Pivoting to
Virtual Classrooms
in Light of
COVID-19

THE eLearning
GUILD

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INTRODUCTION

This eBook presents archived material from *Learning Solutions* and The eLearning Guild Online Event Archives addressing your need to plan and execute changes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

What has happened to the world?

As late as January, 2020, articles speculated about "the nature of work" and "the changing workplace." In a matter of two months or less, those concerns were swept away by the unexpected emergence of the novel coronavirus and its spread around the globe.

Today, organizations worldwide are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, related physical distancing (social distancing, spatial distancing) ordered by governments and public health officials, and shelter-in-place orders and other actions intended to reduce opportunities for the spread of the coronavirus. This has changed the way that people work, and in some cases it has changed their work itself. Inevitably these changes have affected learning and development activities because the "normal" way L&D carried these out required travel and large group gatherings.

A pivot to distance learning

The adjustment that organizations are making is to pivot to teleworking from home or remote offices, and to distance learning through virtual classrooms and asynchronous formats. Distance learning is replacing training, orientation, and onboarding activities, and even coaching.

The 15 *Learning Solutions* articles in this compilation, as well as the online archive resources, look at strategy, design, and delivery of formal training for a dispersed workforce, using virtual classroom technology, and not involving delivery in group settings. They address the strategic (curriculum design and infrastructure) as well as the tactical (facilitation of instruction in a virtual setting and engagement of employees in learning activities) sills necessary to pivot to distance learning.

Our hope is that these ideas will help you with your immediate response to the challenges L&D faces today.

Bill Brandon
Senior editor, *Learning Solutions*
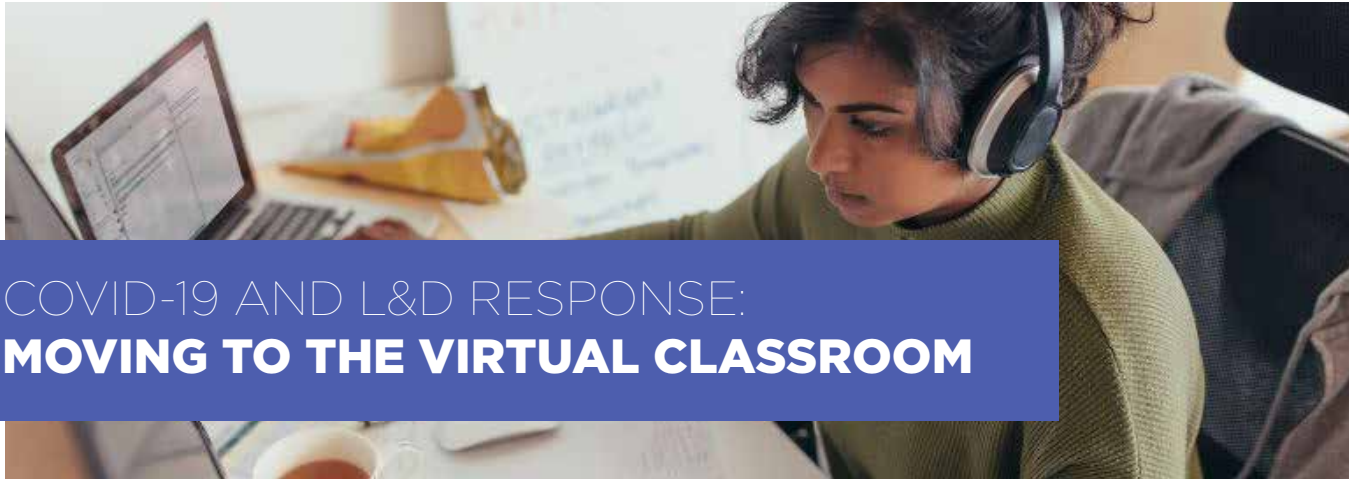
COVID-19 AND L&D RESPONSE:
MOVING TO THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has many elements, but social distancing, sheltering in place, and generally reducing opportunities for the spread of the coronavirus are part of everyday life and work worldwide now and for the foreseeable future. This is bound to affect learning and development activities since so much of the normal way we carry these out involves travel and group gatherings.

One adjustment already underway, along with an increase in teleworking, is a shift from in-person delivery of learning and development—training, orientation, onboarding—to distance learning through virtual classrooms and asynchronous formats.

The eLearning Guild and *Learning Solutions* have a lot of archived material that will be useful as you plan and execute for change. This article is the first of three that will focus on making that transition.

Situated learning

People are learning all the time, and most of that learning does not take place in a classroom or through asynchronous instruction. What has changed in the last couple of months is the social setting within which work and learning are situated. Working from home, or in office settings where many other employees are no longer present (because they are working from home), or where gathering in groups larger than a mere handful or two is not permitted, requires rethinking and "re-situating" many aspects of the ways organizations (especially L&D) have supported learning.

Learning takes place in three different settings. There is:
- Learning that is picked up on the job: tacit knowledge; workflow learning
- Learning gained from other people: coaching, apprenticeship, and job aids, connections to co-workers, supervisors, experts, and reference materials
- Learning that comes from formal training: synchronous in-person training in a physical or virtual classroom, asynchronous courses

As the social setting of work changes, it is going to be necessary to supply support that maintains learning. This introduces some scope problems: L&D does not have and never did have the scope to replace learning picked up on the job or gained from other people. Much of this support comes from other sources. What L&D can do is to attempt to arrange or facilitate mechanisms or channels for those. L&D can also modify the ways in which it delivers formal training so that it can be done "at a distance."

Strategy, design, delivery

Learning and development professionals can approach the scope and facilitation challenges by thinking about the strategy, design, and delivery of learning support within each of the social settings to which work is relocating—not of "training," but of support.

- **Strategy**: The big questions. What does it take to communicate and preserve tacit knowledge, workflow learning, coaching, apprenticeship, and formal training when the social settings of work are dispersed?
- **Design**: How is it possible to meet workers where they are and to support them effectively there?
- **Delivery**: How can the necessary learning assets be made available to workers in each setting?

The answers to these questions vary according to the nature, location, and settings of work and workers. For example, L&D can develop methods by which employees can find and connect to experts in order to tap into tacit knowledge. By conducting methods analysis, L&D can identify ways to support learning within workflow, to support apprenticeship and coaching, and otherwise facilitate skill development in non-traditional ways.

What follows are five foundational articles, curated from *Learning Solutions*, about the big questions (methods, conversion, platforms, presenting, design) to consider when identifying strategy for shifting formal training for a dispersed, decentralized, or isolated employee population from the physical, instructor-led classroom to the virtual classroom.

Choose Virtual Classroom Methods to Support Learning Goals

September 5, 2019

Karen Hyder

Virtual classroom platforms offer a wealth of tools; learn how to align your use of these tools with learning goals.

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Five Best Practices When Converting Classroom Content for the Virtual Classroom

February 15, 2017

Adam Stone

Taking traditional training materials online is akin to substituting baking soda for baking powder. It can be done, but it's not a straight one-to-one translation. Adjustments must be made: content, learner situation, format, and more. Here are five best practices for making those adjustments.

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Five Questions to Ask When Choosing a Virtual Classroom Platform

January 18, 2017

Pamela Hogle

Choosing a virtual classroom platform can be overwhelming—there are so many good options! These five questions can help eLearning developers focus on getting the features that they need and avoid making a costly error.

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Expert's Guide to Presenting Solo in a Virtual Classroom
November 29, 2017
Pamela Hogle

There's no need to be nervous about presenting solo in a virtual classroom; with planning and preparation, your session can go off without a hitch.

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The Keys to Engaging Virtual Classroom Training? Planning, Design, and Channeling Oprah
February 14, 2017
Pamela Hogle

Being a great presenter is only the beginning of what an instructor needs to engage learners online. The ability to build rapport with an audience you can't see is essential.

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HOW TO DELIVER LEARNING IN VIRTUAL CLASSROOMS **DURING PANDEMIC**

How is it possible to meet workers where they are and support them effectively there during a pandemic? We are challenged today by having to design formal training for delivery in settings where workers are dispersed and where gatherings of people for training are not practical or permitted.

Here are five more resources that offer detailed help for virtual delivery.

[Use Microlearning Assets to Fuel the Virtual Classroom](#)
March 5, 2018
Jennifer Hofmann

Microlearning is more than short videos! As Jennifer Hofmann points out, blogs, infographics, videos, podcasts, and worksheets are just a few of the microlearning options available. She suggests a dozen ways to use these assets to offer a dynamic way to bring a modern learning approach into the virtual classroom. Jennifer also provides two infographics that summarize a design approach for bringing microlearning into the virtual classroom, and ideas on how to use chat, whiteboards, and other virtual classroom tools to deliver microlearning.

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[Five Productivity Hacks for Virtual Classroom Teachers](#)
September 15, 2017
Liz Hardy

Changing from a comfortable and familiar instructional delivery approach to a brand new and unfamiliar one in a virtual environment is stressful, even without a pandemic as background. Liz Hardy offers an alternative approach to multi-tasking that stops the busywork and gets you productive. You don't have to run in place. Here are five ways to stay on track and ensure you're being productive— not just busy.

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[Book Review: *The Essential Virtual Classroom*](#)
January 21, 2015
Bill Brandon

Darlene Christopher guides the reader through planning, rehearsing, executing, and conducting a post-session review (PREP). Darlene does this in a way that provides mastery of the mechanics and that shows how to use the potential of technology to teach and inspire learners. Rather than rely only on her own experience and anecdotal evidence, or on assumptions and misconceptions about virtual learning, she bases her approach on research into what actually works.

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Addicated to Virtual Classroom Breakout Rooms? Get Help Now!

August 21, 2019

Karen Hyder

Karen Hyder, a pioneer of the virtual classroom environment, says that you don't have to attempt to base every interaction in the virtual classroom on what you did in the f2f (face to face) classroom. In fact, there are many reasons not to use virtual breakout rooms the same way you did in the physical space. Karen shows you when and how to use virtual breakout rooms in a way that supports your learning objectives and justifies the time and effort required to set up and execute breakouts.

Designing Engaging, Interactive eLearning for the Virtual Classroom

February 22, 2017

Pamela Hogle

Cindy Huggett offers her tips for converting in-person training to successful eLearning. She walks you through the process, beginning with her "untraditional" advice: to remember everything that you already know about what makes really good training, about good design, and about adult learning. Her common-sense, practical approach will guide you well. Her key messages: "... just the idea of getting to know the technology and not being afraid of it, and remembering that it is still learning.

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ONLINE CONFERENCE SM
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VIRTUAL CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT TACTICS **FOR COVID-19 PANDEMIC**
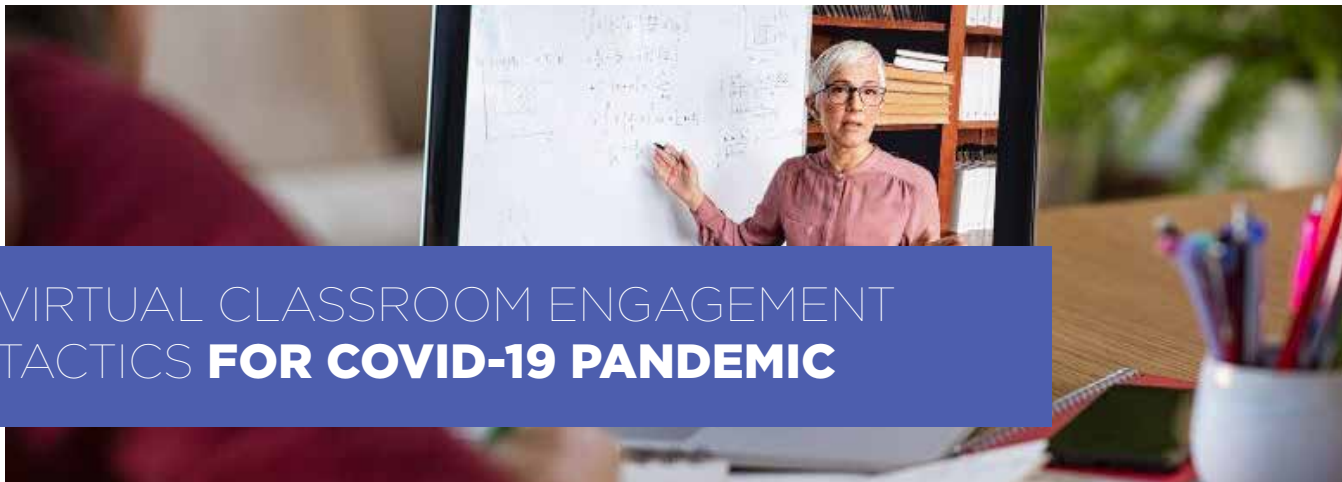
In the two previous articles in this series I listed 10 resources for virtual classroom design and delivery, published in the past in *Learning Solutions*. I will wrap up the series with an additional five that are more tactical in nature.

In future *Learning Solutions* articles you will find suggestions for working from home and ideas for managing remote employees who are working from home. These articles will include tips about security and other helpful hints.

If you have particular topics related to working from home that you would like to see addressed, please email me at bbrandon@ elearningguild.com. In the meantime, I hope you and yours are staying safe and finding ways to stay connected as we go through this very difficult period.

[Five Essential Skills for Virtual Classroom Facilitators](#)
April 11, 2017
Pamela Hogle

Cindy Huggett discusses "five key competencies" for virtual classroom delivery that she has identified in her research and through experience. Mastering these skills is essential to facilitating live virtual classroom sessions that are engaging, polished, and professional. Karen Hyder gives tips for "owning your message" through practice and preparation that will ensure authentic delivery.

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[Get and Keep Learners Engaged in a Virtual Classroom](#)
March 3, 2020
Jennifer Hofmann

Jennifer Hofmann tells you how to meet the challenge that the virtual classroom presents to instructors: getting participants to interact, contribute, and be engaged. It takes more than asking a question or running a poll every three-to-five-minutes. It takes getting collaboration. Jennifer helps you differentiate hosting a webinar from leading virtual training, a key distinction for being successful.

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[Nuts and Bolts: Rocking the Virtual Classroom—What About That Whiteboard?](#)
April 5, 2016
Jane Bozarth

Jane Bozarth shows how to use the whiteboard as a working space, not just a screen for displaying slides. You can use that whiteboard to help learners access their own prior knowledge, stay focused, and reflect on their experience. She advises "use a producer and know how to use the tools you have in the virtual space."

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[Nuts and Bolts: How to Rock Your Virtual Classroom with Participant Chat](#)
May 3, 2016
Jane Bozarth

In this article, Jane Bozarth addresses the skills needed to use participant chat effectively to conduct activities and structured discussions, going beyond chatting and offering commentary. Large group? No problem. Brainstorming and role play? They're a piece of cake if you follow Jane's examples. You can make the virtual classroom more than a passive, lecture-only experience, and you couldn't ask for a better person to show you how.

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[Virtual Classroom: Low Cost, High Value, Personal Experience](#)
March 12, 2020
Bill Brandon

In this interview, Cindy Huggett offers tips that will help you make maximum use of the virtual classroom space to promote collaboration and deal with topics that are challenging for online delivery.

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ADDITIONAL ELEARNING GUILD ONLINE RESOURCES

Virtual Classoom Online Conference
April 1, 2020
Presented by Karen Hyder and Melissa Chambers

Take a deep dive into virtual classrooms via this four-session Online Conference. Video and handouts offer best practices gained from over a combined 40 years' experience designing, developing, facilitating, and producing online events. The in-depth sessions cover instructional design, virtual classroom platforms, facilitation, and production.

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Using Virtual-Classroom Techniques in the Physical and Blended Classroom
June 6, 2013
Presented by Karen Hyder

Access an audio recording and handouts to identify where a virtual/physical blend could improve learning programs and activities; learn vital steps for successful delivery in any classroom; understand modern ground rules to establish with learners; and learn how to adapt your design and delivery plans to use VC techniques in all classrooms.

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Engaging Learners in the Virtual Classroom
March 5, 2015
Presented by Cynthia Clay

This audio recording can help you avoid three deadly mistakes that result in "blah" learning experiences; embrace five discovery learning practices that enliven the virtual classroom; and create "aha" moments to captivate your learner.

ADDITIONAL ELEARNING GUILD ONLINE RESOURCES

Training Knowledge Workers Virtually at the World Bank
February 25, 2015
Presented by Darlene Christopher

Access an audio recording and handouts to identify where a virtual/physical blend could improve learning programs and activities; learn vital steps for successful delivery in any classroom; understand modern ground rules to establish with learners; and learn how to adapt your design and delivery plans to use VC techniques in all classrooms.

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Best Practices for Enlivening the Virtual Classroom
March 20, 2014
Presented by Pandora Bryce

In this session from the Learning Solutions 2014 Conference & Expo, discover best practices for effective, engaging virtual classroom design; obstacles to avoid; when to have "plan B" in place; key skills and behaviors to develop during facilitator train-the-trainer sessions; and ideas for innovative uses of the virtual classroom environment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bill Brandon is the senior editor of *Learning Solutions*, The eLearning Guild's online magazine. His experience in the learning and development field goes back to 1968, and in eLearning to 1984. He has developed and managed eLearning in a variety of environments, from mainframes to desktops to online.

Karyn Gleeson is an online events production manager for The eLearning Guild, where she manages both the tactical needs of producing online events as well as the strategic needs of managing the staff and event deliverables. Previously, Karyn was an LMS administrator and a lead course facilitator and manager of the technical support staff for an online curriculum provider.