

Bournemouth and Poole College: adding a richer blend to health and social care

Supported by:



This handout is one of a series of 20 from the ALT/LSDA "E-learning making it work conference" held in London on 13 October 2005. Other handouts in the series, as well as a compilation of all of them, can be accessed in PDF format from http://www.alt.ac.uk/fe_practitioner_conference.html

Jacky Mawer, Advanced Practitioner for ILT Health and Social Care (HSC)

1. The organisation

Bournemouth and Poole College is a large college of further and higher education on the south coast of England. The health and social care department has been piloting information and learning technology (ILT) in the Access to HE (Social Work and Nursing) course for two years and built upon this experience by taking it out to the other courses. The college has an excellent ILT development centre with ILT champions and learning resource centre staff who have been invaluable in supporting the integration of ILT.

2. Overview

The project, through extensive training, enabled the HSC department to fight the technology demons and recognise that ILT and the virtual learning environment (VLE) have a valuable place in the teaching and learning of health and care subjects. The staff, once they overcame initial reluctance, recognised that time saving was possible after an initial investment. Online assessments save on marking time, and give instant feedback to students. Checking knowledge is made easy. A blend of traditional and 'new' teaching using quality resources makes the lessons more interesting for students and gives a fresh approach for staff.

The students appreciated the 'martini' nature of the VLE - that resources were accessible anytime, anyplace, anywhere providing they had an Internet-linked computer. Students who are unable to get into college can still access the resources and email or have live web chats with tutors or fellow colleagues. This has aided retention.

There has been a major shift in culture to appreciate the value of online learning, the VLE and the benefits to both staff and students. The creation and sharing of resources in the VLE has been really valuable.

3. Details

Approach

The approach of the project was to ensure that all staff had the technical knowledge, the confidence and the time to develop materials and to integrate ILT into their everyday lessons. They underwent training on a pick and mix basis that gave them the knowledge to write their own materials in an interactive way and the confidence to start using them.

A mapping exercise was undertaken to identify gaps and shortfalls in materials and to give focus to the production of materials. All materials were placed in the resources area of the VLE in a virtual

staffroom. This has enabled the sharing of resources – something unheard of before! Other uses of the virtual staffroom have been as a critical events calendar, to disseminate minutes of meetings, and store schemes of work. An exclusive staff area was created for administrative documentation; only the teaching and learning materials are available to both students and staff.

Staff were given targets of carrying out two lessons using ILT each term. This was to ensure the use of ILT had pedagogical value, rather than an 'ILT with everything' approach. There was, and still is no expectation that ILT will be used all the time by everyone, but that it is incorporated appropriately to enhance the learning experience.

Scale

The project involved about 40 staff and 600 learners over 2 sites. The amount of ILT use by the staff and learners varied tremendously depending on the confidence of the staff involved, the availability of technology and the degree of development of the materials for particular subjects.

Impact

The learners appreciated the opportunity to have all resources available at all times. Some students who were unable to get to college because of illness and/or child care were able to participate actively using the discussion boards and email along with the online resources and assignments. Very few used it as an excuse not to come to college. The learners were the major catalyst for many members of staff. If one had started to use ILT then the learners demanded that others followed suit.

Students from an online course in Kuwait are incredibly enthusiastic and use the materials and the synchronous and asynchronous communications tools as a lifeline. The live discussions are particularly appreciated as they give instant feedback, and thought the bulletin boards are useful as the information stays there.

There are greater opportunities for placing extension materials on the VLE for the more advanced learners to use.

Students are very keen to use online assessment tools. Students also seem to be picking up more complex information more easily, although this would need some more research.

Bite-size bursts of learning seem to help with knowledge retention.

Teachers, once they had overcome their reluctance to change, began to embrace the technology and made huge strides to incorporate ILT despite the lack of equipment such as interactive white boards. Their confidence soared and results from a baseline audit and a follow up audit showed that 300% more were confident in using the discussion boards online, 200% were confident to use the student tracking in the VLE, 30% more could download materials.

Teachers and tutors found the online mark book useful to keep track of student progress, as did the students. The use of online assessment means no marking and instant results and is a valuable investment of time.

Through the involvement of the learning resources team the project has encouraged the development of strong collaborative working.

Managers found that they could access schemes of work and materials for cover quickly. They also recognised that there was a trend of better retention in groups where resources were widely available online, though this is inconclusive.

The Bournemouth & Poole College has already embraced some of the practices and now requires all staff to put schemes of work online. The training programme is rolling out and all staff will have the opportunity to undertake all the training for ILT. The new build will be incorporating more ILT facilities into the classrooms.

Costs and benefits

The project was relatively cheap in cash terms and involved mainly staff time. It was supported by a grant from the LSDA's transformation projects initiative. The effort required varied between staff depending on their attitudes and perceptions along with their skills. Those who have embraced it have initially spent a great deal of time and effort developing the courses and materials, but are now reaping the rewards of that time well spent. All authorship is anonymous, so staff can download any resources and re-purpose them and contribute the re-purposed content. This is considered a benefit for sustaining the currency of content and resources.

There are two main elements to sustainability. The first is the continued interest of both senior and departmental management. They are pushing the targets and ensuring compliance with uploading schemes of work etc. The shift in emphasis by Ofsted towards ILT will ensure college wide sustainability. The second is that staff will need ongoing support and training to keep up with new developments and to create new materials using the new generation of tools such as Reload, Wink and Image Author – which are either freeware or open source, thus keeping licensing costs down.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

A clear link between accurate management information system (MIS) information and the login creators is essential. If students and staff do not have logins set up properly the whole thing won't work.

Technology is still considered a barrier, particularly reliability and log-ons.

The availability of equipment in classrooms meant that the students who used those rooms with good equipment got a better deal in terms of ILT. It is unrealistic to expect staff to set up and dismantle ILT equipment every lesson.

Having a competent and willing IT department to deal with technical problems quickly is vital for the smooth running of ILT and to dispel the fears of the technophobes.

A clear student induction strategy is important to ensure maximum use of ILT.

VLE training is better initially incorporated into normal IT lessons but then needs to be backed up by subject sessions where it can be used and consolidated.

The project's approach would seem to improve retention, although this would also need some research. Conjecture is that this may be to do with a focus on learning design and preferred learning styles.

The future is now considered a reality, in other words we have:

- A paperless NVQ
- Online courses
- Blended learning
- More e-learning materials
- Sharing resources cross-college

However, the 'paperless NVQ' is still considered a contradiction by some and there is a need to convince some external verifiers.

There is an issue about staff being willing to give up a proportion of their teaching to train in IT, particularly if that means giving their teaching over to someone else.

Overcoming reluctance takes time, patience and enthusiasm to be creative in the classroom.

It is important not to try too many new things at once; take it slowly – but do have a go.

Make sure you have a technician around the first time you try anything – the technology is bound to let you down!

Don't assume IT teachers will be great at ILT – they may lack the confidence to try.

Face the fear and try it – but have a back up plan in case all goes pear shaped.

Have a group exercise for the beginning of the class in case you need extra time for setting things up.

Above all – keep it simple to begin with and enjoy the creative buzz you get when the students start asking for more!!

There is a risk of disadvantaging students who do not have a computer at home.

Books remain an important resource for all courses.

5. Contact details

Jacky Mawer jmawer@bpc.ac.uk 01202205398