

# BLENDED LEARNING

Integrating Technology and the Four Cs Into Literacy and Basic Skills



## What Is Blended Learning?

Blended learning is an approach where educators leverage technology and digital access for learners to create, communicate, collaborate and apply critical thinking skills to construct knowledge in our connected world. The Four Cs — collaborative, communicative, creative and critical<sup>1</sup> — are concepts that help educators make decisions about the ways they blend online and offline activities and integrate technology to support literacy, language and numeracy development.

## The State of Blended Learning in LBS

Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program supports the integration of technology in face-to-face learning centres and classrooms, and offers exclusively online courses through e-Channel.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic crisis forced many LBS educators to rapidly expand their integration of technology to provide remote learning options. Although LBS educators were able to facilitate access to e-Channel courses for learners, the vast majority adopted the use of a variety of communications and instructional technologies that considered learners' digital access and readiness to learn online.<sup>3</sup>

While many educators have quickly added additional technologies to their repertoires, more comprehensive integration may require a shift in the art of teaching. This is a time-consuming and resource-intensive process that some educators pursue on their own time, but educators need ongoing support and professional development to exchange insights, reflect on practice and experiment with new ideas.

AlphaPlus's approach to blended learning helps educators make decisions about what, when and how they engage learners with technology when it's appropriate and meaningful in the learning process and learners' lives. When programs are invested in blended learning, they are more flexible and responsive to the needs of learners whenever more online or more in-person engagement is needed. Blended learning is a scalable online learning solution with teacher presence at its heart.

## What Does It Mean For Educators?

### MULTIMODAL CONTENT

Include online and offline resources that are visual, auditory, text-based and kinesthetic, such as videos, podcasts, ebooks, textbooks, apps, online news, learner experience and experiential opportunities.

### AUTHENTIC LEARNING

Plan activities that involve making, practising, researching, discussing and inquiring about real-world issues, problems and applications.<sup>4</sup>

### ASSESSMENT

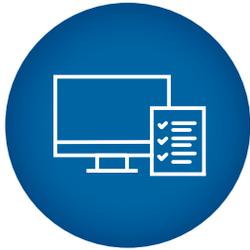
Align the mode of assessment with content choices, learning activities and goals, using presentations, displays, stories, observation checklists, written responses, research essays, discussion, creative outputs and testing.<sup>5</sup>

### TEACHER PRESENCE

Design, facilitate and direct learning with cognitive and social presence to create sustained and authentic communication with learners.<sup>6</sup>

# The Four Cs of Blended Learning

The following blending examples are from LBS programs and most were developed in partnership with AlphaPlus technology coaches. Additional details can be found online at [www.alphaplus.ca](http://www.alphaplus.ca).



## Collaborative

Educators develop blended learning experiences by collaborating with learners to ensure that learning takes place in real-world contexts and enhances learners' capability to be self-reliant. Learners are involved in the planning and decision-making processes about what, where and how learning will happen and have opportunities to draw on their experiences and existing knowledge. Content is chosen because it's meaningful to the lives of learners and the development of different types of knowledge. Technology is chosen when it's appropriate to develop relevant content and knowledge. Learners and educators co-create the curriculum based on the learners' goals and curiosity, so learners start to see themselves as people who can learn and make decisions about their own learning.

### Examples



Online notebooks, websites and classrooms (e.g. Evernote, Google Sites, Moodle or Google Classroom) support collaborative planning by organizing and managing resources and providing opportunities to work together.



Collaborative literacy-development activities focused on experiential learning and/or inquiry projects engage learners with peers and instructors to use technology in authentic ways.



Word processing, wikis and online open publishing of student writing (e.g. Pressbooks) support collaborative writing projects.



## Communicative

Technology is changing our communicative practices. It impacts the ways we receive, perceive and share knowledge and information about ourselves and how we connect to people, institutions and services. Participating online as a reader or as a more active poster, commentator, developer and collaborator can help learners build their networks.

### Examples



Interacting with government service websites helps learners to access services, resources and supports they're entitled to.



Posting on social media helps learners pursue their interests using dynamic and personally relevant content. It also helps them build peer networks that extend beyond the program to support learners in the long term.



Students' mobile devices are key communication tools that can be used in a variety of ways inside and outside the class.



Blended learning can be applied to all kinds of LBS providers, including individualized education and course-based, fixed curriculum.



When developing a blended learning approach, consider:



What are the learners' **experiences** and **goals**?



Do they have **access** to appropriate technology and other resources?



What is the educators' **expertise**? Do they have adequate support and time?



## Creative

Technology can support the sharing of an opinion, argument, solution or story in creative ways. Learners use technology to make meaning and develop documents, displays and experiences that integrate visual, auditory and textual modalities. Multimodal learning and demonstrations of knowledge that combine discussion and print-based activities provide learners with choices that support and enhance their strengths and preferences. Educators use technology to represent the same content in various ways that respond to learning styles or preferences by increasing the probability of retention, motivation, application and transferability.



## Critical

Learners build digital-literacy and self-advocacy skills and critically analyze information for relevance and trustworthiness. Educators play a vital role in learners being able to access online public and consumer services by offering situated learning opportunities where learners build confidence navigating and evaluating online environments. Building digital technology skills and knowledge helps learners manage high-stakes use of technologies (e.g. online interactions and form-filling tasks).

### Examples



Creating multimodal presentations allows learners to use a variety of online and offline skills.



Project-based approaches employ creativity-based digital technologies supporting computer-assisted design, photography and video production.



Using multimodal features of devices and readily available apps such as digital recorders, cameras, scanners and podcasts opens up possibilities for learners to strengthen literacy and numeracy and support their peers.

### Examples



Video conferencing and screen sharing help learners with complex learning challenges gain access to and fully participate in tutoring and face-to-face instruction.



Learners can critically evaluate online search results for websites.

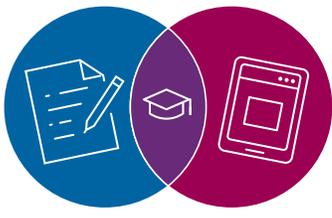


Understanding information privacy helps learners establish security routines and gain confidence when engaging with online services.



Using paper- and technology-based resources and tools inside and outside the classroom, learning can occur at times, at locations and in ways that best suit learners' needs.





# The Benefits of Blended Learning

## Flexible

Learners find increased flexibility and diversity in learning opportunities and gain a greater sense of what's possible with technology. As online government and consumer services increase, learners are better prepared to access them.

Blending online learning with classroom learning offers more choice and provides flexibilities for scheduling, increasing practise times and flipped classrooms (where learners get instructional content, usually online, before class and then focus on applying that knowledge in the classroom).

## Relational

Literacy learning is a social experience. Programs using a blended learning approach value the social relations among learners and educators to co-create learning activities.

Teacher presence is recognized in the learning process, and educators ensure a safe, constructive, supportive learning environment, both face-to-face and online.

## Empowering

A blended learning approach increases the potential for learners to continue to practise using technology and build their literacy and language skills when they step in and out of adult basic skills education programs, especially when they continue to have access to online tools.

Through online social communities and connections, learners build their networks, expand their circle of learning beyond the classroom and discover those with similar and different experiences around the world.

## Equitable

Blended learning can help to manage socially structured digital inequalities resulting in access barriers related to online connectivity, activity and benefits. It encourages self-empowerment by building digital literacy skills.

Using technologies can change power dynamics in learning relationships and distribute responsibilities more equitably between learners and educators.

## AlphaPlus Services Are FREE For LBS Providers In Ontario

Blended learning practice involves experts and novices. With AlphaPlus you can:

- **Catch up** — Brush up on using and teaching digital technology.
- **Keep up** — Stay current in the changing world of digital technology.
- **Get out front** — Use advanced tools and practices for innovative teaching.

## To Learn More

**Technology Coaching Service:**  
[www.alphaplus.ca/support-services/coaching/](http://www.alphaplus.ca/support-services/coaching/)

**Blended Learning Position Paper:**  
[www.alphaplus.ca/download/position-paper-on-blended-learning-in-adult-education/](http://www.alphaplus.ca/download/position-paper-on-blended-learning-in-adult-education/)



AlphaPlus supports LBS educators and co-ordinators to use blended learning approaches through our technology coaching service, face-to-face and online training, and tech support. If you'd like to know more about how blended learning supports basic skills and adult education, read the *Position Paper on Blended Learning in Adult Education*. It describes our understanding of blended learning, its benefits and how LBS learning can be conceptualized using a blended learning approach to best support adult learners with their life goals, including employment and further education. Additional content for the graphic overview developed by Christine Pinsent-Johnson and Matthias Sturm.

Endnotes: (1) We have reinterpreted the four Cs of blended learning for an adult education context. They were originally described by the National Education Association, "An Educator's Guide to the Four Cs: Preparing 21st Century Students for a Global Society," (2006). Available from: <http://www.nea.org/tools/52217.htm> (2) E-Channel is comprised of five agencies that deliver online distance learning for the LBS Program. (3) Initial findings from an AlphaPlus survey of over 300 participants. The survey report will be available at <https://alphaplus.ca/> (4) Great Schools Partnership, "Authentic Learning," *The Glossary of Education Reform* (2013). Available from: <https://www.edglossary.org/authentic-learning/> (5) Programs prepare learners to take a variety of tests directly related to their goals, such as college entry tests. In addition, program funders require testing. Ontario programs currently use the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) Milestones. (6) T. Anderson, L. Rourke, D. Garrison and W. Archer, "Assessing Teaching Presence in a Computer Conferencing Context," *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 5, 2 (2001): 1-17. Available from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228749393\\_Assessing\\_Teaching\\_Presence\\_in\\_a\\_Computer\\_Conferencing\\_Context](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228749393_Assessing_Teaching_Presence_in_a_Computer_Conferencing_Context)