



The Future of Individual Classes

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Abstract

Training is a sound investment only when you are able to measure the results. The investment is not only financial but mainly human in terms of time spent on learning, instead of producing if thinking like an industrial company by example.

This sounds obvious but is absolutely key to any firm engaging in training actions. It would be absurd to separate training action and return on investment or expectations.

In the first part of this article we will demonstrate why distance individual training is the most effective, time saving and result oriented type of training.

In the second part of this paper we will develop how globalization and digital changes have transformed the way we work and how these changes have affected in turn the way trainings ought to be conducted. In the third part we will demonstrate why distance individual classes are the future of language training.

1. Why individual classes are the future of language education?

With today's quickly evolving technology, one could think that computers and software are the future of education. After all, we spend more and more time on screens and software designs, and hence, programs are getting smarter every day. Although this could be true for a lot of subjects, this would be forgetting one thing: languages are used to communicate. Without communication there would be no life as we know it.

Communication is all about exchanging information, ideas, emotions, opinions between individuals. This is something that computers will never succeed in doing, not because it is technologically impossible but because individuals need to have feedback from other individuals, not machines.

In the case of languages, learning with machines has its limits. Human interaction cannot be replaced. Indeed nothing can replace the precious exchange that a learner and a qualified native speaker share. More than just listening and understanding, the learners can take time to form sentences, enunciate them and get the necessary real-time corrections. But mostly human trainers can adapt and change delivery to meet the learners' needs and learning styles [2]. This is the only way to keep learners engaged and motivated.

Time alone, spent learning is not how we learn. We need to devote time and attention. One of the trainer's main roles is to spark the learner's interest in order to elicit attention. This is not magic. It is simply a matter of understanding the learners' needs, setting clear and attainable objectives and adapting to the learners' learning styles [2], taking into account their initial acquisitions. This is how Kirkpatrick [3] set out to define return on expectations and what every individual learner and firm engaging in training are looking for.

This puts both the learner and the trainer at the center of the training as both have essential roles to fulfill in order to achieve learning goals.

Why individual courses and not group classes?

After all, group classes do have all the human components necessary to engage in learning. Group classes may also seem to be more cost effective. However if you consider that time has more value than money, which is often the case, then the return on expectations and investment is low and somewhat deceitful in the case of language acquisition. The trainer, however good, cannot individualize the content of the course to all members. Each participant arrives with their own pre-acquired skill set, objectives and learning style. Kolb [1] identifies four-stage cycles of learning, in which 'immediate or concrete experiences' provide a basis for 'observations and reflections'. These 'observations and reflections' are assimilated and distilled into 'abstract concepts' producing new implications for action which can be 'actively tested' in turn creating new experiences.

The learners also have various needs and the contexts in which they wish to enhance their language skills vary considerably. Creating homogenous groups is close to impossible if you take in account

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these criteria (previous level, needs, learning style and learning speed and skills usage context). Even more so if you include Burns' 7 criteria to differentiate learners.

While we know that social constructivism [4][5] is essential in learning, including of course for languages (as I stressed earlier, inter personal communication is paramount), this is not always the case in group lessons. However learners don't lack the social learning component as they practice languages with their peers at work. The newly acquired skills are generally put to use straight away in the genuine environment it was meant for.

Face to face individualized trainings have been the norm for many years, as this was the "traditional" high end teaching method. Yet, even this has restrictions. Most of the limits are due to time constraints linked to globalization and the digital revolution as explained hereafter.

2. How globalization and technology have changed the way we work

The effects of globalization and IT in the workplace are numerous. From the nature of organizations to the daily tasks accomplished by the workforce

The operational impact of globalization and IT are leading companies to gear up and face what are seen as irresistible and "seismic" forces for change in the short and medium term. This no doubt has significant implications on training and development.

Globalization means more Multinational corporations than ever before. For the workforce it means that you often either work for one or work with one. Companies only dealing with domestic customers and clients are more and more rare. [6]

This means that the demand for operational use of worldwide languages is rising every day. Traditional education in most countries has not yet managed to bridge the gap. The bulk of the European workforce was trained in many countries which only provide basic knowledge of languages. This is changing slowly but most countries are still delivering graduates who do not have the minimum language requirements to work in our globalized economy.

Now add that to the current digital revolution in knowledge and information processing [7] and you get the need to communicate around the world in record time in the target language.

Through the widespread use and interconnectivity of mobile networked devices and mobile telephony, internet websites and resources have become a de facto standard in digital communication and have transformed the way we communicate at work.

The digital revolution and globalization have revolutionized the rhythm and the pace at which we work and exchange communications more than any other factor.

While in the past you could take time to write a letter or send a fax, messages are getting shorter and shorter but growing in quantity. The magnitude of messages sent and received are in constant increase. The need for precise and relevant vocabulary to avoid miscomprehension is higher than ever.

Competition is also a key factor in need for efficiency and cost cutting.

Traveling time has been reduced to a minimum. Face to face encounters are getting rarer all the time. Meetings are more often than not conducted via web-conference systems.

In this context face to face trainings are declining as they produce unwanted travel time and lack of flexibility.[8]

And it is about to get worse. A study from Accenture named "Fast and furious" describes the new trends and the style of work we may be on the verge of entering.

This is why it is necessary to have the very best and most time effective way to learn required skills.

3. Why we believe that distance individual lessons are the future of education

Compared to traditional face to face individual lessons, distance individual lessons (be it by phone, skype or web-conference) have three main advantages they are both more flexible, more effective and better adapted to today's exchanges.

First, educationally, body language and nonverbal communication often hinders progress. During distance training sessions body language is eradicated. Learners can't rely on tacit agreement with a subtle nod or express incomprehension through facial mimics.

In our experience, reducing the scope of communication by removing much of the non verbal communication is a key factor in enhancing improvements.

This is something that we have been experimenting with for the last 5 years with more than 100,000 hours of training delivered.

As explained previously, communication is becoming more and more instantaneous.

Emails go back and forth all day, people pick up their phone or issue a skype call to get a quick answer. Meetings are generally planned through web-conference instead of around a table and instant



messaging is making its way into our communication habits. In these situations non native speakers need to use the target language without prior preparation. This is one of the reasons why training over the same media provides essential practice.

As we know, training is all about context. If we keep practice and knowledge acquisition in the workflow we come closer to the 70-20-10 rule and manage to transfer this acquisition into habits. Pushing the right resources at the right time in the work environment is how we can really help learners progress.

We believe that training in the same context used by the learner (phone or web-conference) in everyday business situations is the closest you can get to experiencing and helping steer away from traditional class rooms and low-retention learning.

For language acquisition the 70-20-10 rule can't apply completely. I have seen many learners complain that they don't progress although they use languages every day at work. The reason for this is that coworkers are not there to correct mistakes or offer language tips. Even if they provide vocabulary, as it is not used immediately after the exchange it can't be assimilated.

So the combination of using genuine work situations and offering language tutoring is simply the most efficient way to progress.

More than just developing language skills this allows learners to feel more at ease, happier in their positions and take more responsibilities in their day to day jobs.

The effectiveness gained by training professional adult populations reduces the hours necessary to achieve operational goals. This is why we are firm believers that both from an educational and an economical stand point individual distance training sessions are the future of education.

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