

BILC CONFERENCE MAY 2021

PRESENTATION

**The Constant Switch from On-Site to On-Line**

**When Recurrent Brakes Become the Driver**

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This presentation is about what worked for us, within this context ie senior officers in the French War College, with this specific student profile. To our mind, all best practices are always to be considered with caution because nothing is universal. All methods must be adapted to a specific context.

My presentation started where my previous presentation in October ended.

Recap of the previous presentation - what I explained is that our experience underlined the importance of changing design as one moves from synchronous to asynchronous technologies.

We formed ideas on how to find this challenging balance between dialogue and structure having in mind that technology must not dictate the settings for any given activity but the chosen settings must be the result of a collaborative discussions between the teacher and the students for a well-thought through course of action.

The key word for this presentation was flexibility.

I now argue that we need to **go beyond flexibility**, we need **adaptability** overall, **adaptability** as the centre piece of each course design.

What is key is how we define concepts and how we apply them in a completely new context after reflecting on a very pragmatic journey to finding the solutions that would support all parties to reach their goals – students, teachers, stakeholders.

This presentation is divided into three main parts:

- Part I - What are we talking about? What do flexibility and adaptability really mean? Our definitions stem from a pragmatic journey battling through unprecedented circumstances.
- Part II - What are the components to achieve 360 adaptability?
- Part III - and how to implement them?

**PART I**

As lead faculty, you need to be very clear on how you define what you require from the teaching team. It is a duty to go through the thought process of contextualising the definition of concepts.

First, we started with the dictionary because this is an undeniable objective basis to use as solid ground to build your mind map.

Second, we used analogies. I truly believe in the power of analogies for imagining and governing key concepts. Analogies help people make sense of change and other innovations.

Let's start with the dictionary.

**Flexibility** means the capacity to be bent without breaking while **adaptability** means the ability to change or be changed to fit changed circumstances.

Let's move on to a technological analogy – weapons system. We work in the military; we have all some acquaintance with the topic.

The weapons can be flexible to be deployed to either the Arctic, Iraq or Afghanistan; we have to make a slight modification to the trigger. **Flexible is to provide inherent usability across a wide and changing spectrum of situations, often without making significant or any changes to itself.**

When weapons are adapted for a new mission the necessary modifications are complex. They are usually permanent changes to the weapon. **Adaptable is to be inherently modifiable to be deployed across diverse situations of deployment.**

How does this apply to teachers, our weapons system?

Teachers must be **flexible** to handle unexpected circumstances, such as sudden illness or emergencies.

Teachers **adapt** lesson plans to accommodate for the physical and intellectual needs of each student within the context of the pandemic.

Being adaptable means you are able or **willing to change** in order to suit different conditions. Being flexible means you can adapt easily, very easily.

Flexibility in addition to resilience makes the most adaptable people.

This is the final definition that our pragmatic journey led us to draft:

Adaptability = flexibility + resilience + will to change

If you are resilient then you'll be able to withstand or recover quickly from unexpected or difficult conditions, adapting to (and often enjoying) change on a regular basis.

## **PART II**

Constant change, which is our new normal requires adaptability.

Adaptability requires a combination of will to change, flexibility and resilience.

I am going to focus for a moment on flexibility in practice and what we identified as three imperatives to achieve adaptability:

- cognitive flexibility,
- emotional flexibility,
- and dispositional flexibility.

**Cognitive flexibility** is the ability to use different thinking strategies and mental frameworks.

**Emotional flexibility** is the ability to vary one's approach to dealing with emotions and those of others.

**Dispositional flexibility** is the ability to remain optimistic and, at the same time, realistic.

### **PART III**

What is the practicality of the principles we have just discussed? How do we implement this?

Adaptability has to be the centre piece of course design and everything that supports the course – the teachers, the teaching method and the practical organisation.

This permanent short-notice shift will always go smoothly with

- Adaptable and autonomous teachers
- Flexible and action-oriented students
- Organisation - well-assembled groups
- Open architecture course design
- Digital literacy
  
- adaptable and autonomous teachers.

It all starts with the recruitment criteria. Times have changed and we are now looking for different qualities in the teachers we recruit. Thus the criteria have changed.

- Flexible and action-oriented students

We want an environment in which adaptability can occur at any given time. For that to happen, every goal, objective, activity needs to be the result of a collaborative discussions between the teacher and the students for a well-thought through course of action. This will flow naturally if we focus on a student-led approach.

- Well-assembled groups

For a student-led approach to be effective, it is of the utmost importance to pay attention to how you stream them into groups. Using their command of the language as the sole criteria will not provide a group dynamic that will sustain development of autonomy and initiative.

- Open architecture course design

All of the above will happen by choosing adaptability as the keystone of your course design.

This means suggesting that all teachers choose open architecture lesson planning and course design.

It's an iterative process that allows for the teacher to easily amend his/her lesson plan with any input from the students may it be on the content, the teaching material, the grammar points, the vocabulary, the type of activity.

- Digital literacy

Digital literacy means having the knowledge and ability to use a wide range of technology tools for a variety of purposes. Due to the pandemic, we all became more digitally literate **on the job**.

What is interesting is that before the pandemic, as educators, we would have to constantly compete with social media and interactive apps. The lengthy lockdowns have led many to realise and take into account the added value of the interaction with the teacher.