty much everyone is answering the poll.

We have 39 answers. 94% have taken an online course and 5% no.

If you have taken an online course, please send a text about your experience. How was it for you?

One participant is saying that she had a good experience.

Another participant says that there was a lot of self-study and that it was very boring and mundane. I can see how self-study when there is a lot of reading material can be boring. We will address that today.

Another participant says she had one wonderful experience and one frustrating one. I'd like to hear more about this – why was one frustrating and the other one great?

Another participant says she is not a fan of online learning. She prefers to be in the classroom with the option of asking questions ASAP.

“Discussion boards help with interaction but can be challenging.” We will talk more about how there can be challenges with the technology for some learners.

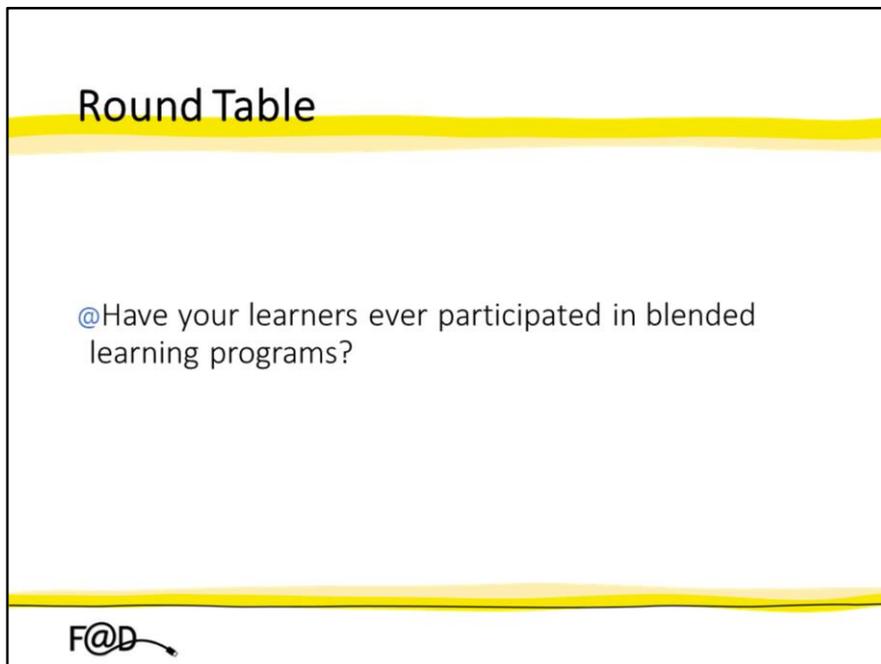
Another participant did a degree online and found it excellent.

Another participant writes that she finds online learning impersonal because you don't really make connections with your peers or generate meaningful discussions. We will address that today as well.

Another participant mentions that you have to be self-directed and good with computers.

Another participant says that it gets better as you become more comfortable with the platform. That is indeed a big part of the learning experience.

Another participant says that online learning works well with her schedule.



Have your learners ever participated in blended learning programs? If yes, please let me know using the check mark and red “x”. I’m just trying to get a sense of everyone’s experience.

I can see that we have pretty much an even split. Those of you who have this experience can give tips for those who haven’t.

A participant asks: Is a course with F@D a blended learning program?

If a learner is taking a course with a learning centre and with F@D at the same time, then yes, it is blended learning. If they are just registered with F@D, then it’s just online learning.

Let’s back up a bit and define blended learning. Blended learning is when we mix different types of learning. In the LBS sector, we have learning centres where learners can go, and we also have e-channel options that are also offered to learners. When a learner takes a class in a centre and an online course at the same time, that is called blended learning. But there are also other definitions. Someone mentioned that she had a lot of materials to read – that’s also a form of blended learning. Let’s say you are

in high school, university or college and you are taking classes in a physical classroom, but you also have independent study, that's a form of blended learning. So, blended learning is when you mix two types of learning together.

Round Table

@Which blended learning options are offered to your learners?

F@D

And here's our next question and another poll. Which blended learning options are offered to your learners?

You may have existing online materials such as pre-recorded lectures or quizzes. There are also web-delivered courses which are the actual virtual classrooms, kind of like what we are doing right now when the instructor and learners are online at the same time. You may also have workshops as well as webinars. Please choose the option that is most utilized by your learners.

The asynchronous, online learning materials is the most popular choice. It's an independent course. Learners are on their own, although they could be accompanied by a mentor or a trainer who grades the assignments and answers questions. This doesn't happen in real time. The learner would have to send a message via the learning platform or email or call. However, with web delivery courses, or virtual classrooms, everyone attends at the same time. You can use many different resources such as videos, audio, presentations. For example, one of our instructors was giving a nutrition course. She had all of her equipment there and thanks to the video, learners could actually see her pouring liquids and measuring things. She then asked the students to do the same thing. There was even one class where they all cooked together, although they were all in different locations. There are many things that can be done through web-delivered courses as well as with online learning materials.

Round Table

@Why did you choose blended learning for your learners, and which type of blended learning did you choose?

F@D

Now I'd like to get a sense of why did you choose blended learning for your learners, and which type of blended learning did you choose? Please write in the chat why you chose blended learning for your learners.

During this whole webinar, I'm asking a lot of questions because I want everyone to reflect on what blended learning is and what it can offer to your centre and to your learners. This is the participatory approach where you reflect on the question to come up with the answers.

We have lots of input in the text chat:

- It's best for their strengths and learning styles
- To provide another way to engage with the material
- To keep learning interesting
- To appeal to all learning styles
- Flexibility
- Offer more hours of training

Flexibility is being mentioned a lot in the responses as is offering different types of learning styles. Offering more options is also a popular response.

One participant notes that the courses the learner was interested in were not offered at her centre.

We will come back to all of these answers.

Round Table

@What are the barriers that are preventing you to register your learners for blended learning programs such as online courses?

F@D

Let's move on to the next question: What are the barriers that are preventing you to register your learners for blended learning programs such as online courses?

If you aren't registering learners or not as many as you know you could, what are the barriers? Be honest. Lack of access to the internet or to computers will be a common response.

What can we do to take those barriers down?

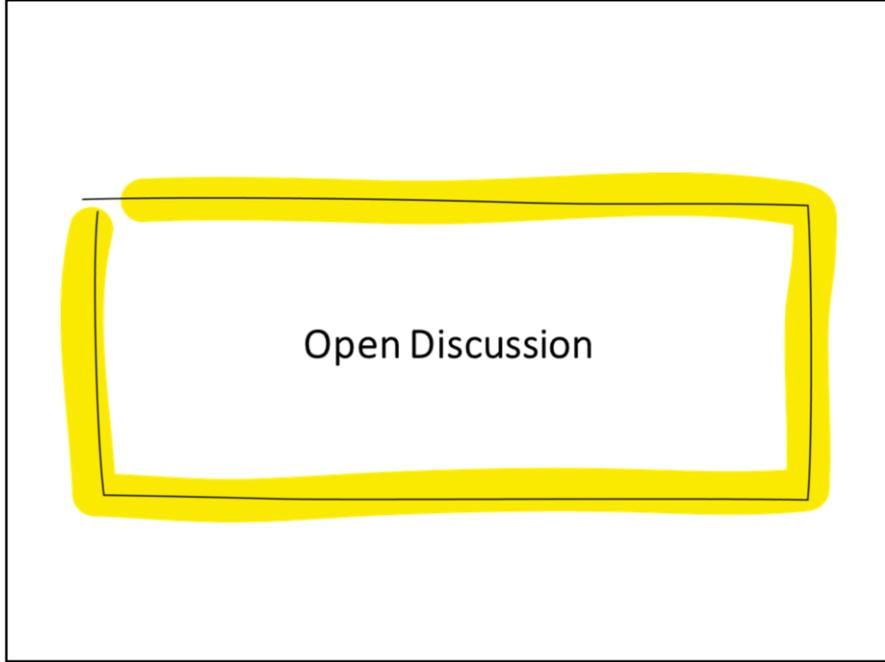
Other responses I am seeing include a lack of basic computer skills.

One participant notes that a specific course that a learner was interested in wasn't being offered.

We're going to try to find some tips and tools together to remove those barriers.

Another response is that low literacy skills can pose a barrier.

Sometimes registration is difficult for students.



Let's take all of these questions and have an open discussion to find some answers to reduce those barriers.

Let's discuss

@ How can you make blended learning a positive experience for your learners?

@How can you make blended learning a positive experience for your instructors?

F@D

How can you make blended learning a positive experience for your learners? As a trainer or an executive director, how can you do this? If you have had a positive experience as a trainer, what best practices do you have in place?

One participant says: offer courses that they are interested in.

Other responses include: input from online instructors; provide a short video of how it all works; have someone available to troubleshoot technical issues, preferably in person; provide technical support especially at the beginning of the training.

These are all excellent answers, and I'd like to go more in depth with some of them.

What I am seeing are responses that might not be completely tailored to what you as the trainer can do, but that's ok. We'll come back to that later.

What can you, as an instructor, do to make blended learning a positive experience? To offer a good experience, you might need to help them at the beginning. Let's focus on the positive outcomes it will bring. The first barrier might be that the learner might not know the benefits. Our attitudes as trainers will make a big difference. If you suggest that there might be some problems with the internet or that there might be a time gap in getting a response from the teacher, then you are promoting a negative environment. But if we're positive and explain that the learner will learn a new concept as well as develop self-confidence and technical skills and

that they will manage their learning, we can focus on the positive.

A participant notes that trainers should have good knowledge of what courses are available so you can tailor offerings in terms of the learner's literacy levels, interests and goal path.

Let's say that a learner doesn't have good internet access at home, what can you do as an instructor? What if they don't have a computer at home? How can you as a trainer help? We have some centres in our region that welcome learners in their centre and provide computers so learners can take courses. Sometimes they refer them to the library or another location with a computer they can use.

A participant suggests that we can make sure learners know where in the community they can access computers.

Another participant says to make sure that your learning centre has good computers and good internet access and is open convenient hours.

We spoke before about flexibility. We find that online learning is often good for people who are working or have other obligations during the day and may only be available at night. We need to think about what we can do to better accommodate those learners. Maybe we can be open one night a week and have a trainer on-site who can help, especially for those just starting online learning. Think about the first time you took an online course, how did you feel? Were you scared or frustrated? Did you lack confidence? Think about that to help decide how you can help your learners. Maybe you can be by their side when they get started so they can build confidence. Your goal could be to help them work towards taking the course at home independently.

Here's an example of what we do in our centre when we offer virtual classrooms. Our online trainer gives the course, but we also have a trainer who works with the group to act as a moderator. Sometimes learners are too shy to ask questions, and the moderator can help. The moderator can also let the trainer know if the pacing of their delivery is too fast or too slow.

I like this comment: offer open computer lab time and make students feel welcome when they drop in.

Another participant notes that some students live in the country and may not have transportation in to the centre.

As a trainer, you can make yourself available "on call" if you can't physically be present. Check with the online service provider because they provide technical support and can

also help out. We aren't dumping everything on you! Talk to the provider and see what supports can be offered for your learners.

We talked about videos. Some platforms have tutorials about navigating the platform. There may be videos to show how to send a message, answer a quiz or submit work. Having videos can really help visual students.

You can also develop cheat sheets. Online service providers may already have them in place. You can give them students to help remind them of what they need to do, such as how to log in to the course.

We're going to save all of the comments in the chat and distribute it along with other resources from this webinar.

Another suggestion is to take an interest in what the learner is working on.

Remember to focus on the positive. Let the learner know that even though they are taking an online course, you are still there for them.

So, for the trainer, how can you make blended learning a positive experience for you? Let's face it, sometimes we register our learners and then technical issues pop up and we feel overwhelmed.

Provide enough training. Engage with the delivery organization so you have a contact and can get some feedback. There are some systems in place that you can work with without duplicating the work. Here is an example of what we are doing: we have some forms that we send to the centres so that they know exactly what their learners are doing. For example, we let them know when a milestone is coming up. We share the learning plan. We don't want the participant to ask about why they have to fill out multiple registration forms. We can talk with the service provider and share the information so that we don't have to contact the learner twice. We can share milestones – we can send you the memo from the Ministry that outlines that we can share the same milestone. We're no longer talking about duplication of service or body snatching! See what the online service provider does and how you can get that information without having to duplicate efforts. Follow up forms is another good example.

Other responses include: build a relationship with the online instructor so you have a virtual team.

Do a dry run of the online course before the learner actually starts it. Ask the service provider if you can do a mock-up. For example, I got together with Sarah earlier this

week to make sure my camera and microphone were working. Then when the day arrives, you feel confident with your technical competencies.

Keep your hours manageable.

We have some teachers who actually take the course themselves to get a sense of the learning experience. Then if the learner asks a question, you can help.

Some of these tips might sound like we are adding to your workload, but look at the final outcome. Let's say you want to register your learners in a math course. You take it once, but you can help 50 learners with the course – you don't have to take it all 50 times. Then you can help your learners and engage them. It's time you can take to help your students. You will be available while they are taking the course, whether it's a virtual or an asynchronous course. As they become more independent, you might find that you end up with more free time at the end of the day.

Another participant mentions that instructors do like to try out some of the online courses. As service providers, we do want you to do that. But what we can't do is register you in our database! Your numbers don't "count" towards our targets, but that doesn't mean that you can't take the courses. Maybe some online service providers might be afraid that you will take the course and then deliver it in your provider. I'll be honest that we have had some discussion at F@D about when we share our material. As learning centres, we have done that between centres because learners couldn't travel but with online courses, everyone can attend. But I still think it can be a good thing to develop a good relationship with your e-Channel service provider and have a win-win approach for both of you. If you are taking the course to just have access to the material, that's not a good thing but if it's to assist your learners and develop a relationship, that's great.

Another participant notes that it's good to have a back-up plan in case of a technical problem. It happens. Sometimes the internet doesn't work well. We don't want your learners to have technical issues and find that they can't access their learning, so having a back up plan is a good thing. That can be as easy as talking with your online service provider and knowing what material will be covered in that session so you can engage the learner so they don't feel like they have wasted their time. Be prepared. That will help with the way you react and the way the learners experience online learning.

Group Activity

@ Advantages for learners to take e-learning courses

F@D

I'm feeling that these tips and tools are mainly what you want to focus on, so here's the next activity. I want to see if you would like to do this activity or if you think we should keep focusing on tips, tools and resources and we can skip this activity. I feel like my question was hidden in what I have been saying. This is another activity I wanted to do. What are the advantages for learners but also for you as instructors for registering for e-learning. Do we want to do that or do we want to stay focussed on tips and tools?

I feel like we have already covered this during the discussion about why you registered your learners.

Based on participant feedback, we will skip this and keep going with tips and tools.

Let's choose one barrier and address it to see how we can turn it into a positive experience. What are the barriers that prevent you from registering your learners in blended learning? Let's start with lack of computer skills. Will we talk about this on the learner's side or on the instructor's side? There may be a situation where the learner has good technical skills but the instructor doesn't. In our centre, we find that sometimes that is why we lack registration. The instructors sometimes feel that they

don't have enough technical skills to have their learners navigate.

Let's start with learners. When learners lack computer skills, what can we do to make that barrier disappear? What are some tips, tricks and resources that we can use? Some learners have no computer experience at all. We can offer in-person support. We can make sure that there is an instructor physically there to help. You can ask volunteers to do this. There might be people in your community who want to help. High school students have to do 40 hours of volunteer work so our centre asked high school students to come help learners navigate the learning platforms. They sat down beside the learner and helped them. They didn't do the work for the learners. When you are trying to help someone learn technical skills, it's important to not do it for them. Instead of taking the mouse and moving it yourself, show them the techniques and be patient.

Before referring your learner to an online course, you can offer computer training. That's where blended learning can also happen. If someone wants to take online courses, but your centre's hours don't work for them, you could make a plan with them where they come in to your centre to work on their computer skills. Once they feel confident, they can start online learning at home by themselves.

There are many free resources online that you can use such as videos on YouTube that explain how to use a mouse or a keyboard.

A participant notes that regular exposure to computers can help increase confidence levels. For example, find an online quiz about whatever subject you are working on so that the learner has an opportunity to go online and get comfortable with using the computer.

A participant suggests letting students watch others participate in online learning. This way you can show them what it looks like. You can also have learners offer peer supports to other learners. This also helps give confidence to the learner who provides support, because instead of being a learner at that moment, they become the teacher and help someone else learn.

Another participant suggests familiarizing students with the online accessibility features. Have a chat with the online service provider about what they are doing about accessibility and find out what supports are in place.

Ask if the resources are already in hand, such as a pre-e-learning course, which is something we are developing at F@D because we see that some people aren't registering because they don't yet have the technical skills. We are developing a course that we will send to our centres to use to help their students develop their technical skills before they register. I think the Learning Hub has a checklist to help identify if

students are ready for online learning. It's called a Readiness Checklist and is on their site. I will add the website to the slide – I hope it's ok that I'm sharing this resource!

Several e-Channel providers do offer orientation to online learning.

The Readiness Checklist includes questions such as “does the learner have reliable and high speed internet access?” If no, please hold off registering until access is guaranteed. On the side, there are some tips to follow. So have a chat with your online service provider to see what tools they have. E-Channel providers are starting to work together to share some of the tools that we have. At F@D, we are working on making a guide of our own.

If we look at lack of technical skills by the instructor, then the first thing for the instructor is to do is to build those skills.

As a reminder, we will be sending you today's presentation along with the text chat by email. I hope that today's presentation has answered some of the questions that you have! I feel like we could talk about this for hours.

Group Activity

@Advantages for instructors to register their learners for e-learning courses

F@D

Recap

@ What will you take away from all of these discussions?

@ After all that we've discussed, what can blended learning offer your centre?

F@D →

Just to recap, what will you take away from all of these discussions? Mainly what I want to know is what can blended learning offer your centre? Do you feel like you are more equipped to register your learners for online learning?

One participant says that there are tons of good resources out there to support both learners and instructors. If you aren't sure where to find them, talk to your online service provider who will gladly point you to them.

Another participant asks, "to engage with e-Channel learning, does this process have to go through an IT department in a school board or can an LBS program engage directly?" An LBS program can engage directly with an e-channel service provider, which is how we work in the Francophone sector and I believe it is the same in the other cultural groups.

Another comment is that blended learning offers access to a broader array of resources for our learners and also equips our learners to function in an increasingly digitized world.

Blended learning is more possible for all learners and taking the time to help the learners will be beneficial for both learners and instructors. You might find that it takes more time at first, but I can guarantee you that as you both become more familiarized with this

environment, the more you will see that you as an instructor will participate less. At first it will all be new and you will have to learn the platform, but like all good things it will eventually take less time and you will see the positives and the advantages it brings to both the instructor and the learner.

A participant comments that learners will make good progress with the blended learning option. They might be able to attend only 2 hours a week but with blended learning, they can spend more time learning.

It can free up a group instructor who can spend time with one learner while another one is involved with online learning.

Blended learning will prepare students for future learning.

I know that we weren't able to cover everything today, but I hope it was a good start and that you found it informative and got you thinking. I hope you are taking away some tips and tricks. Do talk with your e-channel service providers, get to know them, and see what you can do together. I speak for F@D when I say that I love when our centres give us ideas and tips, and I am sure that the other service providers appreciate that as well.

Closing Statement

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Thank you everyone for being here today and for your participation! I hope that you keep thinking about blended learning and that you will try it if you haven't, and if you have that you discovered some ideas to help you have a more positive experience. Here is our website and my email and phone number. I'd be glad to keep this conversation going and helping in any way I can. We are all working toward the same goal: we all want our learners to learn in a positive environment!

Thank you again and have a great rest of your day.

Sarah Stocker: Thank you Rachel Anne for a wonderful, enthusiastic and excellent presentation. I mentioned in the text chat that all of the e-channel providers will be following up this series of webinars with a resource for all of you to use, so watch for that to come out. We will also provide links for the recorded version of the webinar, and the various links and information gathered in this webinar will also be shared with you. Our final webinar in the series will focus on blended learning beyond e-channel.