Classroom teaching versus blended learning: lessons learnt from the comparison

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Abstract:

On-line learning drawing upon new technologies is often presented as the future of education. This article compares, from teachers' point of view, two Master programs delivering the same degree. One is based upon classroom teaching and face to face seminars, the other one relies on blended learning. Lessons learnt from the comparison are threefold. First, teaching simultaneously in both systems enabled cross-fertilization and enrichment of teaching methods. Second, a strong relational network, between teachers and trainees and among trainees, proved to be key success factor in the distance learning system. Third, the high quality of the blended learning program reflected in the excellent rate of success required a great deal of resources and is eventually much more expensive than the classroom training program.

Key words: distance learning, classroom teaching, teacher-learner relations, cross-fertilization, secondary school headmaster training program

Classroom teaching versus blended learning: lessons learnt from the comparison

On-line learning drawing upon new technologies is often presented as the future of education. Saving costs related to the maintenance of physical classrooms and reaching trainees in widely-dispersed locations, saving travelling time and costs for all, distance education would allow the best experts to teach their knowledge and know-how to a large number of trainees. Based upon experiences in classroom teaching and blended learning for the same post-professional Master's program, this article aims at comparing the two training systems. It is a reflective examination of these experiences from the teachers' points of view. The authors are two teachers who have been taught in both training systems and one teacher involved in the classroom training and who observed the blended program. This article will especially show that the teaching methods used simultaneously have fostered cross-fertilization, each experience enriching the other. Rather than considering distance and on-line learning as the future, progressively substituting classroom teaching, we conclude that both training systems will exist alongside in the long run.

1. Two teaching systems for a Master program with the same objectives and audiences

1.1 Post-professional Master's program for secondary school heads

In December 2005, the academy of Créteil and the ESEN[1] asked for a new Master's program for public high school heads at the University of Paris-Est Marne la Vallée. The point was to offer to these professionals a program leading to a Master's degree complementing the initial

[1] The mission of the école supérieure de l'éducation nationale (ESEN) is to design and implement the basic mandatory and continuing training of teaching and administrative executives of the National Education system.

and continuing training proposed by the academy which is mainly operational peer training. This classroom training lasting 18 months aims at "reinforcing the professionalization of high school heads attending initial or continuing training programs in the Créteil academy"[2].

The agreement stems from the fact that "the modernization of the public service of National Education calls for an evolution of the professional competencies of the managing staff, that it is essential to accompany with training. Because of deconcentration they are in charge of a growing number of managerial acts as closely as possible to the field; and decentralization, which compels to better articulate the responsibilities of the State and those of local communities, gives them a central role in monitoring local public teaching institutions, applying laws and managing human resources"[3].

The goal of the master is to train high school heads to manage an educational institution. It specifically aims at:

- Improving their abilities to carry out an innovative project in their secondary school, whether relating to new services for beneficiaries, improved quality of services, pedagogical innovation, or settling new external partnerships.
- Developing their monitoring of multi-dimensional performances of their secondary school: pedagogical, economic, social and societal performances, service quality and considering that these performances are not necessarily converging.
- Improving their organizing and leadership skills to mobilize existing resources, especially the human ones.

The Master's program presents a thorough thought on management methods implemented in firms (strategic analysis, management control, Human resource management, service quality

[2] Partnership agreement between UPEM, ESEN and the Academy of Créteil, 2005.
[3] ditto

management, change management, conflict management, etc.) and on their adaptation considering the specificities of public teaching institutions. Besides these courses, lectures in English, sociology of organizations, public education policy and educational laws allow trainees to understand the context framing the evolution of secondary schools and provide them with a national and international perspective to analyze the transformations they experience.

As the acid test to obtain the degree, the Master's thesis requires both to manage a change project in the trainee's high school and to analyze it through a specific lens. To do so, the secondary school heads are individually supported by a member of the teaching team[4]. This team is composed of teacher-researchers in management and sociology and professionals from National Education (IGAENR, Headmasters…)

This Master's program presently called GEDOS (French acronym standing for Management of Educational Organizations) is a special option of a Master's degree in Management. It has been opened to secondary school heads from the Academies of the Paris Area and to primary school headmasters and Ministry of National Education school inspectors.

[4] A communication written by three secondary school heads who got their master degree in 2014 has been published in the colloquium acts of AFAE (a French association of education actors), 2015. It illustrates these experiences of change management in secondary schools and shows how lessons learnt during the master contribute to the results: Cote-Sainsaulieu A., De Battista I., Gobetti D., (2015), « En quoi la formation du master GEDOS de l'Université Paris Est Marne la Vallée prépare-t-elle un personnel de direction à diriger un EPLE autonome ? » (How does the GEDOS master's program of université Paris-Est Marne la Vallée prepare executive staff to manage autonomous public education institutions?"

1.2 The creation of a distance learning Master's program with the same goals and audience in 2009: M@dos

As Master's programs with the same kind of objectives and audience than GEDOS existed in several French universities and considering that all secondary school heads should be able to benefit from this training program, ESEN and a consortium of universities (Angers, Lille 3, Marne la Vallée, Nancy 2 et Poitiers) created a blended learning Master's program in 2009.
This new program shares the same goals and addresses the same audience as stated in the accreditation documents sent in 2010 from the Université de Marne la Vallée to the Ministry.
Thanks to the consortium of universities and the support from ESEN, a network of 2nd year Master's programs specialized in the management of educational institutions is created. This training system, called M@dos, relies on blended learning combining distance learning and classroom sessions on ESEN site and is opened to 13500 secondary school heads. The first cohort of 25 trainees coming from all the French Academies starts in September 2009. The program is the same as GEDOS Master's program except for an additional course in digital culture designed to help secondary school heads use technologies for distance learning.

A second difference is that the Master's thesis is not necessarily about a change project carried out in the secondary school; it may deal with an issue pertaining to any discipline taught in M@dos: management, sociology, public education policy or educational laws. The Master's thesis is assessed with the same criteria and assessment grid than in Gedos Program. The program length is slightly longer as the teaching stretches out over two years.

At the inception, 3 teacher-researchers from Gedos teaching team are involved in setting up M@dos; they teach the same courses and supervise thesis. Two of these courses, namely "change and project management" and "service quality management" are part of the material

analyzed in this paper. The professors have created their lectures for in-class sessions. After 4 years of classroom teaching, they have adapted the course to distance learning and have taught it for 5 years in parallel in both training systems.

1.3 Main differences between the two training systems

The training system is basically different between Gedos and M@dos. The M@dos Master's degree relies on blended learning with mainly distance learning using two major tools: a platform and a virtual classroom tool. The Moodle e-learning platform enables to present and animate course contents through various activities. It also allows teachers to put on-line many resources (written course material, link to internet websites, videos, …), self correcting knowledge tests, collective or one-to-one exchange forums, polls (evaluation of the course by trainees for instance), glossaries, wiki, space for uploading and correcting assignments[5].

Lectures are virtual, however 6 or 7 classroom sessions, each lasting 2 days, are organized at the ESEN site in Poitiers over the two-year training period. The virtual classroom tool enables the teacher to gather virtually at an agreed upon time all the trainees for a course session. The webcam may be activated but for technical reasons pertaining to communication quality, most often only sound is switched on. The teacher can see on the left of the screen the list of connected trainees. S/he has a kind of blackboard on which different software applications can be used (slide show, spreadsheet, etc.) and different important points can be manually emphasized and underlined. On the right side, a chat window allows the teacher to take part in or follow written exchanges. Written messages may be sent to one particular person or all the participants or even to the coach who is also often connected during virtual lectures to ensure its smooth functioning. All the trainees can take the floor; they raise their virtual hand just

[5] For additional details on Moodle platform go to: https://docs.moodle.org/19/fr/Fonctionnalités

besides their name and the teacher can give them the floor. Participants also have emoji to express their reactions: laugh, applause, etc. Each virtual class is recorded, thus allowing trainees who eventually missed the lecture to listen to it.

Students and teachers benefit from coaching by e-learning experts: they help for technical problems (connections, Moodle or virtual class software functioning) but also for designing e-learning courses. Each virtual classroom is supported by one coach. Trainees are supervised by a director of studies who call them once or twice a year for an overview of their training progress and to assist them in finding solutions to concerns they may have. For instance, some work teams have been redesigned after recurring conflicts had impeded them to work properly.

2. Comparison between two learning systems

2.1 The design of classroom courses

As said above, the classroom teaching program was the first one. The teaching team members who have intervened in both systems first started with designing a classical classroom course. For each courses, key concepts and theories are formalized on visual aids; the oral presentation of the professor aims at bringing precisions, details, illustrations and discussions with the students on how implementing them in the specific professional context of trainees.

After conceiving the course in a traditional way, the professors have gradually discovered the professional milieu of trainees, characterized on the one hand by public management principles and on the other hand by the specificities of secondary schools. They had to get

accustomed to terms and acronyms (school life, Principal Education Adviser (CPE), health and citizenship education committees (CESC), PERDIR (executive staff), etc.) and above all the organization of secondary schools, the different kinds and statutes of employees, professional cultures, etc. Face-to-face interactions have well served the reciprocal learning process – management concepts for trainees, specificities of the management of educational institutions for teachers. Questions and answers and numerous spontaneous discussions that took place in the classroom have enabled the professors to deepen the understanding of this professional universe.

Drawing upon their first year of teaching, the professors have been able to refine their talks, prepare answers to recurring questions such as " why could the pupil be considered as a customer?" and provide examples from the education milieu that had been discussed and elaborated with the first cohorts. Tutoring master's thesis, individually or collectively like during seminars dedicated to thesis writing (see section 3), as well as visiting some of the trainees' schools have quickly enabled the staff involved in classroom teaching to become familiar with the daily issues of the heads of secondary schools. Informal discussions at beaks or lunchtime when the trainees are at the university have enlarged this knowledge. Indeed, the situations on the ground are quite varied, according to the kind of school, its size, its geographical location in the city center, in a peri-urban area or semi-rural area, the training programs proposed, the social background of pupils, the physical lay-out of the school, etc. From the inception of the GEDOS program, the heads of a large variety of schools have been trained. Finally, during the first years of the classroom training program, the teaching team has produced or more accurately, co-produced through the multiple interactions with the school heads contents in management science more and more adapted to the management of educational institutions. They made links between on the one hand theoretical contents and

practices of private companies and on the other hand public organizations and the daily sitations of educational institutions in the academies of the Paris area.

2.2 The design of a course in a blended learning system

In 2008, three professors from the classroom training program at the Université Marne-la-Vallée agree to get involved in the blended training system. The project plans to have several teachers sharing one course and each course team is supported by a coach both for technical assistance for using information technologies and for advice on teaching approaches adapted to distance learning. Coaches and teachers meet face to face several times to introduce the tools: the platform to make teaching material available to trainees and the virtual class software.

The tools are pretty ease of use even though teaching a virtual class for the first time requires a huge amount of concentration for those who are not digital natives. The teacher has to focus simultaneously on the content of oral exchanges, the trainees' reactions (raising their hand…) and chat exchanges, which may bring up very useful insights for all, interesting questions or may report individual technical problems that the coach may help to fix.

Coaches have emphasized that one cannot teach a on-line course exactly as a classroom lecture. The basic principle is to provide the trainees with resources as we would do with a textbook and to plan for each virtual class, some activities to help trainees make the available knowledge their own or to check that they actually learnt the content as expected. The steps of the learning program are much more detailed than in seminars in classroom teaching. Each week activities are planned: document reading, individual or collective assignments, virtual class, etc. Formal lectures are kept to a minimum; only a few minutes can be devoted to

introduce and illustrate some key concepts. The remaining time in virtual classes is dedicated to activities (case studies presentations, role playing, exercises), feedback on activities or assignments with the full class or small groups.

The teacher has prepare the course thoroughly down to small details; s/he cannot just define the main objectives, the list of key notions to be introduced and prepare illustrations, leaving large room for spontaneous discussions and interactions. The learning progression is based upon comprehensive written materials (we could also resort to videos but we did not make this choice). The first step consists in writing a kind of textbook with definite and balanced sequences. The second and most important task is to design activities to learn the knowledge made available to trainees because the whole knowledge available in a digital library remains useless if not learnt and incorporated by the trainees. The professor thus develops MCQ, case studies, simulation of professional situations and lists of answers to frequently asked questions. The virtual class tool allows the teacher to create and navigate between several small work groups to give feedback and particular advice. Collaborative documents can be transferred to the teacher at the end of the class.

The extensive formalization concern each assignment which punctuates the course: detailed instructions, expected format and page number for digital documents, strict deadline since the platform can be set to prevent uploading assignments after the deadline. The formal frame strongly structures the course and leaves little leeway for improvisation. The learning path is clearly defined and each step anticipated. Between formal appointments, exchanges go on, mainly through e-mails between teachers and some trainees but also through the digital platform forum when questions may be of interest for the whole class. Practically, all along the 8 to 10 weeks period of the course, professors must be very available because trainees do

not hesitate to ask them to validate intermediate work: “Am I in the right direction if I propose this?” Virtual classes often take place after office hours (8-10 p.m. for instance) and compel professors to teach from home. It is as if the class entered into the intimacy of the home. Before connecting, the teacher briefs the whole family: no loud noise, no intrusion into the room, no Internet use to save a large bandwidth for the class…). For trainees too, the training takes place outside office hours and this tends to blur the border between work and life time and this leads to solicit teachers or coaches at any time, let the question be about technical connecting problems or learning issues. Besides, as it will be developed later, interactions are more difficult and less spontaneous with distance learning than in the physical classroom, therefore questions, especially personal ones, are almost more numerous outside the classroom than during the virtual class. The feeling that one should be very available from the outset of the course generally with a physical classroom session until the final assignment is uploaded has no equivalent in the classroom training system in which the follow-up is usually carried out when meeting at the university during either lectures or tutorials for the thesis.

2.3 Cross-fertilization between the two systems

As said above, the first experience in physical classroom allowed the teacher to get familiar with the professional milieu of trainees and have fed the distance course. Most cases, exercises and activities have been developed by drawing upon several years of experience of the classroom training program. The expertise of professors for this audience was partly built though face-to-face interactions.

Reciprocally, the distance course compelled to formalize extensively the course content, to detail the learning sequences and to create activities facilitating the learning process, and part

of these teaching materials have been introduced in the classroom training program. The written documents summarizing the course are made available for trainees even though the sequence for their reading is not organized as strictly as in the distance course. They rather make up reassuring resources, especially useful when a trainee has missed a lecture. Even more interesting is the use of formalized illustrations and case studies elaborated for the blended system. Thus discussions that are still easier and more spontaneous in physical classrooms have been enriched by new teaching materials. The course also benefits from individual or small group activities in the classroom. In other words, designing a distance course moved he cursor towards more active teaching method in physical classrooms. It also allowed teachers to enjoy the possibilities of face to face and and quick interactions even more in the classroom training system.

Furthermore, as detailed hereafter, the distance course experience demonstrated that building small work groups was an essential point to maintain the involvement of trainees whose job takes up most of their time leaving very little time for training and who live emotionally charged daily situations. Trainees make a point of not letting their co-workers down and this mutual involvement is a key to the program success. Activities in sub-groups have been introduced in the classroom courses to sustain collective emulation and reduce the risks that trainees give up before they have completed the program.

3. The relationships between teachers and trainees and between trainees: individual-group articulation

This section starts with describes and analyses the two training programs GEDOS and M@DOS from a work group perspective. We draw upon research on teaching relations inspired by E. Goffman's framework pertaining to interactionist sociology.

3.1 Work groups in each training system

GEDOS is a classical training program in which 12 to 25 trainees (depending on the cohort) meet face to face with a professor. The lectures generally take place on Wednesdays and Saturdays and during mid-term holidays. Lectures last for 7 hours a day and lunchtime often gives the opportunity to have lunch together (trainees and teachers) at the university in the teachers' room of the economics and management department. Hence, trainees regularly meet professors even those who are not teaching them that day. Spontaneous exchanges between teachers and trainees arouse on various issues including the writing or the tutorial of the Master's thesis. Theses discussions are also opportunities for school heads to share with their colleagues and some teachers their often burdensome daily issues since some secondary schools of the academies of the Paris area regularly suffer from different forms of violence.

Almost all teachers use slides as teaching materials. Depending on the habits of each professor, slides are made available to trainees, before or after the lecture, either by using the digital platform of the university or sending them to all the trainees.

Face-to-face classes combine lectures and different kinds of individual but most of time collective exercises: case studies, document analysis, simulation of professional situations and role-playing. Overall, courses are very much interactive; trainees ask a lot of questions and easily take the floor spontaneously to add remarks and give real-world examples stemming from their own school head experience to illustrate the teacher's talk. Usually passionate collective discussions follow these kinds of interventions. These peer-to-peer exchanges in front of the teacher seem to be highly valuable for a large number of trainees. It is as if the

classroom was turned into a forum to express oneself and show each person‘s knowledge and power.

Depending on the cohort, one may observe a great deal of solidarity between trainees or, oppositely, the raise of small competing groups.

Most often the course assessment is conducted through an individual assignment to be done at home and sent to the teacher. The deadline is several weeks later and sometimes even several months after the end of lectures. Trainees don't hesitate to bargain this deadline in face-to-face discussion but more frequently through e-mails, because of their workload at school or special events like a strike of teachers, which are not easy to handle. Deadline extensions are generally granted by the teaching team, who is aware of the heavy professional charges the trainees endorse besides the Master’s program.

The thesis is a means of assessment but above all a training process. In Gedos, it is necessarily related to the change management course. It may be so in M@dos but, as said previously, the thesis may also concern another issue related to any course of the program. Secondary school heads, as many professionals, are constantly facing changes (legal, societal,…) that they are not necessarily equipped to tackle and monitor such changes. This is why the topic of the Gedos Master’s thesis has to be related with an on-going change in their educational institution. Hence, the issue is defined during the change management course, and the final assignment aims at initiating the first thoughts about the project.

In Gedos only, the work on the thesis is supported by a 2 or 3 day residential seminar for all trainees and involving the majority of the teaching team. This seminar was introduced for the second cohort to help them write down the thesis, as it became clear that this step was the

biggest challenge of the Master's degree for the school heads. Over the 11 years of existence of the training program, the thesis seminar has been offered 6 times.

The residential seminar takes place on a weekend in April (often on the seaside but once in the school of one of the trainees). The trainees are invited to come with all the necessary documents for their work and the writing of the thesis. Generally, almost all teachers participate. With a few exceptions, trainees and teachers travel all together each way by the same train.

Just after arrival, the seminar starts with assessing the work in progress of the trainees. Each one individually meets two teachers (including the master's supervisor). During this exchange, the trainee is out of sight of his or her classmates. The pair of teachers assesses the progress of the thesis, with the trainee and using a detailed diagnosis sheet: is the very nature of the exercise that the thesis represents understood? Is the topic clearly identified? Is the issue precisely stated? Is there a tentative or definite thesis outline and a work plan? Is the introduction written? Is the literature review completed or in progress? What are the written sections? After this discussion, the pair of teachers tries to identify what may impede the writing process? They come to an agreement with the trainee about the major difficulties encountered in the writing process. Beyond the lack of time, which is the most common reason given by school heads who actually all have very heavy workload, the white page syndrome often comes out of these diagnosis interviews; the atmosphere of confidence and benevolence invites disclosure. Writing a thesis, i.e. thinking thoroughly about an issue and structuring the thought into a consistent document, which seldom has less than 60 pages (appendices excluded), is quite difficult for educational professionals. Their daily life is made

of multiple tasks requiring immediate responses, just the opposite of what professors ask them through thesis writing.

Depending on the diagnosis results, priorities are set and a personal roadmap is defined for each trainee. The work during the weekend is organized in a threefold frame: thematic workshops, solo work in one's room and meetings with the supervisor or eventually another teacher to overcome a special difficulty, recover motivation or simply report the work progress. Several thematic workshops are offered: how to define the thesis issue? How to build the outline? How to write the introduction? How to account for professional situations on the field? In each workshop, a few principles about the topic are introduced by a teacher but very quickly, each participant starts to work with the teacher's help. The workshops aim at overcoming the specific difficulties that trainees are struggling with. The workshop "how to account for professional situations on the field?" is always particularly welcome. It presents how to chart what is going on in one's organization. As said above, the main point of writing a thesis consists in conducting an analytical and distant reflection on a specific change they have managed in their educational institution.

This raises challenges. The first one is understanding the distinction between leading the change in the organization and analyzing this process by taking a step back from the field. The second one relates to eventual professional transfer to another school. Even if it is not encouraged, some school heads move to another institution while they are attending the program, hence loosing their main access to the study field for their thesis.

This workshop enables the trainees to stage the field with quotes, examples presented as life narratives, schemes, tables and pictures, all facilitating the communication with the teachers who read the thesis.

The seminar is flexible enough to allow trainees who are willing to take action to isolate at any time to write.

Teachers are also regularly solicited for face-to-face interactions to clarify some notions for instance. Most often, these meetings make up the opportunity for the teacher to stimulate the trainee, to emphasize the progress made and to encourage the work still to be done.

The seminar is also the opportunity for teachers to work together when supervising thesis writing and this enriched the content of each course. Eventually, the classroom teaching system leads to the creation of several groups: the group of trainees, the group of teachers and the whole group gathering both groups around the training program.

The residential seminar of Gedos reinforces the collective dimension. This collective is stronger than in M@dos in which, the group of teachers is only strong at a course level. There are few interactions between the teachers of different courses. At best, they have access to what the others are doing on the platform and they meet for defense jury.

The M@dos training program, designed a few years after the creation of GEDOS, benefited from the experience of the first degree, especially concerning the close supervision required for the thesis.

In GEDOS program, lectures are not written in advance but the teacher follows the syllabus and uses slides. However, there is a high degree of freedom for the teacher who introduces more or less long but useful digressions. Classroom interactions also induce discussions between trainees while the teacher is essentially giving the floor to them. Even though M@dos trainees can raise their hand, such interactions are seldom observed during virtual lectures as interactions are prepared in advance, anticipated and follow a detailed script. Even

if it is quite rare, a M@dos trainee may keep the floor for a long time and without visual interactions, it is difficult to stop as it can be done in a face to face situation where one can urge the chatterbox to finish by showing non verbal signs of impatience. Reciprocally, the teacher who engages in too long an explanation has almost no clue that the audience has stopped listening to it. Exchanges at distance are disembodied up to the point that the speaker may notice only after several minutes that a technical problem has occurred and that the communication has been interrupted. When the connection is reset, the teacher ignores what the trainees heard or not. Furthermore, virtual interactions are technically possible: if participants raise their virtual hand they are given the floor. However, they are idling compared to face-to-face interactions. The person who takes the floor starts by greeting everyone and checking everybody is correctly hearing what s/he says. If need be, the speaker fix an echo or sound level problem before getting to the point and so on with each person wishing to say something. On the contrary, written exchanges on the live chat are quite numerous and quick since they are free of technical adjustments. The teacher who keeps an eye on the chat session may answer the written questions or give the floor to one participant who suggested a good example. Sometimes, the chat session is used to justify a trainee's absence, delay or to share news that may not be closely related to the lecture topic. For instance, when a discussion on the famous text by M. Callon and B. Latour on the reproduction of scallops in the Saint-Brieuc bay area aimed at introducing the actor network theory in the change management course, messages on the chat were about the best way to cook the scallops! The chat session may be used by participants for informal discussions unrelated to the course and the teacher may have to steer it to keep it in line with the teaching topic. It happened several times that the teacher verbally recalled the authors of too lengthy digressions on the chat.

3.2 Analysis of interactions in the two training systems through the lens of E. Goffman and his followers.

The use of E. Goffman's work on interactionist sociology by Postic (2001) and Blandin (2004) to analyze the distance learning relationship shows that the border between classroom and distance learning is not as thick as might be expected. For instance, the distance between teacher and trainees could even be considered counter intuitively as more important in certain kinds of classroom teaching when the lecture takes place in a large amphitheater and is relayed on screens. Hence, the very notions of distance and presence are put into question.

The notion of interaction is central in Goffman's work; he defines it in 1988 as what emerges only in social situations, i.e. in environments in which two or more individuals are physically present for the other's answer. Drawing upon Goffman's approach, Postic (2001) defines the interaction in the learning context as the reciprocal reaction, verbal or non-verbal, temporary or regularly repeated through which the behavior of one partner influences the other's behavior. This interaction expresses itself either in a dyadic system (the behaviors of each student is influenced by the behavior of the teacher and vice-versa), or in a group relationship (the teacher facing the class).

There would be several ways to be present or several ways to share "here and now". For Blandin (2004), one can face someone physically present and nevertheless absent because his or her mind is busy with his or her own business. Based on the work of Goffman (1988) and Weissberg (2000), Blandin (2004) classifies the different possibilities of sharing a teachning "here and now" into 4 categories:

- face-to-face or classroom teaching: all the participants are actually here and now;

- virtual presence: the “now” is shared in a virtual space which provides image and/or sound through various tools (like distance learning platforms). However, the “here” is different for each person who is in one’s own private or professional place. The “now” is imposed and shared in the virtual classroom but may also be different and chosen. For instance, participants may connect at their favorite time to complete tests or exercises.
- synchronous but distant teaching: individuals share the “now” but without a common space providing mutual presence
- Asynchronous distance: the “here and now” are different for each individual as is the case with e-mails. Writing and reading e-mails are not done at the same time enabling to think about it and take a step back.

Gedos enters into the first category of interactions (face to face) while M@dos (at least for the distant classroom) pertains to the second category, namely virtual presence.

During exchanges, the presence of emotions, displayed and felt, by the protagonists is not making a great difference between the different forms of exchanges. Each form gives place to emotions, even if they manifest differently. Face-to face teaching enables to use all kinds of non-verbal communication through which emotions are expressed (even if the teacher does not always use all of them). It includes proxemics (management of the space between teacher and trainees), gestures and paces (more or less tonic, quick…), voice (power, tone, flow, rhythm, diction/ articulation), facial expressions (smiling, looking, pouting, frowning, eyes wide opening…). Virtual presence only partially restricts exchanges of expressions and feelings. In The M@dos training system, as said above, the webcams are not activated for technical reasons pertaining to limited bandwidth of telecommunication networks. Teachers

and trainees do not see but hear each other, however, they are never sure that their speech is properly received[6].

If writing an e-mail does not enable to use all the forms of non verbal communication, nevertheless, it also involves emotions. Angriness, fear, surprise, joy are expressed in e-mails through the chosen terms and syntax, the size of fonts, smilies or punctuation. A few examples from Gedos and M@dos help to understand the role played by emotions depending on the kind of teaching relations and how it influences the satisfaction experienced by the teacher.

With regards to teachers' satisfaction, perceptions vary. Because it does not enable to use all forms of no-verbal communication (especially paces, proxemics, tone, gestures…), some feel that the blended program is less satisfactory at least for its distance teaching part, than the Gedos program. The wide range of non-verbal communication enables to display more emotions (joy, satisfaction, surprise…), which would contribute to the learning process by reinforcing self confidence, reassuring and re-motivating trainees. Others enjoy the detailed scenario of distant teaching interactions and find more satisfaction in it because of its tight framework.

In further research, we will also focus on the trainees' points of view in order to compare their assessment of both training systems concerning interactions between trainees an teacher but also between trainees. As said in the introduction, the first step of this study is only concerned with the teachers' experiences.

[6] This may also be the case in face-to-face teaching when the professor uses a microphone that does not work properly. However in this situation, the professor quickly perceives the signs coming from the public who does not hear.

4. The expensive success for the blended training system

Distance learning systems are often presented as solutions offering to a larger number of people less costly trainings than those who require the physical presence of trainees and teachers. In this respect, our comparison between both systems leads to an opposite conclusion even though comparing is not easy.

The cost of the classroom training system includes the cost of teaching hours (300 teaching hours for courses + 12 hours of individual tutoring for the Master's thesis), the compensation for the program monitoring and the program secretary, the use of rooms and other resources for trainees (digital library, the digital learning platform for English courses, teaching materials…) and the funding of the 3-day residential seminar dedicated to the thesis. For 25 students, the total cost of the training system is about 50 000 euros.

The blended training system costs much more since it includes expenses that do not exist in the classroom teaching program. On the one hand, it is produced by a consortium of universities and ESEN, which implies additional coordination, financial and administrative management costs (writing and following-up partnership agreements, payments of teaching hours to each university) compared to the program managed by one university only.

Concerning the courses, teaching hours are about the same in both programs, however, the design of distance courses has been rewarded in M@dos. Furthermore, teaching hours in M@dos cost twice as much as in Gedos program since they take into account the multiple individual interactions through phone or e-mails besides the lectures. The educational support is also more important in M@dos since it includes several teachers (2 to 3) and a coach for each course and the director of studies ensuring the follow-up of trainees. The digital platform

for M@dos also costs more than he one for Gedos, which is less solicited. Last but not least, the classroom meetings on ESEN site are entirely funded by the program both for trainees and teachers (accommodation, meals, use of rooms). Finally, the total costs of M@dos amount to 150 000 euros each year, not including the one shot compensation for designing courses.

Table 1. Overview of expenses

	Classroom teaching program GEDOS	Blended learning program M@dos
Teaching		
Course design	-	X
Teaching hours	X	X
Interactions teachers-trainees	-	X
Training program monitoring		
Training program direction	X	X
Direction for studies	-	X
Coaching	-	X
Secretary	X	X
Financial and administrative management	-	X
Teaching materials and resources		
Physical classrooms	X	X
Classroom meetings ESEN (6*2 days)	-	X
3 day residential seminars	X	X

Distance learning platform	X	X
Virtual classroom software	-	X

The analysis of the training process in the M@dos system emphasizes that the program aimed at giving trainees a high quality service, as regards the individualization of the teaching relation as well as technical and educational support. By fostering the blending of the training program, by providing individual tutoring to trainees, M@dos strives to be a high standard education program almost regardless of costs. Results are indeed excellent for such a training program, the vast majority of trainees completes the degree, only a few giving up the training program before the end. This high quality training, coupled with stringent selection of trainees (since the applicant pool is national while the classroom training program recruits from a regional pool) account for these results. The classroom training program has a graduation rate of about 80%, which is very good for continuing education but slightly under that of the blended program, especially because of some trainees' failure to complete their thesis. Less stringent selectivity, because the applicant pool is smaller but also because the teaching team tends to admit an applicant whenever it thinks that s/he will really benefit from the training program, explain this result.

Conclusion

The comparison between the two systems, one entirely in physical classrooms, the other being blended, does not show the superiority of one above the other but different advantages and limitations.

It puts light on the mutual enrichment of both systems, permitted by their common points (goals, programs, teachers, trainees' profile…). For instance, the role played by group dynamics in reducing the drop-out rate in the blended training program has been taken into account in the classroom training program through introducing of sub-groups that did not exist before. The seminars devoted to writing thesis in Gedos also contribute to reinforce the group dynamics emphasized in M@dos.

The strong group dynamics initiated in M@dos had been supported by classroom meetings, working sub-groups for collective activities and the close supervision by a team composed of the director of studies, teachers and coaches, all being very available for trainees. Virtual exchanges being constrained, distance learning requires in return high availability to help participants cope with problems out of plenary sessions or just before of after lectures as teachers are used to doing when they are in physical classrooms. Counter intuitively, human relations are the core of successful distance learning. Hence, cost savings that might be expected from distance learning are actually very limited if we are to give trainees the best chance of success. A distance learning system is costly as regards trainees' supervision besides the investment costs and the coaching of teachers for the first year.

Still seen from the teachers' point of view, distance learning follows a tight pattern and leaves less room for improvising; it appears more quickly repetitive than classroom learning, which differs more between cohorts. If learning is very important for the teachers for the first two

years after the course design (using digital tools, developing new teaching materials, creating a script, etc.); it becomes less significant once the course is finalized. As previously said, the emotional intensity is higher in classroom training, this offers more shared moments of pleasure or fun around the story of a trainee or a digression of the teacher. Classroom training suffers less from routine.

The comparison also showed that it would be an uneasy task to first design a distance learning course. Experience with a specific audience, face-to-face, allows teachers to find out the major difficulties, recurring questions, the trainees' background and to adjust the learning steps and pace that are to be formalized for distance learning. Deep exchanges with learners and previous experience of classroom teaching for the course appear to be prerequisites to develop a good distance course. Thus, it is difficult to imagine how we could make a transition to exclusive distance learning and maintain highly relevant and focused teaching. Rather, as seen before, alternating or combining both learning modes permits cross-fertilization.

However, the fact that our experience mainly concerns management teaching may determine this conclusion. As sciences of action, management sciences certainly requires, more than other disciplines, strong contextualization of theories and interactive teaching methods. This validity of such a conclusion should be checked for other fields such as mathematics or theoretical physics.

To go further than this first reflection on our experience, we plan to complete the picture y introducing the point of views of learners and eventually coaches. Their perceptions are as interesting as the teachers' ones since they are target of this training service. The relationship

analysis could also be deepen by distinguishing exchanges in dyadic situations, small groups and the entire class. Above all, we wish to introduce a managerial perspective to explore these programs as the production of services. Most research on classroom and distance learning stems from education sciences, psychology or sociology of education. But teaching is also a service provided to learners. Beyond comparing the costs of the program, we need to explore further the differentiated conditions for service production, to analyze the teacher-learner relationship as a service relation, and the effects on effective learning.

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