E-learning making it work

Supported by:

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

Contents

1. MyKnowledgeMap: the Retail Academy

Rob Arntsen, Managing Director, MyKnowledgeMap

1. The organisation

MyKnowledgeMap is a learning technology company based in York, and founded by Rob Arntsen in 2000. We produce web-based knowledge, skills and training systems designed by individuals, for individuals. We have been active in developing the concept of the e-academy - a partnership that allows everyone with a stake in knowledge and training for a particular area (workforce, employers, suppliers of learning, public development bodies) to work together to improve skills using technology. MyKnowledgeMap also acts as the managing partner in the Retail Academy, as well as providing the technical development resources.

2. Overview

The Retail Academy provides training and knowledge support to the retail sector, and promotes the development of retail skills throughout the UK. It originally grew out of the Retail Enterprise Network - an international partnership for independent retailers, whose remit is to encourage entrepreneurship and diversity in a business area that is suffering high failure rates. Activities are focussed on the smaller retail business, and on training provision and support at the local level.

The Academy is led by a consortium of partners from the public, private and charitable sectors. The delivery partners and partners from the retail sector currently include:

- *Colleges*: Barnet College, Bournemouth & Poole College, Central College of Commerce Glasgow, City of Bath College, City of Sunderland College, The College of West Anglia, North West Kent College, Park Lane College, Preston College, Stockton Riverside College .
- *Retail trade associations*: The Association of Convenience Stores, The Association of Cycle Traders, Federation of Wholesale Distributors, National Federation of Retail Newsagents, National Federation of Sub Postmasters   .
- *Other partners*: Skillsmart Retail, London College of Communication, University of the Arts, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Others who have joined since summer 2005.

3. Details

Approach

The retail sector is one of the UK's most important industries in terms of numbers of people employed. However, prevalent working conditions create barriers to learning provision:

- High staff turnover.
- Part-time working.
- Low levels of staff per workplace, outlet or store.
- Shift working and weekend working.

These access barriers contribute to, and are in turn compounded by, fragmented learning provision and a lack of associated support services.

The Retail Academy aims to energize the supply chain for retail training—and make it work for small retailers. It began from an analysis of the state of existing retail training, which didn't offer a compelling proposition to small retailers in terms of value to their business. By offering more flexible learning and leveraging new technologies to deliver relevant training in the workplace, the Retail Academy offers bite-sized learning which can be shown to have a direct impact on retailers' bottom lines.

Scale

To engage as broad a section of the industry as possible, Retail Academy training offerings have been made available in a variety of formats: accredited courses intended to put retailers on a training pathway (currently, courses at NQF level 2 have been rolled out, but these will be supplemented by courses at levels 3 and 4); and unaccredited training and skill development intended to draw retailers into the training habit. These offerings include:

Skill Gap Analysis System

The Retail Academy developed a skill gap analysis (SGA) system based on existing MyKnowledgeMap technology. The system can be used on the free Retail Academy website, in workshops (where training providers can guide retailers through the process), or in a full featured version that's part of Retail Detail (see below).

The starting point of the SGA was a skill mapping exercise, for which we asked a focus-group of retail professionals to prioritise retail skill areas. This allowed us to map the broad skill groups that retailers associated with success in their industry.

We plugged a self-assessment system into this retail skill map. As well as producing detailed reports showing where in a business the skill gaps were located, the system guided retailers to appropriate development activities—so it feeds back into the certified learning being offered by the Retail Academy's training partners.

The Certificate in Retail Principles

This includes seven bite-sized courses in specific, important areas of retail. The starting point for development was a skill-mapping exercise, for which we asked a focus-group of retail professionals what areas they thought it was important to cover. The mapping exercise revealed the participants' dissatisfaction with the structure of existing qualifications, which have tended to follow the priorities of larger retail businesses.

The areas they identified as important, which later became the areas covered by the seven certificates, were:

- Visual Merchandising
- Security in a Retail Environment
- Serving Customers in a Retail Environment
- Product Range Planning
- Marketing
- Legislation for the Retail Environment
- Monitor Retail Operations

Using the feedback from this exercise, we worked with CGLI (City and Guilds of London Institute), whose qualifications were particularly recognised by retail employers, to develop a series of qualifications. The certificates offer an opportunity to develop new knowledge and skills in a college learning environment, with supporting bite-sized e-learning.

Unaccredited Learning

One of the barriers preventing retailers from engaging with Retail Academy training has been the fact that fast internet connections may not be available at work. We produced CD-ROMs based on the Certificates in Retail Principles, but with a strong emphasis on practical, moment-of-need learning, and with some of the aspects that retailers felt were more academic stripped out. Learners can use them to cover the basics of a subject, and then top up their learning by contacting a training partner and studying for a full City and Guilds-accredited certificate.

This is central to the Retail Academy approach: create synergy on the supply side to get and keep the interest of retailers; then help them build their skills in a way that will positively impact on their personal development: NVQs by stealth.

Retail Detail (Online subscription service)

This online service, our main framework for delivering a paid-for extension to the well-established Retail Academy website, takes that site's basic mix, provides an alternative route into training for retailers who feel certified courses aren't right for their business. Training is offered via a web portal, with links to regional training opportunities. Again, there is the opportunity to top up learning.

Impact

As part of the Certificate in Retail Principles, we have developed online spaces to make it easier for the partner training organisations and colleges who deliver the qualifications. These systems allow Retail Academy partners to work cooperatively along the supply chain. College learner management systems, for example, interact with the Retail Detail subscription service to allow colleges to award quality points that retailers can put toward a certificate of quality, the Retail Academy Quality Award. The main advantage is that many hooks and systems working smoothly together can create interest in skills investment on the part of retail owner/managers.

All the indications are that the Retail Academy is becoming very successful at engaging retailers, and is having a very positive impact upon those learners it engages. Working closely with retail trade associations such as the Association of Convenience Stores, the Association of Cycle Traders, and the national Federation of Retail Newsagents gives the Academy access to 140,000 of the 298,000 SMEs in the retail sector (47%). In 2005, there were around 1550 enrolments on Certificates in Retail Principles and, to date, 160 companies have subscribed to the Retail Detail service.

In 2005, the national LSC conducted a pilot study on the Academy's Certificates in Retail Principles; this found that satisfaction levels from participants have been high, learning materials were highly rated, and that the Certificates overall were attractive to both providers and learners.

Costs and benefits

The Retail Academy was funded via an ESF project, to a total of about £500,000. This funding came to an end in late 2005. The ongoing plan is use the chargeable Retail Detail service and other paid training (e.g. unaccredited CDs) to become self-sufficient. The charge per year for a SME employer's subscription to Retail Detail is £95, which allows access for up to 10 employees (there are higher charges for packages covering more employees). This appears to be working, and the sustainability plan is to draw income from this service to sustain ongoing development.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The difficulties of engaging a time-poor, resource-poor industry such as SME retail are plain to see from the historical statistics on engagement with training. But it has also been widely understood within the sector that there's a skill gap that needs to be narrowed. Given a range of training offerings that are flexible and appropriate enough, there is a real demand for learning.

5. Contact details

MyKnowledgeMap info@myknowledgemap.com 01904 659465 www.myknowledgemap.com

The Retail Academy info@retailacademy.org 01904 658 856 www.retailacademy.org

And www.retail-network.org

2. South Birmingham College: a teacher training gateway

Greta Barnett, Deputy Director Learning Resources
Jazz Chateau, Assistant Director Management & Professional

1. The organisation

South Birmingham College has over 30,000 enrolments each year and has 5 major sites across the city and numerous community venues. We offer specialist provision in the broadest range of professional, vocational and academic qualifications.

A very large proportion of our courses, well over 50%, are delivered in a community context. This includes much of our teacher training provision. To support this provision, through access to our learning resources, we are establishing a number of broadband network connections at community venues that will have secure access to our on-line teacher training subject gateway and our VLE. It is anticipated that this pilot programme would be deployed more widely across the community provision in the academic year 2005-06. Ours is a rich multi-cultural, multi-racial college, with our student body coming from all walks of life.

2. Overview

The aim of our project is to develop an on-line resource for initial teacher training at South Birmingham College, comprising teacher training support material and e-learning content within a VLE. The nominated VLE is MOODLE, an open source solution freely available to the sector. Obviously this is subject to continuous scrutiny, enhancements and refinement by its user community. It will be used to support integrating e-learning pedagogy in initial teacher training and to develop trainer and trainee skills in relation to e-learning.

3. Details

Approach

The College recognises the need for a fast track bridging programme to assist trainee teachers to progress from 7302 to 7407 qualifications and is developing a separate bid for funding to develop this. It is anticipated that distance learning and our approach to developing a teacher training e-learning resource will be key to this development.

The production of a teacher training gateway as a sustainable and easily manageable on-line resource and VLE, focusing directly on teacher training, is likely to be of general value across the sector. South Birmingham College plans to implement this for its own teacher trainers and trainees and we anticipate it would have widespread application.

It focuses on teacher training and enabling trainees to experience ILT as part of their own learning and leads them to consider how they could use ILT in their teaching.

The development of tools, based on readily available platforms, to assist teacher trainers and trainees in making wider use of ILT within teaching and learning is, we believe, a significant step towards this. We have a highly qualified content development team in place to carry out technical aspects of the project. They have considerable experience of integrating e-learning pedagogy and e-learning content development. The team has been involved in a range of sector wide projects in e-learning including the X4L (Exchange for Learning), Phase 1 and have recently won a bid to take part in Phase 2.

Scale

For the pilot we used two groups consisting of 30 learners. One group was based at the college; the other group was based at a Gurdwara, a place of worship for Sikhs.

Impact

We found that learners welcomed the opportunity to use the learning objects. They had in some cases already covered the modules to which the objects related. This gave them the advantage of having a different mode of delivery with which to compare them. The things our learners said were most valuable to them included being able to work at own pace, check their learning by using the quizzes, having access to the learning objects any time, and reviewing possible opportunities to use ILT within their own subject areas.

Practitioners found them useful to underpin knowledge and to introduce topics. They were also encouraged by the learners' response to investigate other areas within the syllabus that would benefit the learner by being developed into learning objects.

Staff who had recently completed teacher training and more experienced staff found them useful as refreshers and also encouraged them to search out areas within their own curriculum area that would benefit from this type of development.

It means that we are moving forward with the agenda to embed ILT into the curriculum; we will continue to build on this success in teacher training and the wider curriculum. Having the materials on-line means more of our staff and learners are able to access them as and when they need them without being in a formal setting.

Costs and benefits

The biggest cost was staff development and funding the different stages of the learning objects development, including teacher time. We already had the hardware and a team with developer skills available in-house.

Another benefit was that students appeared more engaged in their learning which we believe was enhanced by the use of these bespoke learning objects.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications…

We found that once we had exposed staff to the possibilities and benefits of these learning objects it raised their awareness to possible developments in their own curriculum areas. We have now started to work with some of the staff on some of these developments.

Our advice to others would include taking note of issues such as copyright. Materials being used in college by teaching staff were the starting point for the development of the learning objects. It soon became apparent that we would infringe copyright law if we used them as part of the project and disseminated them to the wider community. Permission was sought for the use of some materials and others have not been used as permission was not given. We have learnt to become 'creative' in drawing upon existing materials, using the ideas they contain but creating our own customised versions.

In common perhaps with other projects lack of time has been an issue. There never seems to be enough time to talk, meet together, plan, develop and test the growing range of learning objects.

We sought to allocate time for teaching staff to take an active part in the project but even where this was possible, we found that being spread over five sites and community venues meant that sometimes it could be problematic trying to get us all together. We recommend to others following our path that they allow adequate time to complete even the simplest of tasks.

We had a dedicated team experienced in the development of e-learning materials and their very existence has been fundamental to the success of our project. Every project involved in the development of e-learning materials is different and has it own issues to resolve; this initial teacher training project was no exception.

5. Contact details

Greta Barnett greta.barnett@sbc.ac.uk 0121 694 5000
Jazz Chateau jazz.chateau@sbc.ac.uk 0121 694 5000

3. South East Essex College: seeNet - a college intranet

Paul Groome, Director of Information Technology and Systems
Paul Gardner, Web Development Manager

1. The organisation

South East Essex College is a large general further education college with growing higher education provision located in Southend. In 2004 the college moved to a new £52 million building in the centre of the town. The college has an excellent IT infrastructure and has a balance of open learning areas and seminar rooms.

2. Overview

seeNet is the college intranet, developed in-house.

Most significantly seeNet is embedded in college practice and culture to the point that it is the message rather than the medium that is the focus of attention for users. seeNet is not the focus of our teaching and learning strategy; it is just one tool among many available to staff and students.

3. Details

Approach

It should be obvious to everyone that ICT can change the way we work and learn for the better - – everyone says so (including the DfES), so it must be true. So why aren't people falling over themselves to embrace the technology? Either they are lazy and stupid *or t*hey don't believe that it will make their lives better. Sometimes they are absolutely right! Making ICT work means making people work differently and people resist change.

Scale

seeNet consists of 5 million unique pages, 40,000 lesson plans, hundreds of thousands of learning resources and receives 120,000 page requests each day from 2000 unique staff and students users. seeNet is the primary means of communication in the college for staff and students and can be accessed as an extranet.

Impact

There are 3 barriers to embedding the use of a technology:

Access

Time

Motivation

It must be unrealistic for someone to say 'I couldn't get on to a computer'. If the online systems are the primary means of communication then it must be realistic to expect people to log on at least once a day. There must be: continuity of experience (all machines must perform the same tasks), lots and lots of computers including laptops for staff and wireless networking, possibly external access and mobile device connectivity.

Staff say 'I enjoyed the training session and it's a good idea but I haven't got time to do it'. Telling people IT will save them time is counter-productive: they won't believe you and it's probably not true. Is it sustainable to give people extra time to do something you want to embed? Do champions restrict embedding ILT? Sell the benefits not the features (if there aren't real benefits, why are you doing it?). Early adopters are great advocates (preferably not the techies). But .t may take a year or two to demonstrate the efficiencies of a system.

Usability is the single-most important factor in embedding a system – training should not be

necessary. 'When people sit around a table and discuss what they might like to see on a site, they will often focus on superficial aspects and praise fancy features like animation and Flash effects. But if these same users were ever asked to actually use the site to accomplish a task, they would usually ignore the animations and would find that the Flash effects hurt them more than it helped them.' [Jakob Nielson, Alertbox, December 12, 1999]

The rules for usability include keeping it simple and following conventions. Thus:

- Blue links
- No drop-down menus
- Resist the urge to animate
- No frames
- Use a good search engine
- People have already got the skills to use the Internet for banking, buying and information finding - use the same skills
- The hardware must work as well - all the time
- Beware the assumptions of software developers
- Just because a feature exists it doesn't mean you have to use it
- It should work first time and every time
- There should be no need for explanation or training - point, click and type
- It's never the user's fault for being stupid or not reading the instructions
- Be consistent in interfaces and language - if possible, across systems
- It must be easier to do things on-line than off-line
- Most tasks people are asked to perform using ICT they are already doing off-line
- Work out what users use your systems for the most and make it easy for them
- Count the clicks it takes to perform every task

In relation to staff motivation:
- 20/60/20 - ignore the bottom 20%
- Find an unambiguous benefit and talk it up (i.e. cover!!!!)
- Catch new staff early
- Managers are critical if staff are to join in
- The path of least resistance - if it works it should sell itself

Costs and benefits

In relation to management and strategy:
- It's not a magic solution to anything
- The power of "e":
  - Gets funding.
  - Gets projects the green light.
  - Gets attention.
  - Gets unreasonable expectations in very short time-scales.

Ask about the cost/benefit:
- Is it going ahead just because it's an ICT project?
- Is it a good idea but not worth the effort?

4. Lessons, caveats and implications

Senior management:

- Must be risk-taking not risk-averse.
- May require an enforced need to change.
- Committed to use of ICT - no half measures (but beware the power of 'e').
- Accept it's a long term project.
- Mustn't be seduced by software - pedagogy before technology.
- Must accept failure.
- Must accept lack of measurable outcomes.
- Must praise successes.
- Must accept it's not all about e-learning. It's about doing what you already do more effectively and giving the opportunity to do some new things.

And finally, more impact can be made on the success of a course by making all the existing handouts and assessments available on-line than by creating a multimedia extravaganza that is used in one or two sessions (and at a fraction of the cost). It's not sexy-technology and it doesn't look great at conferences, but it is easy to do and has real practical benefits for staff and students.

5. Contact details

Paul Groome paul.groome@southend.ac.uk 01702 220453

Paul Gardner paul.gardner@southend.ac.uk 01702 220499

http://www.southend.ac.uk/sites/new-campus/

4. London Online: an innovative approach to training for online interactive materials production

Ron Mitchell, lead trainer, Tower Hamlets College
Tahmina Maula, ESOL trainer, Westminster Kingsway College

1. The organisation

London Online is a growing strategic partnership initiated in 2001 in response to a vision that all London learners should have access to relevant, high-quality e-learning resources. It is steered by partners and directed/led by Chris Avis at Southwark College.

2. Overview

The project involved and combined training and professional development of staff in FE and ACL with effective collaboration and high quality interactive materials development. The materials including the source files are released free to the sector, and there has been extremely positive feedback both regionally and nationally.

The achievements include: true collaboration between members of Central London Learning Partnership and Tower Hamlets College who developed the programme, including five colleges, one special designated institute, one skills for life professional development centre, and one community training organisation. The materials have been formally piloted with a further nine ACL providers. 24 trainees have been recruited and trained between Sept 03 to July 05

The project has resulted in two sets of freely available interactive materials, comprising eleven ESOL units mapped to the national skills for life curriculum. The materials comprise customisable learning objects together with an easy to use authoring tool - picturegrid editor.

There has been a groundswell of interest and positive feedback nationally from tutors accessing and using the materials and authoring tool. The 03-04 materials were created to complement the DfES Read, Write, Plus materials and mapped to the national skills for life curriculum at Entry Level 1. The units include the topics Friends, Health, Jobs, Neighbourhood and Shopping.

The 04-05 materials were created to complement the ESOL and Citizenship curriculum at various levels. The units include the topics Renting Accommodation, Settling in to a New Home, Neighbours, Transport, College Life and Free Time.

3. Details

Approach

Invitations were sent to Central London colleges and ACL providers as well as various contact lists inviting expressions of interest in the course/project from ESOL teachers or multi-media developers.

Trainees attended ten three-hour sessions and worked in pairs and as a team in the intervening (30hrs) development sessions. The training workshop at Tower Hamlets College was made available for the duration of the project.

This 20-week schedule included an induction session at the beginning and a dissemination workshop at the end to which line managers, project steering group and external guests were invited.

All trainees accessed a WebCT course and used a JISCMail mailing list to communicate and share materials and ideas throughout the duration of the course/project.

All the pairs completed module grids and storyboarding to develop the content of their chosen modules which reflected the ESOL Read Write Plus (03-04) and Citizenship (04-05) topics and map onto the chosen level of the core curriculum.

Course sessions involved a mix of whole group, split group, pair work and tutorials as well as individual on-line and off-line support.

A major objective was to produce materials which are easy to customise without specialist skills e.g. keeping all assets external and therefore easy to replace. This has also enabled the easy and efficient creation of new content during 04-05.

The original authoring files (Macromedia Flash) are also made freely available to enable and encourage further and additional development. Where possible all coding is fully commented.

An easy to use authoring tool (picturegrid editor) was developed and made available as further 'proof of concept' of the value of using external assets.

Scale

There were approximately twelve participants each year (03-04 & 04-05) all of whom are staff from London colleges and ACL providers. There were also three trainers (one a previous participant) and numerous steering group members and partners.

Dissemination has involved CLLP, talent London, LLU+, Becta, LSDA, JISC RSC, NIACE, TechDis and a range of other organisations and individuals. This has included events, training workshops, case studies and various email and online communications.

There have been over 1200 downloads of the 03-04 materials and picturegrid editor and large numbers of registrations of interest together with positive feedback via the available online form.

Impact

The project participants have produced high quality, interactive and engaging learning material mapped to the skills for life curriculum. There has been a successful pilot/evaluation with 100+ learners in London and very positive feedback from tutors and trainers nationally who have used the material with their own learners.

All the participants are motivated to develop materials further and disseminate project outputs. Some have been delivering external workshops as well as disseminating within their own organisations.

Staff in a number of colleges and ACL providers have used the customisable engine-based material to repurpose and create new material. For some colleges this has formed the basis of an LSDA Q Project.

Line managers of course participants have been involved and very supportive throughout the project. In many cases further development has been ongoing and involvement in the project has encouraged and initiated further CPD and materials development activities.

Training the trainers workshops have been delivered enabling further cascading of use and customization of the materials and awareness and recognition of the benefits of collaborative development.

Costs and benefits

The project has been funded (£25k/year) by the Central London Learning Partnership (CLLP) which, itself, is funded through LSC London Central. In year 04-05 the project was supported from the LSC's discretionary Local Initiative Development Funds (LIDF).

The trainees and trainers were paid for their involvement via their institutions, although in most cases the time and effort involved far exceeded the requisite learning and development hours.

The project has recently secured a small amount (£2k) from NIACE's Content for Adult and Community Learning (CACL) funds to provide London Online training workshops. These will be delivered in December/January at the Mary Ward Centre in Camden. The Mary Ward Centre is one of the ACL partners in the project and a member of CLLP.

At the moment funding is being sought but is not currently available for running the course/project during 05-06.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The development of easy to use and customisable engine-based material facilitates much wider usage and ongoing development.

The collaborative development methodology has provided a strong model for developing and mapping materials to a curriculum and has encouraged and enabled participants to identify effective practice in adding value to traditional resources and delivery.

This training/project/collaborative development model established through London Online is transferable to other subject areas.

Like all projects individual and team communication and responsibilities are crucial to success. Use of a JISCMail list has proved an important and essential part of this project.

Steering group and line manager involvement/support is another crucial element.

A well equipped training and development environment together with availability of specialised resources and support was also a key factor.

5. Contact details

Ron Mitchell ron.mitchell@tower.ac.uk 020 7510 7788
Tahmina Maula Tahmina.Maula@westking.ac.uk 020 7931 6914
Mary Arnold, Project Manager maryarnold1@btinternet.com 07961 406 005

03-04 materials: www.talent.ac.uk/londononline
04-05 materials: www.talent.ac.uk/londononline/0405
Picturegrid Editor: http://www.tower.ac.uk/curweb/ILT/resourcesdetail.asp?DocID=2148
Downloads and updates: www.tower.ac.uk/curweb/londononline

5. Lancashire Learning Partnership: e-learning transformation – making it happen

Steve Smith, project leader, ILT Manager, Runshaw College

1. The organisations

Over the past year, a network of 12 Lancashire post-16 educational institutions has collaborated to identify what it feels are the key models and processes for embedding e-learning, and the impact of the widespread use, and innovative features of, technology on learners.

2. Overview

The network partners have used their collective skills and experience to develop transferable models of practice in the use of e-learning. These include the way in which we:

- Define an essential skills set for the use of e-learning, and how this can be measured amongst staff.
- Design and run professional development programmes to meet any significant skills gaps.
- Support innovation in the use of technology for teaching and learning through action-based projects.
- Identify the key processes to support sustainable e-learning infrastructures, particularly in an environment where increasing demands on capacity are met with only a modest increase in resources

3. Details

Approach

We used a variety of approaches to address each strand.

For the essential e-learning skills set we first needed to agree what is meant by essential e-learning skills as a clear taxonomy did not seem to exist nationally. A working party of 6 ILT managers was formed to create a skill set and complete a survey form that could be used across our partner institutions. The final survey form was a hybrid with sufficient scope to satisfy the needs of all members. The group felt the resulting proforma was an improvement as it focused on several key factors, each of which influenced the other in terms of institutional e-learning skills provision:

- Software/hardware application skills.
- Use of these skills in a teaching and learning context.
- Ability to apply skills and knowledge (i.e. access to resources).

The ILT managers working group met again in early June 2004 to consider how the results from the skills survey could be used to design a new professional development programme, which could offer just-in-time training in the skill gaps that had been identified. Development time for teachers was also a factor, and the programme design made much use of specific skill sessions that could be completed in one hour or less.

Through the use of action-based projects, the group aimed to measure the impact of e-learning on student engagement, retention and achievement. The main measure was the engagement of students in the evaluation of their perceptions of their own performance with regard to the technology used, as well as staff perceptions.

Twenty two projects were completed within eleven partner institutions between June 2004 and February 2005. The projects were divided into three broad contexts which correspond to the Becta e-learning fan (*Managing Inspection and ILT, Becta, 2002*): supporting learners, supporting traditional learning, and anytime/ remote-learning

A case study approach was used to investigate sustainable e-learning strategies. IT managers in six partner colleges were interviewed and asked how sustainable e-learning was managed in practice. The managers represented small, medium and large institutions so a wide variation in provision was taken into account. All of the case studies were based on three broad areas of support – infrastructure planning, standards of service, and the way in which IT services connect with teaching and learning.

Scale

Over three hundred (334) teachers across six institutions took part in the essential skills survey.

A new training programme called ILT4Teachers was based on the skill gaps identified from the survey and the programme was piloted across three institutions.

Twenty two action-based projects were completed across 11 institutions. 450 learners fed back on their perceptions of how e-learning had enhanced their learning. 39 teachers in total fed back on how they felt e-learning had added value to learner engagement, retention and achievement.

Six IT managers had explained their approaches to sustainable e-learning.

Impact

The feedback from 450 learners indicated that e-learning adds most value to their learning in 8 ways:

- Use of images, animation, video and sound to stimulate sensory engagement.
- Use of resources that add spontaneity and relevance.
- Use of a diversity of sensory forms to maintain attention and to recognise different learning styles.
- Use of features to make lessons more memorable.
- Enabling students to visualise ideas more easily and within their own time frames.
- Providing an alternative explanation to that provided by the teacher.
- Offering numerous examples to help understand the theory.
- Using ILT resources to enable students to be, and to feel, better organised.

The feedback from the 39 teachers involved in the action-based projects indicated that through e-learning students are better able to:

- Recall subject content.
- Gain confidence in their abilities through accelerated knowledge and skills acquisition and instant feedback on progress (particularly through learning construct software and online/onscreen tests).
- Contribute to discussion and development of ideas (e.g. through forums and chat rooms).
- Improve their work in terms of presentation and increased use of a variety of sources.

A third (33%) of respondents felt that retention or attendance had been enhanced through e-learning. Three quarters (75%) of respondents felt that e-learning had had a positive impact on achievement.

The essential skills survey of 334 teachers showed overall that teachers lacked confidence in 60% of the essential e-learning skills listed. There were particularly low levels of confidence in the skills that learners most value (e.g. use of multi media to stimulate sensory engagement).

Of the sustainable e-learning strand, it was noted that:

- IT managers could not recognise an external benchmark for post-16 IT services so there was a wide variation in type and levels of technical support.
- IT managers often inherit a fragmented network that does not connect between institutional software in terms of exchanging and updating information, and means that some parts of an

institution have better network access than others. This was often as a result of network investment being affected by annual budget cycles rather than a long-term strategy. This can lead to an inconsistent experience for learners.

- IT managers tend not to be included in curriculum planning activities so e-learning demands tend to be unexpected, urgent and lead to temporary solutions which then impacts on the fragmented network.

From the teachers who took part in the essential skills survey and the case study outcomes from the IT managers, we conclude that institutions are only able to utilise fully a maximum of 40% of their existing e-learning potential.

- Lack of e-learning skills in teachers and differing levels of network service means that students are having different levels of e-learning experiences.
- ICT-based qualifications are not a comprehensive institutional answer to updating e-learning skills in staff; resources should be focused on supporting essential skill gaps if greater impact is desired

Costs and benefits

There has already been much investment in e-learning infrastructure over the past five years in the institutions studied; the main benefits have yet to be realised because, in some cases, the wrong emphasis is being placed on e-learning development. Institutions can get better value for money if they use the existing assets more intensively in terms of fair distribution of e-learning resources across the institution and developing skills in staff who make better/more imaginative use of existing networked software.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The move of any organisation from the transformative to revolutionary use of e-learning is influenced by three main factors. Firstly, teachers need to be updated in the essential e-learning skills that are needed to stimulate innovative practice inside and outside of the classroom. Secondly, all staff need to understand where e-learning adds value to the curriculum and how it can be used effectively to support learning, support traditional learning, and to support anytime/remote-learning. Finally, the technical infrastructure must be flexible, scalable, fast, utterly reliable, and focused on the needs of the learner.

There is a specific set of skills with which all teachers should feel confident if revolutionary use of e-learning is to happen. Teachers report that the ability to capture, edit, cut and paste learning resources and then link them to other resources tend to be seen as the most useful skills. The most popular techniques for building resources included the interactive features of Microsoft Office and Internet image and media clip search and capture.

There are large differences in skill levels between existing teachers, and a need for responsive and flexible staff development programmes that are based on the essential e-learning skills. It is not certain that external awards can meet this need in every case. There is also a need to develop programmes for teachers that build confidence at an elementary technical level.

In a revolutionary e-learning organisation, the features that students identify as being of most help in their learning should form the content of a staff development programme.

Action-based projects are a clear and measurable way of introducing e-learning innovation into the curriculum, but teachers must involve other areas of the institution that have a stake in its success from the outset (e.g. IT services). Objectives need to have an action, a standard and a condition in order to be measurable. The time allocated for a project, the training effort and allowance for the introduction of new technology are consistently under-estimated.

Classroom management is as important as the appropriate use of technology in terms of achieving a high quality learning experience. Observations showed that the arrangement of a classroom, the timing of the lesson, involvement of the learner and the ability to move fluently from one medium to another were particularly important.

Each of the strands we have explored has raised specific opportunities and priorities for making e-learning more effective within any institution. The sheer scale and range of issues can seem daunting however, and it is vital that leaders focus on a few priorities at a time, and achieve a high quality result.

An annual e-learning skills survey is one of the most influential, single activities you can undertake to pave the way for transformational change, as it has implications for staff development, access to hardware and software, and the extent to which the IT infrastructure supports the curriculum (or otherwise).

Equipping teachers with essential e-learning skills is another area to which it is worth allocating resources. Once teachers are e-confident they can alter their curriculum to use e-learning where it truly adds value, create imaginative materials for particular learners and groups, and make better use of existing resources at a local level.

A very small outlay on resources can yield far reaching results. For instance, the inclusion of IT managers in high-level curriculum planning activity will begin the process of challenging IT managers to allow teachers better rights of access, while at the same time protecting network security and business continuity. It will also promote discussion on the nature of network services to teachers, and the way in which just-in-time technical support can be made available.

5. Contact details

Steve Smith steve.smith@runshaw.ac.uk 01772 622677 x2146

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

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

7. The BlendEd project: collaborative blended learning

Kenneth Park and Angela Skea

1. The organisation

BlendEd is a two-year, £1million, collaborative blended learning project funded under the joint SFEFC/SHEFC e-Learning Transformation Initiative. The project, led by Reid Kerr College, aims to introduce a pedagogically sound blended delivery model within HNC Social Care and HND Business. The emphasis is on producing a practical working model which demonstrates the benefits for institutions and their students.

2. Overview

The project began in March 2005 and is led by Reid Kerr College working in partnership with five other further education (FE) colleges (Cardonald, Coatbridge, Dundee and Langside colleges, plus Glasgow College of Nautical Studies) which enrol 75,000 students collectively each year. This equates to 17% of the total number of students enrolled within Scotland.

The consortium also contains two supporting centres: COLEG, which represents 42 colleges and is committed to the development of resources to support the FE sector, and JISC South and West Scotland RSC, which promotes and supports the use of learning technologies in 21 colleges, including five of the consortium members.

3. Details

Approach

BlendEd intends to improve delivery in specific curriculum areas (HNC Social Care and HND Business) through a complimentary mix of technology and traditional teaching which combines "the best of the old with the best of the new". The consortium colleges are collaborating to re-engineer the curricula topic by topic, rather than at a unit level, as this will allow greater re-use throughout the curriculum.

Blended Learning Technologists (BLTs) at each college work with teaching staff identifying where technology can help them to improve delivery. BLTs also liaise between teachers and a specialist technical team, based at one of the colleges, who develop the multimedia elements required. Technology used includes not only personal computers (PCs) but any technology which can help or add interest, add value or make delivery more effective.

The project aims to encourage lecturers to use the most appropriate and effective blend of teaching and learning strategies to deliver courses which currently contain a minimum of 45 credits, a notional 1800 teaching hours. By introducing educationally sound blended delivery the colleges hope to realise benefits such as efficiency, flexibility and an enhanced student experience.

BlendEd's aim is not to adopt wholly e-learning materials but to examine the appropriateness of creating information, communication and learning technology (ICLT) materials to compliment teaching to create a student centred learning environment.

Scale

The first step in the process is the collaborative identification of the make-up of a typical course in the mainstream curriculum. This is followed by a practical approach to course redesign that involves using a mix of existing, modified and newly developed resources.

Five of the consortium colleges are involved in the development of resources, but all six will deliver and evaluate the learning. Each of the five development colleges have appointed a Blended Learning Technologist (BLT), in some case two 0.5 posts rather than a single position. All BLTs have a teaching background within FE but come with different skills. The role of the BLT is essentially to

support the curriculum staff in pedagogical matters, especially within e-learning, and be a source of advice and support on e-learning technologies.

Tutors have been given 6 hours remission per week for 18 weeks to enable them to take part in the project.

The approach taken to the re-engineering of resources is topic-based rather than unit-based, to allow for resource re-use throughout the curriculum wherever the topic occurs. Resource materials for each individual topic will be packaged electronically to allow for flexibility in the delivery of a unit, giving the lecturer the ability to choose how to assemble a blend of resources to suit the needs of a particular group of learners. The discrete electronic packages will be stored in a repository allowing the materials to be shared widely.

Non-consortium member colleges will be able to benefit from the project as the outcomes (including methodologies, staff development programmes and course materials) will be made available to the sector via the COLEG and JISC.

Impact

The extent of the impact on learners will start to become tangible after the first delivery stage of the project, which was due to commence in January 2006.

Impact on the staff will result from the project providing a series of outputs to help them to develop a blended approach in all curriculum areas including:

- Creation of standards and tools that reflect the sector's requirements.

- Quality assured resources to support the delivery model.

- Best practice guides, procedures, case studies, development standards and technical standards.

The staff who become BLTs will gain new technical and pedagogic skills and will pass on some of these skills to the teaching staff they support and advise. The BLTs will provide a bridge between technical developers and teachers that is often missing.

BlendEd is unique in that it is applying a blended learning model systematically across two curriculum areas and collaboratively in six colleges using curriculum developers supported by the BLTs, COLEG and JISC RSC. By adopting a collaborative approach to development the project should prevent duplication of effort and reduce development costs.

Costs and benefits

The four highest costs, which account for almost 85% of the BlendEd budget, are salaries for:

- The BLTs (30%)

- Curriculum developers and technical support team (27%)

- Project management (17%)

- Quality assurance peer and technical reviewers (11%)

Monies related to staff development and the associated travel and subsistence are not taken from the BlendEd budget but from an individual institution's own contribution. The cost of piloting the BlendEd materials are almost negligible as the units have to be taught anyway.

The BlendEd project is expected to improve the teaching and learning process used within the colleges and change the way in which resources are generated. It is hoped that the re-engineered curriculum delivery will be more efficient and flexible and will enhance the learning experience, therefore contributing to attracting and retaining students.

The project will allow the six colleges to explore and consider their own position in relation to the sector's needs, and what further development is required.

4. Lessons, caveats and implications

As the project is still in its infancy most of the lessons and implications are yet to be identified. In relation to staff training, we have learned that it is important to deal with all BLT training requirements in the early stages of the project prior to working with the curriculum developers.

It is also necessary to ensure that the curriculum developers have an agreed IT skill level and are committed to both the blended model of teaching and to the development of the resources for use collaboratively.

Copyright and IPR issues have caused some problems for consortium members, who report struggling to gain access to resources including some believed to be available to all colleges.

In many cases the problem is not using the resources but gaining permission to re-purpose them or to put them in a repository. It is believed that creative commons licensing will help improve this situation.

5. Contact details

Kenneth Park kpark@cardonald.ac.uk 0141 272 0603
Angela Skea askea@reidkerr.ac.uk 0141 581 2262
Website: www.blend-ed.org

8. East Midlands Adult and Community Education Services: an adult, community and family regional e-learning community

Sharon Hutchings, JISC RSC East Midlands
Ian McGregor, ILT/ICT curriculum manager, Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service
Paul Fleming, Leicestershire Adult and Community Education Service
Dave Cheetham, Assistant Director Operations, East Midlands Broadband Consortium

1. The organisations

The regional e-learning community is made up of at least one and sometimes two members from all the local education authorities. They are:

- Derbyshire County Council
- Derby City Council
- Nottinghamshire County Council
- Nottingham City Council
- Rutland County Council
- Leicestershire County Council
- Leicester City Council
- Northamptonshire County Council
- Lincoln County Council

The JISC Regional Support Centre East Midlands and East Midlands Broadband Consortium (embc) are also members.

2. Overview

The significant achievement of this project is not really about technology, but the development of a regional adult, community and family learning (ACFL) e-learning community. As part of an existing East Midlands broadband consortium project, a few enthusiasts explored web technologies, in particular learning platforms, as a means of transforming e-learning in their organisations. From this initial collaboration, East Midlands ACFL has grown into a pro-active e-learning community.

3. Details

Approach

Our e-learning community is built on the expertise and relationships that have been developing around e-Learning over the last few years in the ACL sector in the East Midlands. We feel quite strongly that the success and sustainability of this community needs to be considered in two key areas:

Human focus

The strength and long term success of this project relies on those relationships that have grown from shared interests and needs. The technology allows for possibilities but the vision and creativity as to how this technology is used comes from those members of the community that are dedicated to adult and community learning.

Pedagogical and technological focus

Our intention at all times is to seek to meet the needs of our learners and we recognise that technology on its own cannot achieve this. However, we also recognise the importance of the combination of a vision for e-learning and the technical expertise creating just the right environment for change. Our community has given us the opportunity to discuss and research carefully a range of

technical solutions, particularly around learning platforms.

Scale

The start of our community evolved out of a project known as the Mobile Learning Unit (MLU) which began in spring 2003. It was managed by embc and funded by lottery money. In brief the project purchased a range of mobile technologies; ACL providers in the region were able to borrow these kits to use for learners in hard-to-reach locations. Technical support costs were also built into the project. From the outset ACL providers involved in the project sensed that their group had more to offer and focus on than the MLU kits alone and this was the beginnings of sharing resources and expertise. A year into the MLU project the LSC required all ACL providers to develop and implement an ILT/e-Learning strategy. This added a further focus for the group realising they had a different purpose to meet. The JISC RSC East Midlands also became engaged with the group at this time and along with embc are active members of the group.

Impact

As e-learning becomes a much more everyday part of learning, the impact of this regional e-learning community is reaching deep into ACL organisations. Six months ago Derbyshire Adult Community Education service had perhaps ten tutors who knew what a learning platform was. Now there are 350 signed up to the project and, while not all are using e-learning as meaningfully as they could, it has injected a whole fresh approach to teaching and learning. Leicestershire County Council has introduced a learning platform to enable better and more efficient communication with their learners. And Derby City Council is developing resources through their learning platform which have alerted other authorities to the possibilities.

Two case studies highlight just how this project has broken new ground and allowed learning providers to widen participation and give learning opportunities to people like never before.

Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Travellers Education Service (TES).

The TES works with children whose families work on show grounds during the summer months and spend winter in Leicestershire. Previously the TES had liaised with each child's school and produced paper-based work packs to take away, posting work to and fro over the summer. With the six

laptops, the TES worked with five different families to set up separate areas on Assimilate (a learning platform) for each child and email assignments back and forth. The teachers gradually became involved and, most encouragingly from our point of view, the families also became involved.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this project has stimulated and encouraged family learning in a culture where it never traditionally existed. One father was reported as asking where he could improve his literacy and numeracy to be able to help his son, and another family has been learning how to use the Internet in order to make their showground bookings online. The project has been nominated for a Becta award and is in the final six in its category.

Nottingham CVS

Nottingham Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) uses the laptops as a library for the beneficiaries of affiliated organisations. The main user of the MLU so far has been Inspire, a group working with adults with learning difficulties. The tutor has been able to deliver IT training to groups of 4-6 students in a suitable room. Previously they had to carry downstairs one heavy desktop computer with no Internet access and get the whole group gathered around it each week. Inspire staff have repeatedly said what a fantastic resource this is for them and how much the students enjoy using it. Another beneficiary has been a bed-ridden terminally ill cancer patient in hospice care; one of the groups has been taking out a laptop to her to teach her how to email to help her communicate with family and also to access online services.

Costs and benefits

Achievements include:

- New innovative technologies on a regional scale, such as a shared resources bank.
- Single Sign On (SSO) authentication allows access to a web-based personalised learning space for each tutor or adult learner.
- Shared expertise with recognition of LEA-wide differences.
- Shared resources and collaboration across the region and beyond e-learning.
- User access to the embc community gateway anywhere, anytime through a web-based interface.
- Using technology where appropriate, to meet the challenges of lifelong learning.
- Appropriate use of learning platforms.

Lottery funding enabled the MLU project to be successful. This has now come to an end but we have decided on new terms of reference for our community which fit with the group's now wider role. The cost of hosting meetings will be met by each ACL provider in turn, support will continue from the JISC RSC East Midlands and embc, and we hope to look for future funding as a group. In reality we understand that to develop future innovations we may struggle to fund projects such as the shared resource bank, but the benefits of belonging to a community like this can be realised through simple support and shared experiences.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

As a regional e-learning community we feel the key to our success has been the focus on the human rather than the technical aspects of what we want to achieve. We look forward to hearing from you if you would like to discuss further what has made this community work or what you might want to consider for building your own community. You can log in to a discussion on our shared resource bank by sending your name, the name of your organisation and your email address to sharon.hutchings@rsc-em.ac.uk

5. Contact details

Ian McGregor Ian.McGregor@Derbyshire.gov.uk

Penny Bryant PBryant@rutland.gov.uk

Sharon Hutchings sharon.hutchings@rsc-em.ac.uk

9. The College of West Anglia: facilitating the production of professional development journals (PDJ) and the development of reflective practice through blended e-learning

Paul Adcock, Course Director City and Guilds 7407

1. The organisation

The College of West Anglia is one of the largest and most successful further education and training providers in the Eastern Region. It is based on three campuses, King's Lynn in Norfolk, and Milton and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. There are also learning centres in Downham Market, Hunstanton, Sheringham, Fakenham and Thetford. Each year more than 20,000 students are enrolled on courses ranging from 3 hour taster sessions in IT through to full-time degrees.

2. Overview

The aim of the project (one of LSDA's related transformation projects) was to develop and introduce blended e-learning into initial teacher training (ITT) through the professional development process in order to extend, enhance and embed reflective practice for learners. It aimed to deliver positive outputs and outcomes of a tangible and intangible nature. Tangible outputs focused on the development of 'on-line' systems and formal protocols to facilitate reflective professional development. Less tangible outcomes focused on the developing confidence, competence and commitment to the use of e-learning with the ITT group. It was hoped that this would increase the learner's confidence to use e-learning in their own teaching practice. (cf the LLUK e-learning standards Q1,2,3.)

Objectives included to:

- plan and launch the ITT e-learning professional development project.
- design a robust on-line system to facilitate professional development.
- utilise the on-line professional system with the ITT cohort.
- measure the performance of the on-line professional development system.
- evaluate the performance of the on-line professional development system.
- quantify and qualify relevant learning and development in the project team.

3. Details

Approach

The research project was designed around an established group of 47 learners engaged in the second part of an ITT City and Guilds 7407 qualification. The group comprised 2 distinct cohorts, one delivered at COWA, the other delivered off site at a local RAF station. The college course was intended for public access, whereas the RAF course was intended for service personnel only. Both cohorts were taught by the same staff and followed the same syllabus, being assessed against the same unit criteria.

The professional development journal (PDJ) which is required of students related to the following City and Guilds 7407 units:

- U107: Self-evaluation. *Aims: To evaluate one's own practice within a professional value base and to agree codes of professional practice and to evaluate personal skills against those required for teaching.* The focus of U107 is on 'reflective practice' as defined in the FENTO (now LLUK) standards via a traditional paper-based professional development journal (PDJ), during the first semester (September 2004 to January 2005).

- U118: Personal development. *Aims: To work within a professional value base and to conform to agreed codes of professional practice.* The focus of U118 is on continuing professional development (CPD). The COWA ITT e-learning project was built around this unit, with the PDJ being in electronic form in a virtual learning environment (VLE). Feedback and assessment from the tutor to the student were held on-line in a form that replaced the traditional paper-based journal. Each student cohort was introduced to the VLE system in semester 2 and continued to use it up to the end of the course in June 2005. This new form of PDJ was agreed with the City and Guilds 7407 external verifier, who viewed some of the entries in June and was pleased with the outcome.

Scale

A critical success factor was the decision from the beginning to use the lowest level of technology, which would do the job with a minimum of development work and a maximum use of common tools. Previous experience had shown that e-mail messaging, a familiar concept to many people, can be used to support on-line discussion. The project used a proprietary VLE (WebCT) to host the PDJ for each learner, with all records held securely on the college's central computer. Learners accessed and interacted with the system via a web-browser (e.g. Internet Explorer) and made all entries direct into WebCT. The advantages of this include data integrity and security whilst no additional software is required for access. Training needs for both tutor and learner (see below) were reduced by the common familiarity of web-browser and e-mail protocols.

Once logged onto WebCT the learners could also access resources related to the course. These included the course timetable, which had links to session information and support material (PowerPoint presentations given by the tutors, handouts, unit information) and the course handbook, which contained all the City and Guilds guidelines and appeal procedures. There was also the facility for learners to e-mail each other within the group and for the tutor to send e-mails to the whole cohort on pre-set dates if required.

Impact

The process of reflective practice in teacher training should involve continual improvement. By recording thoughts and reactions to events and situations in a PDJ, learners can help to develop knowledge and understanding to improve their teaching. A paper-based PDJ can become a very subjective account and may turn into a 'dear diary' where the learner is diverted away from reflection. As the course tutor commented, the paper based PDJ was checked only twice a term by the tutors and therefore the student could have been unreflective and going in the wrong direction for a whole six weeks before this could be pointed out. The online PDJ alleviated this problem by providing more immediate feedback.

Costs and benefits

The issue of 'what is reflection' is an on-going one. With the on-line PDJ, guidance could be given regularly and pedagogic issues could be reinforced through informative feedback and setting small targets in the tutor's responses. Another benefit is the immediacy of the on-line PDJ and tutors can respond to a current need, the responses relating to one another.

4. Lessons, caveats and implications

A critical success factor was the involvement of the senior management team from the beginning of the project. Their attendance at the monthly review meetings ensured the smooth running of the project and the senior management team's in-depth understanding of and involvement in the project as it developed.

The project has been very successful in meeting its key objectives. The on-line system has proved itself to be secure, robust and simple to use. The majority of the learners interviewed found the system far more convenient and effective than the paper-based version and that tutor responses were more rapid and therefore often more relevant. Both tutors involved in the project were also very

positive, feeling that the system was an efficient use of their time and responses improved the relationship that they had with learners. The proof of the project's viability is the fact that it will continue to be used in the next academic year and developed further for other FE and HE courses running at the College of West Anglia.

5. Contact details

Paul Adcock padcock@col-westanglia.ac.uk 01553 815221

10. City and Islington College: using a project management method to define and deliver e-learning projects

Sandra Partington, e-learning manager

1. The organisations

City and Islington College is London's most successful college, with over 21,000 full-time and part-time students of all ages. It offers nearly 4000 courses and about 450 qualifications in many settings: in college, at work and in the community. The Ofsted inspection in November 2004 described the college as 'outstanding' and placed us among the top ten colleges in the country, awarding 90 per cent of college provision with outstanding or good. Beacon status was awarded to the college in January 2006

By 2005 the college will have completed the biggest accommodation investment programme of £60 million in the history of further education. By then, the college will have five centres across the borough of Islington, each specialising in its own distinct subjects. Students and staff will have the very best environments for teaching and learning.

City and Islington College selected Camden LEA as a key partner in the delivery of our strategy. Working closely with our in-house ICT team and the capital projects team, Camden has brought significant technical, procurement and project management experience. By working together, the 'classroom of the future' is now a reality at our Finsbury Park and Angel sites.

2. Overview

The college has invested significantly in the network infrastructure, users now benefit from a reliable high speed, 100 MB, network between sites. The total PC population is now in excess of 2500 with excellent facilities such as colour printing, network filtering and specialist software for multi-media and languages.

This was the first year of using a project management method to manage change projects across the college centres and services involved in e-learning.

3. Details

Approach

83 small scale projects and 6 medium scale projects were initiated using a project management methodology. The status and progress of all projects was reviewed regularly. All projects were closed and evaluated by the end of the academic year. Development plans for 2005- 2006 were reviewed and drafted by the end of the academic year.

The project used the Ferl Practitioners' Programme Module Q for the planning and implementation cycle and Microsoft Project 2003 Professional for project management templates and method.

Scale

The focus of the small scale projects from each of the 5 centres and four support areas (key skills, adult learning, the learning centre and careers guidance) was agreed after a consultation process. They are outside the overall annual development plan and run from 2004 to 2006. All are matched to the college strategic plan and to the listed centre or service priorities for e-learning development. The data collected and project evaluations were to be used to report to SMT on the distance travelled towards the goal of embedding e-learning in the college by September 2005.

Impact

- Increased online access to learning materials for specific courses via the VLE.
- Subject support by learning centre staff improved by accessing course materials online via the VLE.
- Increase in access to subject-specific online resources and journals via the learning centre online.
- Increase in teachers using multimedia and web based resources in the classroom in a sustained way, including evaluation of how this can improve learning.
- New policies and procedures in place to ensure services meet the needs of learners.
- Enabled cultural change in learning centre service to enable knowledge exchange between student, subject teacher and learning centre staff, and to focus students using the centre and resources effectively for independent study.
- Supplied data and feedback on how e-learning is becoming embedded.
- Identified areas for future improvement and for LSN Q project applications.

Costs and benefits

The e-learning manager and e-learning assistant spent time:

- Researching the project management method and adapting available document templates.
- Creating the project year overview and milestones.
- Training the e-learning champions.
- Preparing reports and consulting with directors and champions to agree outcomes and deadlines.
- Preparing and presenting end of year reports and disseminating the results.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The use of a project management methodology is becoming embedded in normal practice and the college is now developing a programme management approach. The adoption of these approaches has improved the monitoring and control of projects, and allowed progress and success to be measured against the college plan and priorities as well as targets such as widening access. Further work is required to quantify, on a project by project basis, time and costs for internal staff and central resources such as the ICT team.

Systems

After spending lots of time on setting up in the first year, overdoing the paperwork, we came to a streamlined system for the following year. The streamlined system introduced varying levels of detail - depending on the scale of the projects which are classed into three broad categories: small, medium and large. This has enabled a quicker start to the year for projects and improved regular reporting to management.

Small-scale projects

If you have many small-scale projects running simultaneously in faculties and curriculum areas, make sure they are all numbered and listed and no new ones sneak onto the list during the year. Agree the basics, like timescale, outcomes, who will do the work, and who will be the sponsor - then get on with it! Use a project overview to monitor progress and report to existing college deadlines (e.g. the self-assessment review and development plan).

Analyse all the projects for areas that cross over college departments or services (e.g. learning centres and key skills) and make sure they share knowledge, resources and standards.

Use external funding (e.g. the LSN Q Projects) to enable academic and technical staff to work together on projects to explore new technology, resources and their effectiveness in teaching and learning practice.

Examples include:

- Childcare: Populate two identified VLE course areas with interactive learning materials from the NLN learning object collection. In term 2 the course leader and e-learning champion will demonstrate to the team at the end of term training day.
- Key Skills: Online assessment for students to be researched and added to the VLE area. In term 1 the staff and students trained to use this will include the key skills e-learning champion.

Medium-scale projects

Analyse the projects and the development plans of service areas that support e-learning and identify projects that cover more than one service. Get this list identified and agreed by senior management as a priority for the services involved and agree to work together and appoint a project manager to each. This approach also works for writing and agreeing new policies and procedures.

Examples include:

- Create and document a responsible 'unblocking service' for web sites in liaison with ICT services and the learning centre service to expand the range of resources available to support teaching and learning.
- Procure and install two new 'classrooms of the future' in liaison with ICT and e-learning services to enable web and multimedia resources to be used in the classroom.

Large-scale projects

Use Prince 2 methodology with an appointed project manager and senior management project board. These projects may include bidding for funding and applying a tendering process.

5. Contact details

Sandra Partington spartington@candi.ac.uk 0207 700 8750

11. Oldham College: on-line initial assessment

Roger Clegg, Head of Learning Resources, The Oldham College
Julie Harding, Resource-Based Learning Manager, The Oldham College

1. Organisation

The Oldham College is a medium-sized further education (FE) college, situated close to the town centre. The College serves the borough of Oldham, which has a population of around 220,000 and also attracts students from the surrounding boroughs of Greater Manchester. Whilst most provision is delivered from the College's main campus, courses are also delivered through a number of community (LINK) learning centres, situated in the most deprived wards in Oldham providing basic skills and IT courses to people aged over 19.

2. Overview

The Learning Resources department within The Oldham College aims to provide learning which is designed to remove the barriers of time and place and to give the individual learner the freedom to select or negotiate the Curriculum. The mission of the Learning Resources Unit is 'to provide resources, support and a learning environment which enables learners to maximise their achievements'.

One contribution towards the realisation of this vision has been the development of an on-line assessment tool that screens learners in the areas of literacy, numeracy, dyslexia and learning styles. The assessments run within the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and the results are linked to the College's MIS system (EasyOCIS) to allow access for all College staff. The outcome is to produce an individual learning plan for every learner relating to the skills for life curriculum. These results are linked to bite-sized chunks of learning electronically available for access in the classroom, learning resource centres and externally via the Internet.

3. Details

Approach

The assessment tool had to ensure that the questions and results feedback were pedagogically sound and fitted exactly the requirements of the basic skills core curriculum. This meant close collaboration with the College's skills for life unit and the team responsible for assessing and meeting the additional support needs of our learners.

The outcomes had to be presented in a format that was accessible and easy to understand for both academic staff and their learners. One of the project's objectives was for learners to understand fully the initial screening process and the reasons why they were completing the assessments. From a technical standpoint the electronic questions had to be SCORM standards compliant. Initially copies of old exam papers were used as the source for the assessment questions. However, when the VLE was implemented there were concerns about copyright and therefore the source was changed to the DfES copyright free materials.

To be a success the results were required to be linked automatically into the College's MIS system EasyOCIS to enable the outcomes to be viewed either on an individual or class-by-class basis.

Scale

Operationally by far the biggest challenge was ensuring we met the College's target to identify quickly the additional support needs of our learners. This means that we have to screen all full-time learners and those on part-time courses of six hours a week or more during the first four weeks of their learning programme. With around 3,500 full-time equivalents students (FTEs) enrolled in the College, and the vast majority commencing their courses in September, this presents a logistical operation utilising 150 PCs across three learning resource centres from 9am to 9pm.

Impact

The biggest benefit of delivering the initial screening assessments online has been the completion of all the assessments, including the feedback, in a timely manner meeting College targets and learner needs. This was confirmed by the College's Ofsted/ALI inspection which noted 'Timely and extensive initial assessment used to accurately identify needs'.

In addition the College's at-entry student perceptions (SPOC) survey asked learners about the assessment and established that 100% of learners completed the screening and that 89% knew why they were undertaking the screening.

There was also an unexpected benefit in that it introduced learners to the College's VLE and electronic learning materials as well as highlighting the support available in the learning resource centres. This was something acknowledged during the College's successful CoLRiC (Council for Learning Resources in Colleges) accreditation where the inspectors found 'A well-devised VLE, the structure of which encourages student participation in the Library and Learning Centres'.

From the College's point of view to complete around 20,000 on-line assessments during the month of September is a major improvement on the previous situation when the initial screening was conducted using a mixture of paper-based and off-the-shelf e-learning software packages. This split meant that the co-ordination and analysis of the results was extremely problematic and very time consuming.

Now academic staff receive detailed reports of their learners' individual skill levels and have access to an individual learning plan which is linked to e-learning materials produced in-house, increasingly making use of the National Learning Network (NLN) materials which are linked to the outcomes of the initial assessments.

Costs and benefits

The main cost was that of staff time, as all the hardware and software was already in place and it has been a case of maximising the skills and resources already available. However, a great deal of effort was required from a small team and this effort will need to continue to ensure the success of the on-line screening assessments every year.

A very significant benefit has been that increased additional learning support funding was obtained from the LSC as the college was able to provide statistical evidence of need. Also, in addition to timely assessments being completed, the project has been a catalyst for further e-learning developments within the College. This has led to the development of a dedicated on-line assessment centre where learners can complete formal on-line qualifications at a time to suit themselves.

Feedback from the assessment encouraged learners to want to improve their scores and therefore their skills. Also a top-up campaign, with help from the marketing department, has encouraged 'almost there' learners to top up their skills and then take and pass the test.

It is anticipated that there will be a rise in basic skills achievements during the 2005/06 academic year given the range of additional support provided by the new e-learning materials.

4. Lessons, caveats and implications

The initial screening is probably the second most important annual event that takes place in a further education college (the first being enrolment). It has been a massive undertaking involving every single college department from caretakers, IT support staff all the way through to the governing body. Of course, this total involvement has advantages and disadvantages but the scale of impact did was greater than expected. The biggest implications were the cost in terms of staff time and stress! In hindsight implementing more pilot and testing sessions prior to full college implementation at the beginning of an academic year could have avoided some of this stress. Further advice to other colleges is:

- Senior management involvement and a clear plan, with timescales, which all involved have agreed are important.
- Given the importance to the college of these assessments, producing a full risk assessment, and alternative strategies should the technology fail, is recommended.
- Do not underestimate the size of the project and the importance of it to your organisation but at the same time relish in the challenge.
- Keep your staff fully briefed at all times especially to prevent them from being sidetracked by the e-learning non-believers or the 'we've always done it this way' brigade.
- Set yourself specific milestones which are SMART and remember that 'only performance is reality'.

ICT only seemed to be a barrier for a few older and SLDD (learning difficulty or disability) learners and these needed some extra support. Interestingly, a bigger problem was the learners with higher qualifications who did not want to take the screening tests. However, it was found that not all lecturers understand learning styles well enough to take account of the screening information in their delivery. Further staff development is planned to address this.

The most important future challenge is how to utilise the resources now available in the college to maximise the achievements of learners. This is to be realised by developing a new on-line assessment centre for 2006/07 that will further meet the needs of the individual learner. The college is also discussing with local schools the possibility of scanning learners before they start at the college in order to save time at the beginning of the year.

5. Contact details

Roger Clegg roger.clegg@oldham.ac.uk

Julie Harding 0161 785 4196

12. Tameside College: embedding e-learning pedagogy in initial teacher training

Liz Salter, Teaching and Learning Manager
Sally-Jane Brown, Subject Learning Coach, Teacher Education/Adult Learning
Nathan Walsh, Learning Technologist

1. The organisation

Tameside College delivers a number of different initial teacher training (ITT) programmes, including the University of Huddersfield PG/CE, the University of Sunderland PG/CE and Stages 1 and 2 of the City and Guilds 7407. The project focuses on in-service trainees. On average, there are approximately 120 trainee teachers on these programmes, over half of whom are employed by the college on either a full or a part-time basis.

The role of ITT in supporting teaching and learning within the college is reflected in the position of ITT within the organisational structure. ITT is managed by the Teaching and Learning Manager, who reports to the Director of Workforce Development, and is responsible for organising support for teaching staff, including the development of skills related to use of e-learning methods. The key role of ITT in promoting the use of ILT and facilitating the development of related skills has been recognised for some time with a specialist IT tutor joined the ITT team in September 2003. The team recognises the benefits of using ILT in ITT both in terms of the benefits to learners and in terms of spreading good practice which will then be transferred to all curriculum areas.

2. Overview

The achievements obtained, some of which have been unexpected, come through participation in an LSDA-funded transformation project, run between January and July 2005, to embed e-learning within initial teacher training programmes. The project has shown how a coaching approach to continual professional development has assisted in developing staff skills more widely and helped to embed the use of ILT within curriculum areas. Case studies were used to identify the distance travelled by both staff and students in the use of ILT within the curriculum; even where the distance travelled was limited it was certainly evident that it was causing participants to reflect on how in the future they could use ILT within their own curriculum areas and thus enabled them to set targets for future development.

One initial objective was to create a resource that catalogued e-learning materials used within the college. This has grown into an interactive resource of evaluated materials and a repository of current use and practice of e-learning within curriculum areas.

3. Details

Approach

The overall approach was to keep-it-simple and build on the skills that ITT staff and students already had, primarily a familiarity with the use of word processing, presentation packages, e-mail and searching the Internet. An initial audit of ILT skills was undertaken to identify the base for the start of the project. This showed a diverse range of skills ranging from novice to expert. It was originally envisaged that support for the ITT team would be provided by means of a structured training programme, based on results of a skills audit. However, as individual needs differed considerably, a coaching approach was adopted, whereby the ICT specialist worked with colleagues individually, team teaching on occasion, to assist with skills development and resource preparation creating interactive materials extending the use of applications already known. A similar approach was used with students with the added support of peer coaching.

The IT specialist introduced both staff and students to new software through the use of exemplar material in their own teaching and encouraging discussion on how they themselves could use and adapt the material.

Scale

The project involved some 50 plus ITT students and 3 ITT staff during the six months of the project. Two cross-college staff development days have been held, one a showcase of how some staff are using ILT in their teaching and one in September, where all academic staff were asked to contribute and evaluate an e-learning tool they had used for the resource catalogue. This resulted in over 200 web-sites, CD-ROMs, and NLN materials being evaluated in terms of where they could be found, ease of use, how they had been used, costs and the relevant curriculum areas, being added to the resource catalogue.

Impact

The project has raised awareness by both teachers and trainees of the potential of e-learning. They have been motivated to participate in training events and work with our specialist to raise skill levels. We will run dissemination events to share what we have learned with our HE partners and other FE partner colleges. Learners have benefited from their teachers' (ITT trainees) more confident use of e-learning.

All teachers participated in a college-wide staff development day in which trainee teachers demonstrated good practice in e-learning. A second internal training day involved large numbers of teachers using the resource evaluation tool, investigating and evaluating an e-learning resource. Records of internal lesson observations held after these staff development days indicate an increase in the use of e-learning on the part of college staff.

Costs and benefits

Funding was provided by the LSDA, but the project undoubtedly required a substantial extra effort on the part of all staff involved. A significant benefit is that all staff delivering ITT now use e-learning methods and emphasise the benefits to trainee teachers. Trainees understand that they are expected to use ILT regularly with their own learners.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

A significant deterrent to the use of ILT is lack of awareness of its potential. Staff training should focus not only on skills development but also on awareness raising and discussion of the pedagogical reasons for using ILT. Peer observations and team teaching should be used to share best practice and raise the profile of e-learning and promote discussion regarding appropriate applications. This

applies to all areas of the curriculum, including ITT. The review of schemes of work was in itself very effective staff development for the ITT team, detailed, extensive discussions and review of methods resulted in needs identification and training requests from all team members.

5. Contact details

Liz Salter liz.salter@tameside.ac.uk 0161 908 6592

Sally-Jane Brown sallyjane.brown@tameside.ac.uk 0161 908 6658

Nathan Walsh nathan.walsh@tameside.ac.uk 0161 908 6670

13. Stephenson College: the perceptions of teachers on the development on online learning in a further education college

Dr David Rathe, Principal
Laurel Penrose, Director of Learner Achievement

1. The organisation

Stephenson College is a medium size further education college based in Coalville in North West Leicestershire. The college offers programmes in all 14 areas of learning. There were over 13,000 learners enrolled in 2004/05. The college has been successful in developing off-site learning, operating in 35 outreach centres and on employers' premises. Around 40% of the college provision is delivered away from the main college. Most of the full time 16-18 year old students are on level 2 programmes, while enrolments for 19+ learners are mainly on level 2 and 3 programmes.

In August 2005, the college re-located from its outdated buildings in the middle of Coalville to a new site on the Coalville ring road, which links the M1 to the east and the A2/M2 to the north. The cost of the redevelopment was £15.5m. The design of the new college is based on learning clusters, driven by the desire to offer easily accessible learning using the full range of learning resources, including individual and group access to online learning as well as text, audio and visual learning opportunities.

2. Overview

David Rathe, the Principal of the college, undertook doctorate research with the Open University on 'The perceptions of teachers on the development of online learning in a further education college', using his own college as the subject of the research. As well as a personal interest in the research, the college was planning the construction of a new college on a new site, and David wanted to find out the teachers' views about online learning to ensure that the online learning infrastructure in the new college reflected those views.

The research revealed that a large majority of the teachers at Stephenson College believe that the benefits of online learning development strongly outweigh any negative effects it might have on learning, leading to a research conclusion that they strongly supported the development of online learning. Most teachers in fact said that they would want to develop online learning for themselves even if not pressurised to do so by management. The majority of teachers also believed that learning improves if classroom, computer, text-based, group and individual learning opportunities are gathered together in curriculum-focused centres.

These important conclusions providing the impetus for the 'learning cluster' design of the new college as well as the development of an electronic document management system in the new college which has enabled to college to minimise its previous reliance on paper-based storage and distribution arrangements.

The research also identified barriers to the development of online learning in the college which needed to be addressed if its development was to be successful. The college was able to use the lead-in time prior to the move to the new college to address many of these barriers.

The following benefits of online learning were supported by the teachers:

- Online learning enables learning to occur at a time, place and pace convenient to the learner (88%FT, 97% PT agree).
- Online learning enables learning tasks to be repeated as often as required, until the student acquires the intended knowledge and understanding (86%FT, 94%PT agree).
- Online learning will increase the availability of information that is interesting and relevant to student learning (84%FT, 83%PT agree).
- When other students are learning independently with online learning, the teacher will be able

to provide more personal support to those students who need it (82% FT, 75% PT agree).

- Online learning improves learning, but only if used in addition to effective traditional learning methods. (80% FT, 88%PT agree).
- Online learning, through e-mail and bulletin boards, will improve opportunities for students to communicate with each other and with lecturers (76% FT, 58% PT agree).
- Online learning improves learning by increasing individual learning opportunities (66% FT, 80PT agree).
- Online learning encourages students to become more active learners, 'seeking' instead of 'receiving information (62% FT, 69% PT agree).
- Online learning improves the learning process by enabling students to take more responsibility for their own learning (56% FT, 67% PT agree).

The following 'benefits' were less well supported, as less than 50% of the FT and PT teachers agree with the 'benefit':

- Online learning improves levels of student achievement (40% FT, 53% PT agree).
- Online learning improves student motivation. (42% FT, 46% PT agree).
- Online learning will be able to diagnose the individual learning needs of a student (30% FT, 25% PT agree).

The following were the levels of support by the FE teachers in the college studied for each of the potential detrimental effects of online learning:

- An inexperienced or weak learner may be unable to take the responsibility for his/her own learning expected with online learning (80% FT, 80% PT agree).
- The development of online learning will increase teachers' workload (54% FT, 43% PT agree).
- Online learning results in too much flexibility, which will disadvantage a novice or unsophisticated learner (52% FT, 42% PT agree).
- With online learning, students will waste their time searching for inappropriate materials and activities (36% FT, 36% PT agree).
- Online learning means that students will need more tutor support (34% FT, 36% PT agree).
- Online learning restricts opportunities for individual students to adopt the learning style most appropriate for them (33% FT, 30% PT agree).
- Online learning will result in students becoming isolated and unsupported (32% FT, 31% PT agree).
- Students will not be able to cope with the increased information available through online learning (24% FT, 25% PT agree).
- Effective teaching/learning will suffer, as online learning is only concerned with gathering information and not its effective use (18% FT, 31% PT agree).
- With online learning the teachers' contact with students will reduce (16% FT, 22% PT agree).

The following are the main barriers that the FE teachers believe are inhibiting the development of online learning in the college. In view of the number of comments about the lack of time for teachers to develop online learning from both the interviews and the questionnaire responses, this barrier has been placed first in the prioritised list of relevant barriers.

- There is inadequate time for teachers to develop online learning.
- Students need new skills to be able to convert information from online learning sources into relevant knowledge and understanding (70% FT, 80% PT agree).
- Teachers will need to be the 'gatekeeper' for the students to ensure that the information they acquire online is relevant to their learning (78% FT and PT agree).
- There is currently a lack of suitable software to support learning (68% FT, 69%PT agree).
- Students expect teachers to personally provide them with the information they need to achieve their qualifications (62% FT, 67% PT agree).

- Students currently cannot access a college computer whenever they need to (68% FT, 42% PT agree).
- Learning would improve if classroom, computer, textbook, group and individual learning opportunities were gathered together in curriculum-focused centres (68% FT, 78% PT agree).
- There is inadequate technical provision to support any development of online learning (57%FT, 44%PT agree).
- The college network is not sufficiently reliable to support any development of online learning (44% FT, 31% PT agree).
- Online learning requires students to be more active learners. Students will be uncomfortable with this (32%FT, 33% PT agree).
- Teachers do not have the skills to confidently use online learning in curriculum delivery (32% FT, 30% PT agree).
- Staff development should focus on helping teachers to use online learning to teach their own subject (94% FT, 86% PT agree).
- Teachers do not know how to design, develop and use online learning (22% FT, 49% PT agree).
- Teachers do not know how to help students to acquire the skills to enable them to convert information from online sources into relevant knowledge and understanding (26% FT, 17% PT agree).
- Teachers have little or no experience in the practical application of online learning (22% FT, 31% PT agree).
- Teachers are unable to access and retrieve relevant subject-focused information through the Internet and college network (12% FT, 22% PT agree).
- Teachers prefer to create their own learning materials, even if there are good quality learning materials available prepared by others (20% FT, 17% PT agree).
- Students do not know how to access the Internet and college network (16% FT, 17% PT agree).
- Teachers are unwilling to place their learning materials onto the college network (10% FT, 17% PT agree).
- Teachers will only use online learning if it enables them to teach in the same way (6% FT, 11% PT agree).

3. Details

Approach

A literature review of what had previously been written or researched about the development of online learning in education was undertaken. A number of beneficial as well as detrimental effects on learning from the development of online learning were identified this way, as were barriers to its successful development.

Scale

Through questionnaires and individual and group interviews, the views of full- and part-time teaching staff were sought. The research began in 2000 and was finally completed in 2004. All 220 college teachers were sent questionnaires, with a response rate of 56% for full time teachers and 28% for part time teachers. As a result of the low return rate for part time teachers, the data was analysed showing the response rate of full and part time teachers separately.

Impact

The impact of the research has been significant. It significantly influenced the design of the new college, appropriately incorporating a learning infrastructure which took account of the views of its teachers on online learning. So far, the 'learning clusters' has been successful, with both teachers and students acknowledging the benefits of having a range of learning opportunities and resources flexibly

available in a single centre, encouraging movement around the cluster to access the most appropriate resource for the learning outcome sought. The inclusion of the staff room in the cluster is also acknowledged as successful, enabling teachers to be constantly available to support student learning, as well as ensuring that behaviour and noise levels are within acceptable limits.

The development of electronic storage systems prior to the move to the new college has significantly changed how paper resources are now managed in the college where, for example, teachers can now access 'just in time' printing, where printing is produced on only 24 hours notice, in the classroom if required, further reducing the need for storage space. As a result, there are no filing cabinets in staff rooms, and working spaces are shared.

Costs and benefits

Significant resources were utilised in the four-year run-up to the move to the new college in scanning the contents of filing cabinets and desks into the document management system. However, significant savings resulted, in both moving and space costs. Most filing cabinets were emptied and sold, as tons of paper were either re-cycled or scanned into the electronic document management system. Moving costs were significantly reduced. Building costs were around £1100 per square metre. The cost of providing space for filing cabinets and a desk for every full time or fractional teacher would therefore have been significant.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

It appears that the right decision was made in organising curriculum delivery using the cluster concept. We will continue the theme in our phase 2 development now in hand, with the probability of clusters on two levels using mezzanine floors for our two large curriculum sections.

Any college considering a new build or a major re-development of an existing college would benefit from a visit to Stephenson to see how it has developed a learning infrastructure and learning environment, which it believes, maximises learners' access to traditional and online learning resources and opportunities.

5. Contact details

Dr David Rathe drathe@stephensoncoll.ac.uk 01530 836136

14. blueIRIS: using audio to deliver information and learning content to any audience

John Rudkin, eCommunity Manager, Blackpool Council
Kevin Winkley, CEO Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Society for the Blind
Leonie Ramondt, Ultralab, software designer, videographer, lecturer, Anglia Ruskin University

1. The organisations

Blackpool Council is constantly exploring new and better ways of reaching out to the local population. Blackpool has some 600 residents who are registered as blind, with another 1085 partially sighted who are registered as blind. The number of blind and partially sighted people increases significantly in the wider area, which is popular for retirement.

The Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Society for the Blind (BFWSB) offers a talking newspaper service, run successfully for nearly thirty years, a talking library book service, a residential home for 40 residents in purpose built accommodation, a resource centre and rehabilitation service, and a factory employing blind and disabled workers that produces beds and mattresses for sale to the general public.

Ultralab is a diverse and distributed team offering major expertise in e-learning through facilitated communities online, e-assessment, mobile learning, action research, work-based learning, new software tools, digital creativity and strategic consultancy. Ultralab works with partners and is sponsored by governments, charities and companies.

2. Overview

blueIRIS (Blind Learner User Environment - Interactive Radio Information Services) is using the power of broadband over the Internet to provide a service to the visually impaired and features news, information, learning content and leisure material created with visually impaired people in mind. The service is being delivered by the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Society for the Blind (BFWSB) and supported by the Lancashire Digital Development Agency (LDDA), the organisation charged with switching the County onto the benefits of broadband. blueIRIS was launched in September 2005. Several other organisations are also crucial partners in blueIRIS; Blackpool Council, Ultralab, Rural Surround and InterfaceITS have all provided their resources and expertise in this groundbreaking initiative. User of all ages and with varying degrees of visual impairment and computer operating skills, have become registered users of the project, and some are as far afield as Canada, India, Hawaii, testament to the appeal and the demand of the service. Since launch the service has not seen any sort of 'outage'. blueIRIS is not a replacement service for the traditional tapes, but it is an additional opportunity to explore future options.

3. Details

Approach

As we live longer, the likelihood of each of us having a visual impairment through macular degeneration in our old age is very high. While visual impairments are generally more prevalent in later life, young people also have to cope with the problems it causes and the challenges it creates. The reality is, inclusive, accessible design benefits a majority of the population. For example, the guidelines for web pages allow the adjustment of the size of text on all pages in order to pass the accessibility tests internationally applied. There have been a lot of advances in usability design but it requires professionals and the public to increase awareness - not only to support actively the use and implementation of accessible design, but also to expect it as a part of normal practice.

Although younger blind people are rightly expecting to lead active and independent lives, it is clear that there is a whole generation who grew up before accessibility was required or expected. These people may have missed out on much that is now taken for granted, but they are capable of living

fruitful lives and yearn to have information and involvement. It is that information that the "Talking News" service has built upon with its popular tape service; however commercial technology changes make it plain that the days of the cassette tape are limited. There is no formal link between information and learning, yet much of the content of "Talking News" is educational in the way it is delivered and received. While the circumstances of the onset of a visual disability vary greatly, many visually impaired people have had limited access to education, Unfortunately this is still the case but the experience of an earlier project undertaken in Blackpool (iBrowse) showed that audio content was a perfect vehicle for auditory learning.

blueIRIS raises many questions about technology being applied in the delivery of learning to the visual impaired, but most importantly it begs the question "Why not?" Dependency on others is unlikely to ever completely disappear but, with intelligent technological solutions, the independence of visually impaired people can be increased greatly. Some have had little opportunity to develop and contribute their skills and talents to their communities.

blueIRIS brings together a partnership of seemingly diverse parties and it creates a power vectoring of efforts towards a particular end. Starting with another project back in 2003, blueIRIS owes a lot to the NIACE TrEACL programme that provided an opportunity to test the needs of blind users. That project stimulated interest in a technological solution to 'what can we do to make a better service?' In blueIRIS we have practitioners, software experts, sound engineers, educational staff, ICT suppliers and voluntary groups all adding to the value of the emerging programme.

Scale

Starting in June 2005 the blueIRIS team began delivery of an Internet-based service to a user base starting at 5. We had already had the great advantage of access to a wonderfully rich archive of recorded and unique content going back several years in the library of the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Society for the Blind.

The project chose to work with clients having access to an Apple Macintosh computer, although later the project opened up to all platforms. The content is totally cross platform, as is the solution; however as a small project we wanted to ensure we kept out additional support role to a minimum. Apple Macintosh computers offered us an easy to use, stable, virus free and simple to support solution from day 1. The availability of 'Voice Over'; a professional level screen reader, with the other standard accessibility functionality meant the project, did not have to invest in add-on accessibility solutions. This meant that we saved over £700 per installation, simply in software terms.

The project is also exploring the accessibility of its content through even more interesting media, including the idea of content mobility via podcasting to iPods, and we are also looking at 'set-top box' stream players that do not require a computer at all. Whatever the medium, the easier and better suited to accessibility the better. A service such as blueIRIS can provide users with a compelling context and a friendly interface to independence. Anyone with friends or family who are uninspired or afraid to use computers and the Internet knows how independence is the key first step to encouraging them to learn new skills and take control of their own destinies. Indeed, this is no different for any learning.

In January 2006:
- Blackpool BFWSB membership: 900
- Active local members of blueIRIS listening population: 160
- Bespoke content created for blueIRIS: 500 hours to date
- Distant listeners from 10 countries
- Web site hits following official launch in October 2006: 3600

Impact

Although it is early days, research is being undertaken to determine what users of the service actually want. The project is working with blind and visually impaired members to establish their interests and, by encouraging them to contribute ideas and even become the subject of interviews, it goes a long way towards ensuring that their focus meets their needs and interests. This very fact has had a huge impact on the partners, the users and the organisations themselves.

The project team was keen to listen to the visually impaired people's feedback. This has led to the development of a new client software tool which, instead of using a browser, offers a totally tailored user interface solution. blueIRIS is now growing to cater for a greater range of handicaps. It also has something that is rare in this day and age: a passionate volunteer base exists at the 'Talking News'.

As the skill and confidence of participants grows, training in ICT use is in demand, and a training room has now been set up. We have had problems finding trainers with the skills needed to train in the use of the standard PC screen readers without significant costs, so we are training our own. Teaching blind individuals to use podcasts will certainly feature in the project's use of increasingly sophisticated interactive technologies. By establishing high standards of presentation, the pioneers of the blind community can inspire others with their example and their authentic stories. Audio also lends itself well to dialogue, and community inspires participation, so an easy to use audio blog with key topics such as 'useful tips', 'help, please!' or 'what I'd like folks to know' may help to build members' confidence to begin to tell their stories.

As a solution for learning, there is quite a way to go, but we feel that it the project supports people enough to help to increase their knowledge, their experience and their skills and to offer them a way of appropriating the new technologies for themselves to reduce dependency on others.

Costs and benefits

blueIRIS received £150,000 from the innovations fund of the Lancashire Digital Development Agency. On top of this partner contributions have added significantly to the total for running the service.

The BFWSB has some 200 volunteers who assist in the creation and duplication of 2500 tapes per week (130-140,000 tapes every year). In 2004 a local postal dispute prevented the circulation of tapes from the talking news service over Easter. Considerable effort in creating materials with limited shelf life left the Society with no option but to scrap them, as the failure to collect and therefore deliver was a huge disappointment. Audiotape reproduction, once the best solution, has become much more costly due to the failing popularity of that medium.

blueIRIS is a standards based project that is accessible on any modern computer system that can access the Internet over a broadband connection. Costs are kept as low as possible by catering for all types of computer, although blueIRIS cannot be responsible for its users' computers in general. Clients can opt (at this stage) to use Windows XP or MacOSX to access the full range of features, although we strongly advise Mac OSX. blueIRIS runs on Mac OSX servers and provides a semi-automated workflow that makes it easy to create a smooth running service. Running within modern browsers, it utilises the user's favorite (preferred) media player.

The development of a bespoke client application has been crucial, and overcomes some of the limitations of using browsers, and the issues created by browsers that fail to adhere to international standards. The unique user interface with simplified control means that with voice feedback, blueIRIS can be controlled in its entirety by the use of just the four arrow keys on any keyboard.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

We see this project as a beginning. Over the last year podcasting has taken the Internet by storm, and the key thing it does is provide a platform for minority interests and programming to be supported. While blueIRIS supports podcasting, the idea of a service run for a community that can

be totally interactive and accessible from anywhere grows daily. We have had to slow the growth of the service and look to explore how we can support its growing demands on bandwidth.

Our NIACE-funded TrEACL project, iBrowse was really successful, but short term funding prevented us from moving the project to a sustainability cycle. We would have been able to move much faster if podcasting (which we knew was what we wanted) had actually been available at the time. blueIRIS is also short-term funded, but we are now better placed to make the sustainability work. We have no doubts that partnerships are key; without close partners, there is no way blueIRIS would have launched. We had the idea waiting for suitable funding to come along.

5. Contact details

John Rudkin John.rudkin@blackpool.gov.uk 01253 478103
Kevin Winkley Kevin@blueiris.info 01253 362685
Leonie Ramondt leonie@ultralab.net   01245 252009
blueIRIS service: contact@blueiris.info
Web site: http://www.blueiris.info

15. Salisbury College: mobile technology in teaching and learning

Ian Southwell
Sally Gartland

1. The organisation

Salisbury College is a further and higher education college with around 7,000 full and part time students. We have a wide catchment area as the only major city in South Wiltshire, covering rural and urban populations.

2. Overview

Motivated by the high levels of ownership of mobile phones, we wanted to see how we could improve our communications infrastructure, mainly for the benefit of 16-18 year old learners in college. Issues included the ability to contact students at short notice - perhaps due to inform of class cancellations due to illness, or change of venue - and to address the high levels of missed appointments by students for learning support.

As we put together a project proposal, it became clear that there would be many other benefits and uses, for example:

- Our marketing department felt that there would be opportunities – texts could be sent to students informing them of support and advice in college after exam results had been issued.
- Our HR department wanted to provide a text-back facility for job enquiries.
- Course administrators were keen to use texts to invite students to pre-course assessments, where a letter had previously been sent.
- Our education maintenance allowance (EMA) administrator wanted to be able to contact students quickly.
- Our retention officer was keen to use the system to contact students at risk quickly and directly.
- We have some deaf students in college and tutors saw SMS texting as an ideal way of keeping them informed.
- Our enrichment officer was keen to keep students informed of talks from external agencies – sexual health, drugs advice etc.

3. Details

Approach

Having established that there was an internal market, we set about looking at the options. Services seemed to be divided into two categories, the first being free and the second charging for texts and a licence.

The free service was not appropriate for bulk texting and would not link to our management information systems. We then set about finding a provider who could support us through the steep learning curve and found a local company who were willing to give the support required and negotiate on price.

To sell the project to our college management team, we took the seven strands of the common inspection framework and applied the potential benefits to these criteria, as below.

How well do learners achieve?

Learners can fail to achieve for a number of reasons; perhaps they miss deadlines or require additional educational support. Where additional support is arranged, it is not unusual for students to miss appointments – it is a symptom of dyslexia for instance that individuals might forget to attend.

In extreme cases learners can drop out their course and then achievement will not take place.

Tutors can text students to remind them of dates for handing in work or send timely reminders of learning support appointments. Students at risk of leaving can be referred to the retention officer who can contact the student by text to work through appropriate solutions. Speed of communication is an important factor. The attendance patterns of learners at risk can become erratic and students can be sent a text message asking why they are not in class.

How effective are teaching, training and learning?

The college has to demonstrate effective teaching, training and learning and evidence can be provided in the form of lesson planning documentation, feedback from students and demonstration of diversity and provision for learners with special needs.

By using SMS mobile technology, records of communications together with dates are logged and can be used as evidence that learners with special needs are being identified and measures taken to provide support. Learners can 'text vote' on issues which affect them and the use of modern technology can help to engage young learners.

How do resources affect achievement and learning?

Resources for learning include the use of technology, computers, Internet, data-projectors etc. can directly affect how well learning takes place. Mobile technology can incorporate many of these features in a portable package, funded by the student.

Whilst this technology is not common at present, we are already seeing digital cameras on mobile phones and internet connectivity is becoming more common. Increased usage of mobile technology by students will free up college resources with the potential for cost savings and the need for less, or less inexpensive equipment.

How effective are the assessment and monitoring of learners' progress?

Assessment and monitoring can demonstrated by the use of student surveys and quick and appropriate feedback about submitted assignments. Teachers can text results to students and call them in for meetings if needed. Students can be polled by text about relevant and immediate issues.

During the pilot phase of this project, it is expected that students will be sent a congratulatory text as exam results are issued – together with guidance on who to contact (or text) if further help or support are needed.

How well do the programmes and courses meet the needs and interests of the learners?

Meeting the needs and interests of learners relies on questioning, feedback and demonstration that all needs are catered for.

Learners can text in to college on a special number to raise issues, and views of groups of learners can be sought. It is possible that mobile technology can be the most appropriate form of communication with some groups of learners, for instance deaf students.

How well are learners guided and supported?

Many issues connected to the guidance and support of students are outlined above. The use of SMS texting produces an e-mail record of communication and can demonstrate that reminders have been sent – for meetings to provide guidance and support (such as tutorials) and follow ups if appointments have not been met.

'Textback' help lines can be set up and directed to appropriate support staff.

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

By implementing mobile technology as appropriate, managers demonstrate clearly their support and commitment to raising achievement in an innovative and learner-friendly context.

Scale

When the SMS service was implemented, we focussed on the 16-19 age range, although the service was available to any course administrator who chose to participate - not just for students in the 16-19 age group. The system can reach 95% of students in this age range; however other methods such as e-mail are used to help ensure complete coverage. The service has also proved to be useful for adult learners.

We set up ten phone numbers, each with three users. The exception was our retention officer as the nature of her work demanded confidentiality. All 16-19 year old students were invited to participate – we sent them a text message to inform of the service! Currently the service is used with approximately 2500 students.

The system means that student mobile numbers are captured at enrolment when students are advised they may be contacted using SMS. A confirmation text is sent to all participating students advising them that they will receive SMS messages from time to time. Lists of mobile numbers are updated overnight; however there is no compunction on students to update mobile numbers if these change.

The system can handle individual or bulk messages; staff contact the system administrator to request that messages are sent out to individuals or groups. The administrator sends the message text and the list of mobile numbers to an e-mail address supplied by the service provider; this triggers the generation of SMS messages to each of the numbers listed. The turnaround time for this on average is ten minutes. When the messages arrive on the recipient's mobile it appears as if they have been sent from a mobile number.

If recipients respond to the message using the originator's number the message arrives as an e-mail in the administrators e-mail account. No delivery confirmation is generated unless recipients respond to a message it is also not easy to identify respondents without opening responses and all responses go to a single location regardless of the message subject. A system upgrade will allow respondents to be identified.

The system can also send images to the student's mobiles but this relies on them having compatible mobiles.

Impact

Users found the service of benefit, mainly because of the speed of communication. Some teachers were texting students to find out why they were not in class and attendance at enrichment events increased. Students have found the service to be of benefit, particularly to inform the college of lateness or absence. Previously students were required to phone in – the phone was usually engaged!

Original funding was largely from the LSDA Q Project initiative, but we are now able to charge departments for the service at the rate of £220 per phone number per year and 5p per text. 40% of academic departments are about to opt in to the service.

Beneficiaries have been academic departments and support functions as outlined previously. The website (below) has more information.

Costs and benefits

Our initial outlay for software and texts was around £1,500, £1,000 of which was met in the form of a Q project award.

Savings have been made where texts have been sent instead of a letter which we estimate to be around £800 plus savings in postal costs. Savings in time and efficiency have had more impact, but this has been difficult to measure in terms of cost. Just one example would be comparing the time taken to phone a class of twenty students individually to inform them of a late class change perhaps an hour - as opposed to sending a group text to all students at the same time which would take a

couple of minutes. The use of texting has also had a positive effect on retention although it is difficult to evaluate the exact scale of this.

4. Lessons, caveats and implications

Consideration is currently being given to the use of keywords to direct message to different folders dependant on the subject; this will enhance the functionality by allowing for example text voting to take place. It may also be possible to integrate the system with the college VLE though this would require further work. It may be worthwhile to examine other text systems, in use within other colleges, which may offer greater connectivity with existing systems.

Finally the issue of exclusion requires consideration: if SMS becomes a mainstream communication system then care has to be taken to exclude those who do not have access to this technology. UKERNA figures suggest that a high percentage of students have a mobile telephone but a small minority still do not possess one; consideration needs to be given as to how to avoid excluding this minority. For example should mobiles be loaned, hired, subsidised or supplied on enrolment? Can alternatives such as e-mail fill the gap?

5. Contact details

Ian Southwell Ian.southwell@salisbury.ac.uk Sally Gartland 01722 344344

www.onlinelearners.org.uk

16. The Sheffield College: the Young People Speak Out blended learning course and the Hip Hop Digital Sounds and Creative Writing course

Valerie Petersen, English Lecturer
Kate McCullough, English Lecturer
Matt Hine, English Lecturer

1. The organisation

The Sheffield College is a large college of further education serving the whole of the city of Sheffield on 3 main sites. The curriculum was developed by the English online staff at the city centre site which has an extensive vocational programme and students coming from a diverse multi-cultural background.

2. Overview

The Young People Speak Out (YPSO) course is a blended learning curriculum that fuses technology, popular culture and student experience to re-engage disaffected young people in literacy and build their key /basic skills and confidence. This is turn has led to improved thinking and understanding skills. The course has won two national awards for blended learning, including an AoC Beacon award and has been presented at the AERA conference in Montreal.

The course has now become an integral part of the literacy and pre-GCSE English provision at the college and has been very popular with both students and staff. Retention and student achievement have improved. Staff have developed their confidence and skills in ILT. The curriculum has successfully been piloted in schools within Sheffield and the curriculum team have been asked to write a new unit especially for use in schools.

The Hip Hop literacy course is an offshoot of the YPSO course and engages young people in lyrical composition and creating digital sounds, along with providing areas of social and cultural development and exploration. The Hip Hop course was also presented at the AERA conference in Montreal, and is currently being adapted for piloting in the schools in Sheffield.

3. Details

Approach

The approach of the Young People Speak Out course is student-centred, with young people's experiences at the heart of the curriculum. The literacy skills that we teach are embedded into the course. We take a thematic approach, with topics that are of relevance and interest to young people: for example Home and Homelessness, Views on Violence, Music Magazine, and Rap and Poetry. We blend traditional teaching, e-learning and popular culture as a way of engaging students who are often disaffected by traditional literacy classes. The aim is that students will be motivated to do a GCSE class in the future, and some of the materials can be used as GCSE assignments. The students gain a national literacy qualification at the end of the course.

The Young People Speak Out is a blended learning course that is available fully online or in a paper-based version. Students can work online directly into the materials or choose to write into the paper booklets. The course is delivered face-to-face in the classroom with discussion being an integral part of the curriculum.

The Hip Hop (Beats, Rhymes and Life) course came about partly through the work of the blended learning team, along with close collaborative work with a performance group of students from the US. The course was designed to attract learners who may traditionally reject formal education, by giving these learners the opportunity to create their own music and explore a culture important to them. Our central aim was to hopefully bring these disenfranchised learners into college, and provide paths for progression back into formal education.

The course is delivered face-to-face in the classroom, with much of the discussion material available in booklet form. The majority of the work takes place on PCs, as learners construct their own beats and rhymes while going through the process of producing and recording their sounds. We hope to develop the students' IT skills through the music production, the literacy level through the composing of raps, and a development of cultural understanding through the social studies aspects of the course.

Scale

The Young People Speak Out course was piloted in 2003-4 with 9 classes of up to 18 students taught by English teachers. Since then it has been delivered across the other two main centres of the Sheffield College and piloted in 5 schools, including 3 secondary schools, 1 special school and an inclusion unit.

Beats, Rhymes and Life was piloted in 2004-2005 with 2 groups of around 10-15 students and ran as an evening session. This arrangement meant that the learners had to show their enthusiasm by actually attending college in their own time. Since the pilot, the course continues to run as an evening session, but is now part of the mainstream curriculum, being offered to our foundation studies students as part of their programme of study.

Impact

In the first two years of Young People Speak Out retention improved from 67% to 80%. 90% of our students achieved national literacy qualifications. The feedback from students was extremely positive, many recommending it to friends. 31% said that they talked about the course outside class and 78% believed that topic two was 'interesting'.

During a taped reflective discussion, English teachers delivering the course commented that students got a sense of power during the discussions and that the materials gave an anchor from which to explore themes and topics. They also commented on how delivering the curriculum had increased their ICT skills and developed their confidence in using technology in the classroom.

Staff at the College have now trained schoolteachers in delivering a blended learning curriculum. These school teachers also gave positive evaluations that stressed particularly how the course had given them confidence to experiment with technology alongside paper-based materials, and the way the course integrated quite detailed exploration of language with the exploration of themes relevant to the students.

Other curriculum areas within the College now want to develop a blended learning curriculum.

The Beats, Rhymes and Life course has had a real impact on the students involved. Many of our learners remained in college, now taking courses within the mainstream curriculum. Students have re-integrated with the traditional college environment, seeing areas for their own progression and development which they may not have considered previously. Some of our learners have gone on to achieve at GCSE level in English, with some moving towards A-levels and GNVQ qualifications in media and performance.

Young People Speak Out is an effective and engaging new curriculum for Entry level and Level 1 literacy that has become an integral part of the English programme and has motivated both staff and students. To date three specially equipped blended learning rooms have been set up to deliver the course.

Through the pilot project with schools, an ongoing working relationship has been established involving a creative exchange and the development of new curriculum that will act as a bridge for students between school and college.

Along with an integration into the mainstream curriculum for both the learners and the course, the Beats, Rhymes and Life course has seen a real investment on the part of the college in terms of providing equipment that will allow the learners to get the most from the course. Another important development has seen some of the learners being able to submit their raps as part of their GCSE English coursework. This has required close conversation and discussion with the examining boards as to the value of the lyrical compositions of the students and the value and importance of rap culture generally.

Costs and benefits

In order to design and write the course, a team of English teachers, basic skills teachers, a designer and administrator were given time to develop the curriculum. In addition we needed the cost of a web design company to build the templates for the online materials. Three blended learning classrooms were equipped with computers and an interactive whiteboard. Paper booklets had to be printed. Funding came from Objective 1. (The evaluation was an NRDC project.)

An essential part of the success of the course was the time for training and development for English staff delivering the course. This partly consisted of some training in the use of IT but, more importantly, gave staff time to reflect on and discuss the different parts of the course and to share their experiences, so that the course could be fine-tuned in the future.

The Hip Hop course required an initial outlay for the production software and AV equipment required. However, once purchased, we are going to be able to utilise these resources for at least two more years.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

e-learning and blended curriculum development needs to be properly funded. In this case a creative approach through the establishment of a working team that included a mixture of teaching and design skills and administrative support led to a successful blended learning curriculum being written and delivered. Staff do not need to be expert with computers, but do need training and support initially in delivering a new curriculum.

The Hip Hop course has illustrated how utilising the students' own knowledge base and interests is an important way towards re-engaging disenfranchised learners. While learners must take some responsibility for their own progression, offering a point of access that is less formal or traditional could provide the same success we have seen at the Sheffield College. The innate knowledge of these learners, in terms of ICT and cultural awareness, leads to a classroom approach where learning is often shared by tutor and students.

5. Contact details

Valerie Petersen valerie.petersen@sheffcol.ac.uk
Kate McCullough kate.McCullough@sheffcol.ac.uk
Matt Hine matthew.hine@sheffcol.ac.uk

17. Workers' Educational Association (WEA): Community Grid for Learning and the WEA

Ian Harford, Consultant Director, CGfL
Fiona Iglesias, Community e-Learning Developer, CGfL

1. About our organisations

The Community Grid for Learning (CGfL) is a programme set up within the Workers' Educational Association. The Workers' Educational Association (WEA) is the UK's largest voluntary provider of adult education. Founded in 1903 to support the educational needs of working men and women, the WEA has maintained its commitment to provide access to education and learning for adults from all backgrounds, and in particular those who have previously missed out on education.

The WEA is a 21st Century, democratic, voluntary adult education movement, committed to widening participation and to enabling people to realise their full potential through learning. The CGfL was set up as a partnership project in Greater Manchester and has involved a wide range of statutory and voluntary bodies, working together to develop and deliver online learning content. This strong emphasis on content development is born out of a fundamental belief that what most people want from eLearning is good content that is relevant to them immediately. Partners include libraries, community and disability organisations, black and minority ethnic groups, family centres, social service bodies, regeneration agencies, adult education services and UK Online centres.

2. Overview of what we have achieved

The Greater Manchester Community Grid for Learning has its origins a decade ago when the WEA set up its first broadband multimedia computing centre with a 10Mb JANET link to Manchester Computing and was using laptops to run *ICT in the Community* courses with socially excluded groups in some of the most disadvantaged areas in the northwest. We learnt a key lesson from our students. They wanted relevant content that was not intimidating and over complex and we decided to seek the resources to achieve this.

Launched in 2003 with a team of six e-learning and networking specialists, CGfL has established an online portal – www.learners.org.uk – which offers free, 24-hour-a-day access to high quality and compelling interactive courses. Written and presented in clear and straightforward styles, the courses are attractive to adults with less confidence in their learning abilities. The material is used widely within the WEA and by others both online and in different blended learning contexts.

Our emphasis is on collaboration and aggregation of effort. After a successful 30 month 'proof of concept' period we have found that by working with partners we can grow the market, capitalise on existing NLN and other assets and expand opportunities for disadvantaged learners. We can also secure more effective use of digital resources and provide high quality CPD and training in the use of ILT for people working in ACL, in libraries and in the voluntary and community sector. We are in the process of seeking public and private sector partnerships to achieve a sustainable future for this work from 2006.

3. The details of our CGFL Project

Approach

Pedagogic - To be successful e-learning must motivate and arouse the curiosity of learners. This is a tougher task when working with less confident learners than it is with postgraduates seeking updating and extension of an existing knowledge base. A unique feature of our online courses is that they are created by our team in partnership with tutors, community professionals, librarians, volunteers and learners. The production and delivery of our courses are guided by 4 principles: listen, reflect, create, and engage that we believe can be applied to a range of learning design contexts. We 'listen' very

carefully to our prospective clients to ascertain what it is they want to learn. Then we 'reflect' upon the extent to which these needs are part of a wider national or regional agenda and 'create' high quality, interactive content and finally we 'engage' closely with the community to ensure effective delivery.

We have produced materials in house, in conjunction with external e-learning designers and specialist SMEs and via the repurposing of digital assets created by the NLN and others like Tower Hamlets College who have been working with London Online. We seek feedback from partners and tutors and from learners via questionnaires so that we can improve accessibility and design.

There is an emphasis on interactive fun material, which encourages learners to progress to other learning. Most of the courses are in short modular form and can be undertaken in anywhere between 15 minutes and two hours. At present none are accredited, although as we extend the tracking functionality on the site, we will be exploring this option with partners.

A number of the courses have a strong *Skills for Life* orientation and are used by WEA tutors in conjunction with traditional face to face courses and with Employer Training Pilot (ETP) courses. Here the use of wireless laptops & CGfL modules has enabled the learners to improve their ICT skills and successfully complete online their National Literacy Tests at level 1 and 2.

Courses have been designed for the *learners* website in a variety of formats to suit different learning and teaching styles. As a result the team has become proficient in using a range of course authoring tools including *Flash*, *Dreamweaver*, S*eminar*, Q*uandary* and W*ebquests*; for e-tutor supported distance learning, like our Gardening Online course we have trialled virtual learning environments and learning management systems such as C*laroline*, *Fronter* and *Moodle*.

Organisational - The development of online learning as an integral part of an ACL provider's service has many implications in terms of organisation, administration and staff development. The primary focus of the CGfL team has had to be on the creation and delivery of specific courses to meet agreed funding targets, but in general this work can only be sustained if the WEA and its partner organisations become e-enabled and are able to make full use of the potential of ILT.

This has meant looking at all aspects of our management, administrative and curriculum infrastructure; and to do this we have drawn upon the experience which the CGfL team has built up in devising e-learning solutions for adult community learning. We have also needed to provide support for staff in libraries and centres as they help to support learners accessing CGfL courses.

Online course modules have been produced using Moodle to support the roll out of a National WEA 7407 C&G Tutor Training programme; support has been given to staff undertaking e-Guides training and a new WEA NW website has been created which offers information to students and volunteers and enables tutors to download lots of materials and documentation to support their work. We are aiming for the WEA to become the 'Cisco' of the ACL sector, where many activities can be dealt with online instead of using traditional communication methods. We recognise however that this will take time!

Technical - All of the CGfL materials on www.learners.org.uk are hosted on our own firewall protected servers, located at the WEA offices in Manchester. These are connected by a 10Mb link to the JANET system via Manchester Computing at the University of Manchester, which has been throughout an important partner in the project. The system operates with a high level of redundancy.

We believe that we have substantial capacity for scaling up the operation as we attract new learners, but have not had the chance to test this fully yet. Where possible we have preferred to use open source solutions and meet relevant standards for content creation to facilitate repurposing of materials.

Scale

- Over 24,000 unique visitors have logged onto the www.learners.org.uk website since January 2004
- Over 1000 people have registered for courses
- 36 separate online interactive courses and activities are available free for users
- Two pilot Own Label CGfL sites have been created for Library authorities, using our material
- CGfL materials are being accessed from over 50 different locations to our knowledge
- Principal bodies involved are libraries, UK Online & community centres, ACL & VCS bodies
- 32 jobs have been created as a result of the programme
- Support has been given to four ETP programmes funded by LSC
- 120 staff have been trained in e-learning issues
- Advice and support has been given for 19 community based capacity building ICT initiatives

The impact of the CGfL Project

… on learners, teachers, partners, staff, etc

The project has had a substantial impact on the way that tutors have been developing their work and supporting their students. Three comments below illustrate attitudes:

- "These resources can be used as an additional teaching tool. They have helped learners to understand basic IT. The Memory game and shopping course help beginners to use a mouse. Learners really enjoyed them". **Diane Palliser, ESOL tutor**

- "The online resources are clear and easy to understand which makes it easier for the students to comprehend how to use the internet. This is a centralised resource, which the students can access from their home computers too". **Richard Jackson, IT tutor**

- "Everything is professional and yet friendly, relaxed and highly conducive for learning. Although the practical assignments take up time. They are a vital part of reinforcing what I've been learning. One great thing about this course has been the many varied formats used to get the information across". **Debbie Glanville, Gardening Online Learner**

- "I was amazed at how effective the techniques were in helping to manage my daughter's tantrums… It made me feel more confident". **Parents doing Parent Survival course**

… on the organisations involved

The impact on the WEA in the NW and nationally has been significant (See 3.1 above). The partner organisations have been able to access materials and play a substantial role in developing new materials for use with their clients, as indicated below:

- "Other overseas nurses are coming to me to ask if they can do the literacy course, which means that they are hearing from the others how good the lessons have been". **Leah Hart, recruitment initiative manager for Central Manchester and Manchester Children's Hospital NHS Trust**

- "I would like to congratulate you on the range and format of your courses and the ease of navigation. We are currently investigating developing online courses. Is it possible to buy into yours?" **Vera Owens, Adult Learning Manager with Knowsley Library Service**

Costs and benefits

The total cost of setting up the CGfL over a three year period has been approximately £750,000, which includes staffing, tutors, infrastructure, consultancies and outsourcing. This compares well with many HE projects funded by JISC. These CGfL monies have come from 11 different funding sources and managing these separate contracts and the auditing and accountability issues involved has created a large amount of work, which we had not fully anticipated.

The CGfL team has developed experience in providing a range of web services and we are looking to develop these further within the WEA and for external bodies to generate an income to sustain some of the work from 2006.

A major current proposal is a partnership Invest to Save (ISB) application with 8 public libraries and museums to the Treasury to develop *Own Label* CGfL sites with associated staff development and training. We believe that there is a need for discussion about how ACL providers and aggregators like CGfL could generate some income from the LSC or elsewhere for creating e-learning materials and running online *First Steps* courses. This might involve a new Quality Kitemark, organised by LSDA or Becta, to ensure maintenance of high standards.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

… for the organisations involved

The CGfL project has had substantial ambitions and has succeeded in achieving most of its stated objectives. It has been fortunate to receive positive backing from its principal funders – NOF, NWDA and Manchester City and Rochdale MB Councils. We have received very supportive comments from students and from independent evaluators from NIACE, Becta, NWDA and the Big Lottery Fund, who have all produced written reports on the work we have been undertaking.

Limited funds have prevented us from developing the functionality of the website as fast as we had hoped. While we have developed the *Skills for Life* dimension of our work, the changing funding regime for adult education has resulted in less attention being given by some funding bodies to the *First Steps* and effective widening participation role we have been able to play.

We consider that there is a central role to be played in the future by "trusted intermediary" bodies or aggregators like the WEA's CGfL and want to open up discussions with others as to how this could fit in best with the Government's wider Skills policies and the e-Strategy report: *Harnessing the Technology: Transforming Learning and Children's Services*. The WEA's CGfL team as part of its sustainability strategy for 2006 is developing a range of e-learning services for the ACL and VCS sectors. Details are available at www.cgfl.org.uk

… for others

Important advice for others is to watch out for the general direction of Government policies; and ensure that you are aware of new technology developments, which could impact positively on your work. These could include for instance m-learning, use of e-portfolios and developments with wireless technology and interactive TV. It is important also to see how any ILT developments can be sustained for the future. This may well mean that you look at issues about quality improvement and at how in the *Information Society* you manage and plan the curriculum differently than how it is done now.

Delegates at the ALT/LSDA conference were especially interested in the further application of the 4 principles used to develop materials and there was discussion of the extent to which a similar approach might be adopted by all eLearning developers including teachers and trainers irrespective of sector.

Involvement of the clients, matching needs to policy (and hence potential funding streams), making learning fun and engaging and then providing support at the delivery stage were all considered to be excellent steps in promoting learning with technology. Concern was expressed that only those proposals that could draw upon current funding initiatives might be developed but it was recognised that in a resource constrained regime this was an important consideration.

Another point of note was the CGfL's desire to make eLearning something that was, interactive engaging and fun and that they had managed to accomplish this with such a diverse set of clients in an apparently cost effective manner. It was noted in their engagement with clients, that the initial focus was on 'interests' and 'recreation' rather than 'learning' and it was felt that this was one contributing factor to the nature of the materials developed. Delegates were also intrigued by the wide range of clients.

It was also noted that in the main users tended to favour a 'blended' approach where the materials were employed in support of or as part of a face-to-face (f2f) encounter rather than being a wholly on-line experience.

5. Contact details

Ian Harford iharford@wea.org.uk m: 07967 089769

Fiona Iglesias figlesias@wea.org.uk m: 0161 277 5460

18. Leicestershire Information Learning Technology: transforming teaching and learning - a collaborative approach

Josie Fraser, ILT Development Officer, Wyggeston & Queen Elizabeth I College, Leicester

1. The organisations

The size, student profiles, and cultures of the five colleges vary considerably. Gateway College has approximately 1,500 students on roll each year, about 80% of which will be full time. Most students are preparing for the GCE AS and Advanced Level or Advanced and Intermediate vocational programmes. Leicester College has a total student population of around 41,000. They offer a broad range of subjects, qualifications and courses from four city campuses and over 150 community venues. Regent College is a sixth form with around 850 predominantly full-time students, South Leicestershire College delivered 11,441 qualifications to 7,290 part-time learners in 2003/4, 90% of whom were over the age of 19. They provide work-based learning, as well as specialist programmes for disaffected young people and courses for people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College has over 1800 full time students; the majority are pursuing A Level courses. They are currently introducing the International Baccalaureate. The collective group is called LILT (Leicestershire Information Learning Technology).

The institutions have all invested significantly in ILT and IT infrastructure, but the resources available vary within and across the colleges.

Two additional institutions joined LILT: Emily Forte School, which has a base of 80 pupils between the ages of 5 and 18 who have severe learning difficulties, and New College Leicester, an 11-18 school, with 1200 students on roll, including 170 post-16 students on traditional and vocational courses.

2. Overview

Within the project framework, we used the open source online learning platform Moodle to get five very different 16+ Colleges not only communicating, but also collaborating.

We secured funding to allow teaching practitioners from across the five colleges time to develop specific technical skills, share pedagogic ideas, and explore professional difficulties and solutions to both developing and benefiting from collaborative working practices and using the Moodle online learning platform to support their wider teaching and learning aims. This allowed us to seed institutions and departments with enthusiastic and capable practitioners.

We created technical and administrative expertise across the organisations, as well as establishing teacher practitioners who are happy to advise and inspire colleagues. We have developed the expertise to provide support and advice for other organisations looking to make use of a learning environment and to work collaboratively.

We established Moodle platforms in each of the partner colleges - and began to set up courses, as well as continue training and staff development.

We created a community hub - CyberHive - which will accommodate collaborative project work (both between partners and including partners and other organisations and communities), exemplar work and virtual staff rooms for staff to work together informally and share expertise, documents, and work in progress.

3. Details

Approach

During the first year we evaluated a range of mainly proprietary platforms. As well as interoperability and accessibility we prioritised the following requirements: sustainability (including the types of learning supported; total cost of ownership; platform stability; platform development and

community); ease of use (for a diverse group of learners, teachers, administrators and technicians); support for collaboration and sharing (security and openness to cross-institutional groups and wider communities); flexibility (adaptability, robustness and customisation). On the basis of these criteria, Moodle was selected as the project platform.

The pilot practitioner group consisted of 20 teachers from across the five colleges, recruited from curriculum groups focusing on business studies, art and design, sciences, and health and social care. Curriculum areas were focused upon as providing common interests and vocabularies between colleagues and offering the most effective way to begin to build networks. Project funding provided staff release.

The project cycle was tied to four workshops: collaborative practices and web quests; resource demonstrations and customising the NLN materials; using and creating resources in Moodle; using the advanced features in Moodle and project evaluation. The workshops provided a mix of introductions to theories and techniques, hands-on practice, group discussion, project work, and participant demonstrations and Q&A sessions - providing a purposeful mix of theory, application, and time for experience and ideas sharing.

Scale

The original project involved a core of twenty practitioners, who attended four workshops over the course of the academic year. The group also made use of a JISC mailing list, email and telephone support. However, the initial platform enrolment developed to include a further 56 teaching staff members who were not recruited by the project, but who requested enrolment and support through word of mouth. During the trial phase there were over 250 student enrolments.

The project steering group consists of one senior representative from each of the colleges, plus the project manager. This was in place from the outset and comprised staff members who were passionate about the potential benefits of employing ILT to support collaboration and enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

The project was supported by LSC funds after open bid submission and ran from October 2004 to June 2005 inclusive. Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College took the steering role.

Impact

The core group was mixed in terms of technical experience, and a positive early indicator of the project's potential was the enthusiasm for the less technically confident members of the group. The pilot was evaluated by qualitative interviews with the teaching participants and by anonymous survey. Unfortunately at this stage, although very positive, the student feedback is limited and anecdotal, due to the timing of the availability of the platform. This is something we are determined to address in the first year of the rollout proper. However, we have already had instances of students putting pressure on other colleagues to make use of the platform, students able to submit work while out of the country, and staff from outside of the target subject groups talking to one another across institutions to recommend the use of the platform or to suggest using the platform for collaborative work.

The platforms are being rolled out across all the institutions, and are going to have significant impact on the ease with which students and staff can engage with online learning. CyberHive is an important, visible flagship for the group, and will be a focus for collaborative work and the sharing of materials, practices, methods and ideas. Collaborative projects are beginning to develop. The workshops are being extended to six this year, and will enable more staff to benefit from hands on, pedagogically based training and peer collaboration.

Costs and benefits

Moodle is an open source product that is freely available to download for any purpose. This significantly impacts on the ability of all partners to participate equally, with budgetary concerns

being less of an issue - particularly in the long term. The platform was selected, however, as the learning environment best able to meet the group's needs and requirements, while supporting the embedding of ILT to facilitate constructionist and situated learning in both closed and collaborative settings. The absence of licensing fees ensures that we are prioritising the needs of our learners, rather than being restricted by the conditions of a commercial licence, and enables collaboration and sharing that would otherwise be inhibited.

It also means we can concentrate our budgets on staff development, training and support, as well as our cross-college ongoing programme of activities and workshops. We can support collaborative projects that exceed the boundaries of the LILT group of institutions.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

Initially we envisaged an entirely different system from the one we are now putting in place. During the pilot period, we used a single platform, which was based on Leicester College's network. However, as it became increasingly apparent that we would need to take a different approach to our original idea - a shared platform, where all of the colleges would work. It became apparent that just storing things in a single location was not going to induce collaborative practice and prevent silos. Moodle is not designed as a repository and so the question of whether or not teachers would be prepared to spend time learning and implementing a meta-tagging system was avoided. Taking the emphasis off sharing learning objects to building networks of practice would have been difficult without a commitment by the steering group to provide ongoing, dedicated project management. There were also issues of data protection, branding and the desire to keep the platforms small enough to remain agile. We are currently rolling out multiple platforms within the institutions in the case of Leicester College, one platform per faculty. CyberHive, our shared platform, together with a series of workshop events, will become the focus of the collaborative work going on and actually extends our ability to support and engage in this, by becoming an independent space.

We shifted our focus from the production of shared learning objects and materials to collaboration as a culture and infrastructure able to nurture networks of practice - a far more ambitious aim than we started out with, but also an achievable one once we had identified a platform that would help us overcome the differences in our individual aims and missions. We benefited from thoroughly researching what was available and what others, both in the UK and internationally, had been through, evaluating and implementing learning environments. We have taken steps to participate in and contribute to the Moodle community of users and developers, for instance by using Moodle partners to host our external platforms, sharing our experiences, and taking an active interest in how the platform is developing.

This approach has shown that ideas rather than content are important and being flexible in what is delivered is crucial. If students are allowed the freedom to create their own activities, student-led activities emerge, for example, through discussion groups. However this student–centred and student collaborative approach does demand that staff development is addressed early. Sharing ideas and practices has proved more productive that sharing learning objects. A side effect of this has been that students are now putting pressure on more staff to use Moodle. Some student input has been developed with remote students including groups based abroad.

The introduction of Moodle has been a key factor in the success of this work. The only cautionary note is to be aware from the start of the costs of introducing Moodle because, although freely available as an open source product, there are many support and additional staff costs that may be hidden. The issue is to understand the total cost of ownership which, if managed prudently, will probably be less than using a commercial product. It is essential that some staff become active in the Moodle community to ensure best use and development of the platform. The view from the project is that Moodle toolset is now considered to be an activity treasure chest rather than simply an object repository.

Some work is still to be done with Moodle and accessibility and investigations will be carried out on how LAMS (learning activity management system) could be used with Moodle. The intention is to use the platform for mainstream course delivery beyond the life of this project.

Final conclusions include the benefits accrued from the diversity of partners involved and that much of the work within the platform is done and owned by the teachers themselves. The project also clearly identified that continuous close monitoring of copyright is crucial.

5. Contact details

Josie Fraser jfr@wqeic.ac.uk 0116 2231739

19. Central London ACL Consortium: integrating e-learning into adult and community education

Michael McCombe, ICT/ILT programme manager, Working Men's College
Phil O'Hagan, ESOL teacher and re-learning mentor, Working Men's College
Simon Beard, Head of Learning Centre, City Lit

1. The organisations

The Central London ACL Consortium includes four institutions:

- City Lit
- Morley College
- Westminster Adult Education Service
- Working Men's College

The senior management teams of all four institutions recognised there was need to improve the learning experience by making use of the new technologies appropriate to adult education. The colleges came together to successfully bid for funding from the LSDA to run a 'transformation project' to develop the use of blended learning in the delivery of ACL courses. Each institution ran its own project, whilst working as a consortium to share resources, good practice, staff development opportunities and network.

The project was managed on two levels. The steering group's role was to provide the strategic direction for the project. The steering group was made up of one senior manager from each partner college. The steering group met at least twice per term. The second level of management was at an operational level and consisted of the project managers, whose role was to undertake the day-to-day running of the project. Each partner college had their own project manager, and all the project managers met at least once per month, with the venue rotating between the partners.

A project leader was nominated from the project managers to take responsibility for the curriculum development issues within the project and an external project co-ordinator was used to provide support on project management issues.

City Lit, which currently has approximately 900 teaching staff, mainly sessional, had six teachers working on this project, plus two mentors and the project manager. Staff from the languages department developed a blended learning approach to teaching either French or Spanish. Some classes were daytime, others evening, reflecting the differing demographic structure of these groups.

Staff from the performing arts department investigated how elements of e-learning can be incorporated into their courses, which included a drama course with embedded basic skills, a theatre technical skills course, and an acting for TV course.

Due to infrastructure restrictions in the old City Lit building, most of the elements of e-learning were additional to the classroom delivery. Where appropriate, a VLE (DigitalBrain) was used to deliver materials. Staff were encouraged to reuse existing content, rather than developing new materials from scratch e.g. NLN materials, and JISC content such as Oxford Reference Centre and Kar2ouche.

Morley College, with 450 sessionals, set up a mentors group to mentor the other staff on the project. There were 32 members of the project team and 4 mentors. All staff involved were interviewed to devise individual training programmes and a series of staff development courses have been devised for the project e.g. DigitalBrain, whiteboards, some individual instruction.

Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) piloted the blending of e-learning into vocational community courses to assist with the embedding of language, literacy and numeracy into vocational subject areas. At WAES hourly paid lecturing staff deliver 68% of the curriculum so the main challenge facing WAES was how to communicate and disseminate e-learning initiatives to hourly paid staff. WAES piloted e-learning for various aspects of staff training and development running training

8 courses from April 2004 with an initial 30 hour course being developed and delivered by the e-learning project development officer. The course developed contained 10 hours of embedded e-learning and was developed using highly technical means. Therefore the remainder of the pilot project courses commenced in September 2004 and adopted a less technical approach to the embedding of e-learning that was achievable in relation to the technical skills of the teaching staff involved.

WAES used IT to embed e-learning in basic skills and developing a VLE. From January 2005 they developed a VLE called the E-Zone based on Moodle. There were 23 part time tutors, course team leaders and community leaders involved in the project; overall about 100 staff attended training. Everything produced was mapped to the basic skills curriculum. WAES were on target embedding e-learning and will shortly have an ALI inspection to take an external view it.

Working Men's College (WMC) was 150 years old last year and there has been a great transformation in the college's offer and student profile since then. Most learners are women and the original offer has significantly transformed - to put the College in the top 15% of adult education as demonstrated by the findings of the last ALI full Inspection.

The WMC projects are mainly in the skills for life area in the ESOL department, and visual and performing arts with associated development in ICT and languages. The project started off with 5 champions and several other staff with technological skills. Morley's notion of using mentors was quickly adopted and this became a crucial element to the project as it was all about learning and finding the best way to support teachers' use of the technology. The mentoring system helped find the right level for each individual. It also helped spread the word after the first term mentees had begun mentoring other staff and demand for e-training soared. This subsequently stretched and continues to stretch resources e.g. the network team and demand for facilities and how to use them.

The project made great early progress in the college with more demand than anticipated for e-learning mainly in the areas of SmartBoard, Quiz Software, and developmental work on a learning platform (Moodle). The college contributed to the JISC Improving literacy and numeracy for disenfranchised groups through e-learning project.

2. Overview

Initially we anticipated spending money on external trainers but our audits quickly identified that we had this key resource in our own staff. However each college had its own particular structures, flavour and needs that could have prevented successful consortium working. The 4 colleges had to work together but also had to do their own thing which they needed to measure through their own mechanisms yet be able to communicate this work to each other and the LSDA. We had a lot of convincing to do!

This brings us back to that key resource our staff. All needed to be brought together, even though they were mostly sessional, and make what we doing work for them. The way we achieved this was through networking days where staff from all colleges could come together and identify what they wanted to do and why. It wasn't particularly about giving staff a voice; it was really about us listening to the experts i.e. the teachers.

Initially the consortium was unable to reach agreement until the concept, difficulties and understandings of e-learning had been fully explored through the networking days and the experiences of the project teams.

3. Details

Approach

We realised that the types of approaches required were much more than pedagogical, technological and organisational; it was about belief and confidence in each other. This took months to achieve and much work. WMC's successful inspection gave a green light on all four counts for the project and

e-learning initiatives but it also told us that each institution had to do it its own way. This made monitoring and evaluation tools difficult to establish but of crucial importance to the project. We however needed something more for participants. We had brought our staff together in our own colleges but we all needed to get together to feedback and develop ideas. Networking days managed to help us achieve this by working together. It also helped us check and evaluate progress across the institutions on a face-to-face basis.

The aim was to keep the evaluation processes simple and manageable but to provide good quality evidence on which to base judgements. The action plan, staff audit questionnaire, monthly reporting, expenditure monitoring, and evaluation tools were used across all the colleges and this was always a challenge but crucial to the success of the project and the measuring of that success against institutional, consortium and LSDA targets.

Scale

60% of staff had some form of training and the amount of learners receiving e-learning went from 20% to close on 60%. The numbers involved though in some cases were fairly similar averaging out at about 100 per institution and several thousand students. The scale of project can be seen by the amount of time it demanded from the management teams of the four colleges through the steering group that met seven times over the year, plus members' attendance at all networking days

Impact

Learners, all staff, and partners were quite clear about the benefits:

- Networking days were rated 90% good or better overall.
- All were not only clear that e-learning made lessons more enjoyable for learners and teachers but also provided better learning opportunities.
- More interactive learning equals better engagement.
- Learners were positive about the benefits of e-learning.
- College data supported improvements in attendance and retention.
- Better success rates.
- College partners were involved and were 100% positive in their feedback.

Each organisation was able to demonstrate transformation of a higher or lesser degree. One has stated it has achieved all it wants to for the moment and needs to focus its attention elsewhere due to other government initiatives in AE. Others such as City Lit and WMC are continuing the development. E-learning has become part of schemes of work, lesson planning, lesson observations, even impacting on everyday college life with developments with the intranet, e.g. City Lit with Share Point. Since our dissemination event (held at City Lit) we are talking more with other ACLs (e.g. Redbridge and Hillcroft) to make stronger links and pool experience and information.

Costs and benefits

The increase in use of open source software was very marked in that two colleges established a Moodle VLE and the new challenge is to continue to broaden out its use across each college. The real benefit would appear in the vast growth of capacity to share a range of resources across individual organisations and the consortium. This was one of the clear aims of the steering committee and perhaps it also has gone some way to break down the silo mentalities of college departments. The project demanded high amounts of match funding and certainly stretched budgets and continues to so in some of the colleges but about a third of project resources were used to simply run it as a consortium but much valuable experience was gained from this.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

The purpose and expectation for the consortium should be agreed and understood by all partners at the initial stages.

- Strong project managers with a good understanding of the models of project processes, such as action planning and evaluation, are essential.
- The commitment of senior managers to the project, through the steering group, is essential to ensure the consortium moves forward.
- A continuing difficulty had been how to share information between four different kinds of colleges, given how hard it already is to share within one institution.
- The processes and methods of consortium working should be planned in advance.
- Specific methods of consortium monitoring and evaluation do not always fit into different partner structures and cultures and this can create tensions between partners.
- Consortium problems can detract from the individual project work.
- The amount of time needed to set up the appropriate reporting structures should be built into the process and should not be underestimated.
- Finding a facility where consortium project teams can meet and work is difficult.
- Different levels of technology and different systems can hinder the sharing of good practice and materials.
- Measuring transformation through e-learning over a short period of time is difficult.
- An open invitation to all staff to join the project team works well.

5. Contact details

Michael McCombe mmccombe@wmcollege.ac.uk 020 7492 2660

Phil O'Hagan philo@wmcollege.ac.uk 020 7255 4740

Simon Beard 020 7255 4740

20. Thanet College: englisch-deutsche Verleichsstudie zu Werbemitteln

Geoff Rebbeck, e-learning Coordinator, Thanet College
Heike Schwarzbauer, Business Tutor, Berufskolleg Herzogenrath
Kim Neve, Business Tutor, Thanet College
Sara Reeves, Business Tutor/ILT Champion, Thanet College
Dagmar Ehlscheid-Zebner, Business/English tutor, Berufskolleg Herzogenrath

1. The organisations

Berufskolleg Herzogenrath is a small college of 57 tutors and 1500 students situated just outside Aachen in Germany on the Dutch and Belgian borders. The college has a modern campus and provides mostly part time vocational training for the employment opportunities in the Northwest Rhineland/Westphalia region. Whilst it has good technology facilities, the use of a VLE is new to the College. The college has strong links with various chambers of commerce who basically set the curriculum and qualifications/examinations.

Thanet College is a general further education college situated on the northeast tip of Kent. The college primarily serves the needs of Thanet, which is the second most deprived area in the South East of England. Most jobs are in the service sector with 85% of work in health and social care, public services, wholesale, retail, finance, business, and hospitality and catering. The college's provision caters for all of these sectors or groups as well as providing training in information and communication technology, basic skills and general academic programmes.

The college is based on a single site near to Broadstairs town centre. The college has Centre of Vocational Excellence status for its hospitality and catering provision.

2. Overview

We have used the facility of an open source VLE to introduce comparative culture study into a module for two groups of students studying a similar course in Thanet and Aachen, Germany. The exercise is noteworthy for the way it was conceived and designed, based purely on online meetings using the course area itself to facilitate both the construction of what we wanted to do and the introduction of students to the exercise when we were ready. The students shared experiences of advertising identical products, and considered why the advertising is different, i.e. using Heidi Klum to advertise McDonalds in Germany but, post-Jamie Oliver, not using the same approach in England.

3. Details

Approach

Using Moodle social constructivist architecture, we chose to have the students present an agreed piece of work in a team, consisting of 4/5 German and 1 English student, using the discussion boards to share what was produced so that students presented to and learned from each other. The added value of learning came from the cultural relativism.

The tutors and e-learning technologists held twenty weekly Wednesday afternoon meetings for one hour maximum to discuss, explore, devise, construct, oversee and summarise the module. Using the chat facility to meet we developed rules for meetings and were able to achieve a reasonable degree of detail in the course architecture and gained enough confidence to experiment with the students in this type of learning. All the students picked up intuitively how to use the VLE. Staff, being a bit older, needed some help and this was provided by 'teaching as we go' in developing the course area.

Scale

Being an 'open source' programme we deliberately brought others in to follow the experiment and take part. In total, 42 people used the course at some point, consisting of (on the English side) 2 ILT champions, 1 tutor, 3 JISC SE representative, 1 JISC London representative, 1 deputy principal and 5 students. On the German side there were 5 tutors, 1 ILT Champion, 1 principal, 1 senior manager and 26 students. The whole community was based on the Moodle server located in Thanet College. We opened a Moodle learning community on 19th November 2004 and closed the course site in June 22nd 2005. The VLE was the locus of online activity. Student worked in class gathering their information.

Impact

Tutors were polled after the area was closed. The German tutors' views reflected the fact this was their first exposure to VLEs and they enjoyed the ability to pace what was done and manage access to suit. The English tutors rated the international component to study higher as they were familiar with the VLE. Following course closure the German staff came to Thanet for two days training in June and have invited us back to plan more collaborative courses.

It is worth noting that the formal meetings of tutors on this course and formal training in how to use the site occurred after the module hade successfully completed. Up to that point, not even telephone calls had been exchanged.

Part of the German curriculum is English Language. We originally set the community up allowing German as a first choice language. However, the German tutors wanted their students to work in English as part of their key Skills record so the module for them was presented in English. We are told that the value of speaking English with English students is likely to make this happen in any European collaboration.

Berufskolleg Herzogenrath staff are now considering installing Moodle. They have asked for further team teaching, which is currently hosted on our server. JISC SE is seeking other possible partners for other subject areas. We have reported this method of working to the London languages teachers' group. The German college has recognised that its part-time students working in industry during the day and attending the college three evenings a week can use the VLE as a means of keeping in contact and studying at other times. The college reports on the pressure their business students are under as they work during the day. The VLE is now seen as a way of spreading the burden of study time over the whole of the week.

Thanet College has seen its VLE usage rise from June to now as follows: 75 modules to 245 modules. 450 users to 1350 users and 400 pages accessed every 24-hour day to 20500. This is not as a result of this collaboration of course but it has been part of what has stimulated the level of staff training over the summer to meet the needs of the digital native students now coming to college.

Costs and benefits

There was no extra cost beyond the running cost of maintaining the server. Staff time was taken in the meetings and marking/commenting and, as the English students had completed this module, they were in effect repeating some work to help the German students. All the College staff have learnt from the project concerning the possibility of collaboration, architecture of a module and contributing to meetings online.

4. Lessons, caveats, and implications

We felt there was too little interaction from the students relative to what we expected. We had hoped for spontaneous discussions to erupt, driven by mutual curiosity about studying the same subject in different countries. The students weren't as rigorous in submitting work as hoped. Where this was new to the German students, there was a preoccupation with the fun side of using a VLE rather than

the work level that was hope for. We were particularly pleased with the involvement of the staff concerned. There is a real progress in the possibility of this type of learning and this sharing of learning and that the whole exercise can be done so much better not for want of planning but experience in how students may react.

We already knew that student activity on a VLE needs to be driven quite hard at least in the initial stages by the tutors. We had not made this clear enough to the German tutors who over relied on the VLE to stimulate the student activity. That critical part of the project needs special attention. There is an implication for adding numbers of students to the server who are not enrolled at your college. Our college takes a fairly relaxed view on the basis it has good educational value and is always beneficial to some degree to Thanet students.

When the project started we had a very poor idea of what we wanted to achieve but a strong sense of exciting options that were available. As we progressed new options became apparent by virtue of the options already chosen, so the project grew 'on the hoof'. Tutors found this stimulating. It is not necessary that tutors know exactly what aims and outcomes are at the start but, by keeping an open mind to opportunity, can find new and interesting ways of stimulation teaching and learning. Remember that tutors are already experts in their subject area and know how to teach it. Finding ways of exploiting technology, once understood, is the easier part.

We set out rules for the conduct of meetings, use of language and who does what to avoid embarrassment if a translation was needed at any time. For example, we stated explicitly that we did not mind if they wished to speak to each other in German without them feeling the need to use English always.

5. Contact details

Geoff Rebbeck geoff.rebbeck@thanet.ac.uk 01843 605040

http://www.bkherzogenrath.de/index.php