TEL communities: bridging the gap between the theory and practice in using Virtual Learning Environments in Higher Education

Ms Suzan Orwell and Dr Tania Dias Fonseca
Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (LTEC)
Outline

- Exploring the role of a Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) community in a University-wide Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) roll-out.

- 2015/2016: we ran focus group interviews and a usability study with the TEL community
- 2016/2017: we rolled-out our new VLE following.
- 2017/2018: we evaluated the use of the new VLE using a survey.
- 2018/2019: how do we move forward?
Theme 1: VLE inconsistency pre-rollout

› In February 2016, the TEL community (staff and students) helped to identify two issues:

- For the students, the lack of consistency in module structure, language and content in the VLE shows that it causes students frustration and confusion.

- For staff, the lack of guidance on good practice, pedagogically driven examples and use-case scenarios of using the VLE limits the potential of fully utilising the various tools in the VLE.

› In July 2016, the same community worked together to investigate the reasons for VLE inconsistency, and proposed strategies to prevent and mitigate this, and thereby improve staff and students’ overall experience of the VLE.
Theme 1: VLE inconsistency pre-rollout

› Flexibility
  – The current VLE has too much flexibility.
  – Confusion over multiple web systems in the University.
    “Blackboard is too flexible”

› Priority
  – The module design and identity is prioritised over its navigation, structure and language
  – Technical training is prioritised over examples of good practice.
    “I sometimes think: is the information uploaded? I don’t know if I’m looking in the wrong place or if it’s just not present”
Theme 1: VLE inconsistency pre-rollout

› Language

– *Multiple labels are used to describe the VLE.*
– *Terminology from the USA is used.*
– *Multiple terms are used to describe the same tool.*
– *Inaccurate and/or vague instructions are given during face-to-face teaching.*

“It once took an hour to find assessment results”

“Some will say, look for it on StudySpace, instead of being precise, clear and saying, your lecture notes for week 3 are available in the module documents under the week 3 folder.”
VLE templates
Theme 2: promoting VLE consistency with the rollout

› Values and goals

– Consistency – students should always be able to find relevant information and find it in the same place.

– Coherency – learning designs should reflect current research on good practice and the institutional policies and initiatives.

– Transparency – students should have clarity with regards to expectations and assessment criteria in order to learn more effectively.

– Accessibility – all materials should be accessible to students regardless of their particular situation.
Theme 2: promoting VLE consistency with the rollout

› TEL community
  - The community’s participation was formally recognised as the ‘Canvas team’
  - Central team (project managers, technical and admin staff).
  - Faculty teams (associate professors, KU graduates, lecturers).
  - Superusers (TEL enthusiasts and directors of learning and teaching).

› Module and course templates
  - New course and module ‘templates’ were designed and implemented to ensure consistent use of the VLE.
  - The design was influenced by ‘Universal Design for Learning’ (UDL), ‘Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education’, Biggs’s constructive alignment, and institutional priorities and educational policies.
Theme 2: promoting VLE consistency with the rollout

› Building modules and assessment and feedback workshops
  – 600 workshops and training sessions were delivered to during the project (excluding one-to-one training sessions).
  – Nearly 2,000 members of staff were trained.
  – Customised training material and content were developed for staff and students.
  – Training sessions, internal and external support was provided for students.

› Module and course quality assurance process
  – TEL community developed a set of minimum standards for modules and courses (topics, units, module guide, assessment and feedback).
  – KU Graduates reviewed module ‘readiness’ using a set of minimum standards
  – Feedback on each module was given to the module leader
Theme 3: Evaluation

› An online student survey

- The questionnaire was available in the VLE from 8th of December 2017 until 7th of January 2018

- The survey was completed by 294 Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

› Observations and notes on academic staff training sessions feedback

- TEL team notes and staff feedback
Students’ questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions:
- Demographic questions (faculty, department, level of study)
- Student perception of the new VLE
- Comparison between the new and the previous VLE
- Suggestions for further improvements
- The new VLE enhances learning experience
- Feedback and grades are easy to find
- Easy to find Assessment briefs, criteria and due dates
- Issues on access learning materials
Top findings

- Materials are better organized now than on the previous VLE
- Modules are clearly labelled and contextualized now than on the previous VLE
- Assessment information is easier to find/access
Inconsistency in using the VLE as a ‘repository’ is still an issue

› **Continues demand to access and download PowerPoint (student)**

*It would have been easier if the layout was easy. Sometimes it is hard to find info on the canvas as there is so many links and the modules are not easy linked with the class PowerPoint, it is hard to get it on the phone sometimes.*

*I would prefer that there were less interactive elements – quizzes, discussion forums, etc. – and that it focus on presenting material relevant to the course/module expressly.*

› **Staff editing and using templates in different ways (quality assurance)**

*I like Canvas but the only thing I don’t like is that every teacher uses it in a different way. So you go to a module and the structure is different than the other modules. It’d be great that all teachers/modules share the same model/structure.*

*Some modules on Canvas have been organised well and made use of sections, headings, and subheadings to navigate the course. Others however have not used this and so it is difficult to find materials on a weekly basis.*
Inconsistency in using the VLE as a ‘repository’ is still an issue

› **Increase demand and expectation for using an ‘app’ to access learning content**

  *Not being able to access all of my content easily from my mobile is very frustrating and negatively impact my learning.*

  *Easier on mobile phones*

› **Continues demand to upload PowerPoint (staff)**

  *Repeatedly asked how to upload lectures’ slides*

  *Lack of Staff availability for training*

  *Different ideas on what is the purpose of a VLE*
Theme 4: how do we move forward?

Using keywords, please describe how the VLE is used in your own experience, context or institution.

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References