



EPALE OER: Designing Successful Digital Basic Skills Programs for Adults

**Transcript: Interview with
Inga Opitz (DVV)**





EBSN: Welcome everyone. This is EBSN's OER on digital course design published on EPALE. Today we have here with us with Inga Opitz, who is responsible for teacher training programs in the framework of VHS Lernportal. Welcome Inga. It's a great pleasure to have you here with us!

IO: Thank you very much for the invitation!

EBSN: Can you tell us a few words about your work and your context in the organisation?

IO: Yes, of course. Well, I'm working since 2018 in the project VHS Lernportal at Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband in Bonn Germany. And in the project, I'm in charge of the teacher training program regarding the VHS Lernportal. In this program, we offer daily or half-day trainings and presentations for teachers, mainly teachers work with adults or young adults in the area of German as a second language or basic education and literacy. And we also offer advanced trainings, which last up to eight weeks. And all of these trainings have to do with the VHS Lernportal of course, to get to know how it works technically on the one hand, but also how to implement it in your classes on the other hand, and blended learning is a topic in both training formats, the shorter and the larger ones.

EBSN: So there is a gallery of different professional development opportunities for teachers on the website?

IO: Yes. The eight week trainings, I think we are starting now our 23rd one. As those trainings, we offer for about 20 participants. So there are a lot of teachers who make use of it. And it's like 23rd in the area of German as second language, but also we have the basic trainings for the trainings for the area of basic education. And there we also had about 10, I think. And we started them in 2019.

EBSN: So yeah, it was way before COVID limitations or the consequences of COVID crisis would come into picture. Would you like to show us the website and how is it structured for the teachers?

IO: Yes, I can tell you a little bit of the website. Let me see, share it. Maybe I can tell you first a little bit of main goals of the program. So, I'm going to give you a short introduction.

EBSN: Absolutely.

IO: The main goal of the program is to develop your own blended learning concept for your classes and it is structured in eight modules and supported by two trainers. And at the beginning, there's a preparation week in which the students get to know the VHS cloud environment, that's our LMS in which the training takes place. It's a cloud for the whole Volkshochschul world in Germany. And participants also get to know each other in the first week and to get to know the trainers and they have the first welcoming and support online webinar with the whole course. And at the end there's another online webinar in which the participants present their outcomes, which is their own personal blended learning concept. So the meetings in online presence are framing the training. But we also offer some extra supporting online webinars in between if there is a demand from the participants. And during the weeks, the teachers can solve the task in their



own pace and they will always have the tutors, the trainers there to ask if they have questions, if they have any questions. They just have to deliver the outcome at a certain day. So it's quite flexible for them. Let me show you the starting page. (...) You can take a look at an example training, and the VHS cloud is without participants so we can protect the data. We got the start page for orientation. Can you see it, Tamás?

EBSN: Yes.

IO: Okay. It's our start page is start page for orientation. And then we can unlock modules per week. But beginning, there's only the module for the preparation week visible. And then on Wednesdays, the next module will be unlocked. The week is we'll first read learning plan for the week, you can see the structure here of the training with the different modules. Well, normally you only see the first one at the beginning and then every week gets another one.

This is like the training plan for a week with the different steps the teachers have to take and then they can start the module. I can show you maybe just click of one module which is about blended learning in general, what is blended learning. So you have different steps you have to take. And everything is linked here into a learning plan, everything you need. And as a main site on which the teachers will find (here it is) initial questions and the aim of the module. I show you here: the aim of the module and then the input which is like text and videos they should read and see at the beginning of the module. And then the different tasks of the module and also rating grid with the next page. I show it to you. You can see like a different path and rating grid here. So they can see how many points they get for which task. And one of the tasks always is to give pure feedback. So the students work with a learning diary, which included in the VHS cloud, and which can be opened for the other students of the training. So there they will post the outcomes and the others will be able to read and comment it. And there's always a quiz at the end of the module, assure that main learning elements of the module have been understood. So that's mainly the structure. And then you have the possibility to get here to different tasks, to have a look at different links and that's a wiki also. You have a conference tool and a lot of possibilities to communicate in a forum, for example.

EBSN: That's a very interesting design. Did you receive any feedback from the teachers using or participating in this course about the training program? How is the reception of it?

IO: Yes, we always ask for feedback as it is very important for us to see what can we do better. And we really get great feedback from the participants and it's just so good to see that those who complete the training are really into blended learning afterwards. And sometimes at the beginning, those with less digital skills say that they're not sure if they could do this kind of teaching because they think it's too difficult for them and their students, and that their students will be much more experts in all these technical things than them. But then during the training they lose this fear and get more confident. And they also realise that it is okay not to be an expert at the beginning and that they also can involve the students when there's a technical problem. So yeah, we really get very good feedback.

EBSN: That's very interesting to hear that their motivation to go into using online tools or online apps for their learners is going up after this course. And they get encouragement to design blended learning courses afterwards. Now, in your opinion or your experience and maybe from



the teachers who already went through the programs do they provide any feedback, why a blended learning design is more efficient or better or if it's more efficient and better at all?

IO: I think for many of the students, it's really very good to have flexibility to also learn at home sometimes. So because they maybe they have to look after the kids or they have to go to work at different times. So they have the possibility to learn their own pace in certain phases and then there's like fixed schedules where they really meet in presence, which is also very important for them. And this is where they also talk a lot in the case of the German as a second language because it's always a very important point to really get into talking also, not only to do your exercise and to write. So it's very important to have both parts, I guess. And that's also the feedback we get from the teachers that it really works quite well.

EBSN: There is just a consideration that now that the implications and the consequences of the lockdown resulted in more people going into online learning or taking up an online part as well as a physical part (...) When we talk about adults with basic skills challenges, would you say that the blended learning design is more favorable for them because of the physical contact as well or the personal contact? Would that be something that benefit them?

IO: I think the personal contact is really very important. Yes, I think also the motivation, the learning motivation gets higher if see that you're really like learning in a group and with real persons and it's not like you're learning alone all the time. Maybe, well, you can always have task to solve in a group or something, but I think it's not the same. I think it's really important to have these presence meetings and also for realising online phases, it's important at the beginning to really show the students how to work with those instruments now because many of them maybe don't have the skills. I think it's an enrichment in both sides. So they really get digital skills at the one hand but on the other hand they still have this online presence where they have a nice learning environment, and which is very motivating.

EBSN: Inga, thank you very much for showing us the platform and to talk about this training program that was very interesting also for the themes, but also for the structures, how we go into it. So we do hope that it is a source of inspiration for our viewers to definitely go out, try the blended learning design and just have a go at their best capacities.

IO: Thank you very much for your time and we wish you well!

