



A 'learn'ing space for lecturers

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The change to a new Learning Management System (LMS) combined with the restructuring of teacher education programmes has led to the need for additional professional development within our College of Education. An online "Educational Design Classroom" has been created with two major goals in mind: to help prepare faculty to design their online spaces for the new courses, which at times combine different subject areas within the same course; and to develop those spaces for teaching both flexible learning (distance) and on-campus students within 'Learn' (powered by Moodle) the new LMS. This poster highlights elements of the "Educational Design Classroom", the theory behind it, and its use.

Keywords: professional development, online teaching and learning, instructional design

Background

Research acknowledges three main areas which form barriers to the adoption of change to include online learning (Covington, Petherbridge, & Warren, 2005; Jones, 2008). They are: faculty resistance; lack of institutional planning, support and recognition; and the need for faculty professional development in the areas of both technology and pedagogical understanding. Our administrative and faculty concerns focus around the length of time needed to learn to use the new technology effectively, to develop and implement courses, and the adverse effect on other academic work.

The context of this research is a university college with large teacher education programmes that prepare teachers for schools in New Zealand. Around 40% of those future teachers are prepared mainly at a distance in programmes known for their quality. The need to restructure programmes to fit with university decisions to change to a new LMS and a common course size led us to instigate an initiative to revitalize our flexible learning options (FLO), which is led by the second author in collaboration with the FLO coordinator and our recently appointed professor of e-learning. Having demonstrated exceptional promise in our "Graduate Certificate in Online Teaching and Learning", the first author was recruited to support our revitalization initiative and one of her strategies was to create this "Educational Design Classroom" to enhance her mentoring of staff. One on one mentoring is known as one of the most effective strategies for faculty development for e-learning (Thompson, Chuang, & Sahin, 2007).

The goal of this project was to create an online "Educational Design Classroom" to complement other initiatives and provide a just-in-time model which would contain many of the recommended aspects of professional development gathered in one place and presented in a way which models best practice in online teaching. This presentation focuses on the design of an online learning environment for faculty professional development to facilitate the growth of online teaching and learning within a newly implemented LMS.

An online classroom for faculty

Within the online classroom, as cognitive instructional design methods suggest, the information has been carefully presented in such a way that the faculty will easily be able to relate it to their existing schema. The focus has been kept on the relevant material by only presenting information relevant to the situation in which faculty find themselves. The information has been structured into sections which relate to the elements of online learning which they will already be familiar with, such as; presenting course information, communicating with students, student work, and student interactions. Keeping information

in clearly identified, brief, easily accessible chunks and presenting some information as steps to take in their planning and learning makes it easier for faculty to assimilate.

The 'Select, Organise, Integrate' (SOI) model of instructional design (Mayer, 1983) provides suggestions of a variety of techniques. To assist learners in selecting relevant material it suggests; highlighting visually, questions or statements of objectives, and summaries. To assist learners in organising relevant material it suggests; headings, outlines, ordered or numbered text, and graphic representations. To encourage learners to integrate material it suggests; worked examples, text accompanied by illustrations, and narrated animation. Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into the online classroom.

An authentic problem solving context in which constructivist learning can take place exists within the "Educational Design Classroom". Faculty need to create their own online learning space for their courses – this is the problem to be solved. To accurately portray the task, the learning has been presented using the same LMS - 'Learn', and the same tools which faculty have available to them. The classroom as a whole has been designed as an example within which I can give support, make suggestions, encourage, and provide resources. Other examples, with accompanying reasoning, give faculty the opportunity to grasp the process behind the learning and increase their experience of online learning and possible solutions to some of the problems they might encounter. Creating an environment which is rich in just-in-time information relevant to the task, is possible through the inclusion of links which the learner need not follow until the information is required. While linking this information to interactive activities may be ideal, few faculty members would have time to complete the activities. Therefore the information is linked to relevant examples, as possibilities for further learning. Active interaction within the context will take place outside the classroom, in the decision making and construction of faculty's own online 'Learn' classrooms. The creation of a community of learners providing the opportunity to work with others in solving problems can be created through the conversation and collaboration tools of embedded forums and wikis. However, it is expected that, at this time, few faculty will choose to communicate and discuss online as they construct their new understandings.

By using both cognitive and constructivist theories, a learning environment is under development that is already informing and challenging faculty to incorporate the material presented both within their understanding of online learning, and within the online learning environments which they are creating. Illustrations of this are provided within the poster.

The "Educational Design Classroom" is only one of several different types of training and information available to faculty. It has been introduced to faculty at staff meetings and has been used extensively as a resource to support individual and small group course design sessions. In its first two months it has supported the development of at least forty courses and outreach sites across the college, as well as forty one faculty members, a quarter of whom have returned to the classroom for continued support following course design sessions. This site will need to be one which changes to meet the ongoing professional development needs, and to remain relevant, challenging and interesting. As they are developed, exemplars from faculty are being added to the classroom and it is hoped that in the future, with a growing confidence in using the technology and less time pressure, there will be more active online participation. Faculty feedback so far has been positive e.g. "The classroom is an invaluable resource. It's supported my growing understanding of how 'Learn' works by modeling a range of ideas for online classroom construction. I've 'dipped' into it often to get ideas and clarify points. It's been great 'next step' learning for me!"

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Educational Design Classroom URL: <http://www.learn.canterbury.ac.nz/EdDesign>. (Username and password required. Please email: susan.tull@canterbury.ac.nz)

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