

Let's Talk About Learning Technologies

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Distance learning, E-learning, blended learnings, synchronous and asynchronous learning – there are so many terms currently appearing in training literature, it can be overwhelming. According to Stephen Walsh¹, the term *Learning Technologies* has emerged as a broad, umbrella description that includes any form of learning resource that uses technology. The list of available tools grows daily, but can include:

- Virtual classrooms, where an online trainer can interact in real time with learners, give presentations, ask questions (OCWTP uses GoToMeeting)
- Social media
- Discussion forums or chat rooms
- Video and animations
- Simulations
- Blogs and Wikis
- Podcasts
- Mobile learning

Increasingly, our participants have had experience with a self-directed, asynchronous course, but the OCWTP is spending more time thinking about blended learning experiences or learning architectures that combine multiple and different methods to create an overall learning experience. The OCWTP's course on effective home visits is a prime example. Participants take a self-directed online course, complete an assignment over the course of a two week period with a family on their current caseload, and then join a virtual session with a trainer and participants from across the state to discuss their skill application.

Unfortunately, many hold false assumptions about distance learning and the use of technology to facilitate learning. Here are some common false assumptions:

Child welfare staff and caregivers are hesitant about taking online courses.

Over 6,500 Ohio child welfare staff and caregivers have taken online courses through the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program with positive results. They like not only the convenience of the delivery method but also the opportunity to gain needed knowledge and skills in a timely and relevant manner. Several noted they were required to interact more, not less in online courses.

Online training does not work for soft skills such as building team leadership, dealing with difficult families, or engaging youth.

¹ Article first appeared in *Inside Learning Technologies Magazine*, Jan 2013. Authored by: Stephen Walsh, Director, Kineo

Soft skills are tough to train regardless of the delivery method, but before giving up on teaching these important skills via distance learning, remember that technology does not teach these skills, you do. Technology is merely the delivery method. A well-designed distance learning can involve participants through brainstorming, reflecting, and responding to the work of others via blogs or wikis, or providing opportunities to model, observe, and critique skills.

Becoming a good distance learning trainer will require learning all new skills.

You will not have to start over. As a classroom trainer, you already know a lot about facilitating distance learning. Think more in terms of adding a new layer to your existing training skills.

Due to fiscal restraints and user demand, all training will eventually be delivered via distance learning.

Distance learning will never totally replace classroom training. Child welfare skills are complex and require skill practice and a chance to have values and beliefs challenged. However, blended learning courses that combine self-directed learning of key concepts with face-to-face training for skill practice and feedback, can make good use of our resources.

Learning outcomes for distance learning courses are lower than face-to-face training.

Numerous research articles indicate no significant difference in terms of learning outcomes between distance learning and traditional classroom settings. One study comparing web-based training to in-person training found higher knowledge scores from web-based learners and no significant difference on empathic concern and ability to consider differing perspectives.²

The easiest way to implement distance learning is to “dump” traditional course content and design into a distance learning format.

This is the easiest way to alienate participants. “Dumping” does not work. Engaging participants in distance learning is the key to success and retention of learners and requires building interactive training designs. Learning objectives should always drive your delivery method. You do not just do distance learning for the fun of it.

Learn More

Click [here](#) to take a short online course about facilitating distance learning.

² Delaney, R. (2009). Web-Enhanced Le'sPre-Service Training for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Parents. Phase I Final Report: A Small Business Innovation Research Grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Grant #1 R43 HD054032-01A1