

## Lessons Learned – A Hierarchy of Needs for Successful Blended Learning

My name is Vanessa Chapman – van Drunen, and I am a senior language instructor at the Dutch Defense Language Institute. In this 30 minute talk, I present the basic discussion about the role interaction plays in language learning, three tools I use for designing curriculum, and my personal experiences of success and failure in the first iterations of two blended courses I taught last year. After reflecting on my lessons learned, I designed a tool – a hierarchy of needs – that I feel visually represents the components necessary for a successful blended course. This pyramid, used in combination with two other useful infographics that I discuss, will aid you tremendously when making decisions related to your course design.

### 1. Social interaction and non-interactive online content

There is no doubt that social interaction is necessary for language learning and acquisition. We also know that plenty of language learning takes place through online and offline content that is not interactive, such as TV series and reading. If people are motivated to search for content they are interested in, despite a language barrier, they ultimately end up learning more about the language as well. The responses to the question, “Where did you really learn English?” show that language learning does not only happen in the classroom, and also not only in social situations. Hence, the need for a **blend**.

### 2. The pyramid

The pyramid I designed is composed of the following levels, starting at the bottom with the most basic needs.

Basic: If these needs are not met, the curriculum will not be blended. Students must have a place to sit and learn, and also be able to access the internet and course material. For example, does the student have a desk or table to work on? Do all the students have access to their online accounts? These are all things that need to be checked before the course can begin.

Psychological: If these needs are not met, the students will not be able to learn the content presented very well. Not only do the students need the mental space to learn (such as the ability to focus uninterrupted), it is also imperative that the course is adapted so that the timing of activities is conducive to learning, and that there is a balanced offering of types of activities as well as location of the activities.

- Types of activities need to be varied in terms of collaborative/independent. Keeping a good balance of offerings, keeps the students engaged. Do not confuse this with unpredictability, much research shows that predictability is very important for students, but within your course, make sure you are choosing a variety of activities from all 4 quadrants.
- Location: remember it's about balance, not all or nothing. The balance per week of location needs to be well thought out to ensure that that students have enough distance, but also enough f2f time.

- Timing of the online lesson is essential. After every 10-15 minutes of teacher talk, the students then need an activity to do themselves. Grammar lessons are very well-suited for this.

Self-fulfillment: If language learners are motivated to take risks with the language and seek out information on their own, they are on a path of life-long learning.

Different courses will be filled with different types of students. One thing that is fairly constant in vocational education, though, is the desire to “see how it’s done” in the job that the students will be working in. Giving the students a taste of how the learning will benefit them in their careers or personal lives motivates them to seek the information out for themselves.

Once an activity hooks the students, they are much more motivated to ask questions and seek out information on their own. Here is where the non-interactive YouTube learning comes in. If you want to know more about an ICEX (naval ice exercise), finding videos about submarines in the Arctic is interesting, and listening to the sailors talk about what it’s like to take part in an ICEX teaches you more (vocational) English as a result. If a student is in the “self-fulfillment” tier of language learning, then YouTube is not a chore or a lesson anymore. It is a source of information for something the student is already interested in.

### 3. The matrix for design choices

The matrix for choice of design and working methods is a tool I received from the education specialist at the Dutch Defense Language Institute, Marleen Luwaert. I have translated it to English and have added examples of activities specifically for language instruction. Once you are sure the levels of your pyramid are in place, this matrix is invaluable in determining which activities belong where: the “type” and “location” from the pyramid. Depending on the learning goal, the matrix helps you choose between offline/synchronous, online/synchronous, offline/asynchronous, and online/asynchronous.

### 4. Typical week infographic

The third infographic in this presentation is equally powerful. It is a matrix for a “typical week” of blended learning. Anytime we discuss blended course design, I believe this quadrant needs to be involved. There are many versions, but I really like this one. The author has a link on her Twitter account to download it for free. <https://twitter.com/jenniferwathall/status/1225994161528066049>

This graphic helps us make sure that our course is well-blended over time, ensuring the students have a balanced week/month/semester. In each colored quadrant the goal of the tasks is the title with a list of those kinds of tasks under it. Concrete examples of what those tasks could be are listed in the black and white bulleted box next to it, and in the yellow box on either side of the whole matrix you find examples of online tools that would be well-suited to activities on the side they appear on.

### 5. Mistakes and wins

Once the foundation is set with the pyramid and quadrants, it’s time to get creative and make the course. Here, I want to let you see some first-hand experiences with the first two blended courses I

taught last year. I have organized it per level of the pyramid to show you what can go wrong when the levels are not well considered – the mistakes – and also to show you some of the really positive improvements we were able to make as a result – our wins.

## 6. Takeaway

In conclusion, I simply want to hear from you.

What will you take away from this presentation, now that we have looked at the pyramid and the quadrants? What changes or ideas do you have for an activity or a course you currently use?

Please open your camera in your phone and hover over this QR code; it will take you to the Padlet I have set up. Here you can type your response and see what ideas others have.



## 7. Contact info

Please feel free to get in contact with me. I am very happy to collaborate and am especially interested in learning from BILC colleagues about vocational language education. My contact information is below, or you can scan the QR code with your camera to import it directly to your phone.

Vanessa Chapman – van Drunen

Senior Language Instructor

Dutch Defense Language Institute

[VD.Chapman.v.Drunen@mindef.nl](mailto:VD.Chapman.v.Drunen@mindef.nl)

T +31 6 82266954

