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RIG Update: M25 Learning Technology Group



The Summer meeting of the [ALT M25 Learning Technology group](#) took place on 2nd July at Imperial College London. Leo Havemann, Birkbeck, and Julie Voce, Imperial, hosted the event that was attended by over 40 people in person and a further 25 people via the online broadcast. The first part of the session primarily focussed on learning design.

Maria Toro-Troconis (Imperial College London) presented the **Blended Learning Design Tool (BLEnDT)**, developed by Imperial that can help to incorporate blended learning into your course based on your learning outcomes. The tool suggests both self-guided and collaborative activities. Maria provided an example of how BLEnDT was applied to an [undergraduate medicine programme](#) which was supported by the use of iPads. Students completed an e-module in the VLE before they came in, then a pre-quiz, a face to face tutorial and then a post-quiz. The students also completed a survey about the use of technology. There was marginal evidence that those who completed the module did better in the final exam than those who didn't. BLEnDT is also being used by City University London, King's College London and UCL.

Eileen Kennedy (Institute of Education) presented '[The Learning Designer](#)' tool, an online tool to support lesson planning. She stressed the importance of communication cycles, e.g. teachers communicating their concepts to the learners and learners discussing their understanding with each other. As part of planning an activity it is important to consider the time of activity, size of the group and whether the teacher will be present. Within the tool, lesson plans can be shared with others, who can then adapt the plan for their own purposes. Eileen highlighted the International Learning Designs Challenge that ran in February 2014 on Blackboard CourseSites as a way of piloting the tool. The course attracted over 340 enrollments and awarded badges for completion of activities. This sort of mini-MOOC worked really well to create engagement and build a global community, which would not have been possible in a face to face setting. It also provided a useful base for user testing and feedback of the tool.

Tim Neumann (Institute of Education) then talked about **learner-centred navigation design**. Tim raised concerns about VLEs and the way they can constrain us to implement teaching and learning in a specific way. He presented two case studies describing where he had had to 'think outside of the VLE' to provide a student friendly solution. The first case study reviewed the **authoring** experience on Coursera and Tim highlighted the limits to the inbuilt navigation structure (e.g. there is no facility for subsections). To introduce this and improve the navigation required a lot of effort through consistency, structure and hyperlinks, requiring coding skills in HTML and CSS. Despite the authoring difficulties, the students liked the layout. (Tim stressed that Coursera was designed with the student in mind, but made authoring difficult). The second case study looked at Moodle. Tim related issues with making content available at the right time to students and demonstrated his use of Google Sheets to produce a timetable for each group of students with details of tutorials and links to the relevant Moodle materials. Student feedback on the solution was positive.

The second half of the session invited ten minute presentations in the form of a BarCamp.

Pete Roberts (Goldsmiths, University of London) presented the **Tiny Open Online Course (TOOC) for Moodle training** to provide an online experience using the VLE with authentic taster activities and an agile approach to releasing new activities. The TOOC attracted around 100 people and overtook the face to face delivery in terms of numbers. Feedback was very positive. Pete's key message was to use the VLE to teach how to use the VLE!

Ben Audsley (Royal Veterinary College) presented the **RVC Learn SPOC (small private online course)** as an alternative way to approach staff training on the VLE, as attendance at face to face training was low. The SPOC ran from March to April with 59 attendees. As with other online courses, participation decreased as the course progressed, so future iterations need to ensure the course maintain interest levels for the duration of the course. Ben also suggested that not having completion deadlines had allowed people to delay working on the course, perhaps indefinitely, without acknowledging that they were not going to complete the training.

Leonard Houx (Floream) told us a love story related to simplicity and design in e-learning. Leonard cited examples from the disciplines of psychology, neuroscience and computing to provide the key message that users like simplicity, don't want too much choice and want to be able to get to what they want quickly and directly. Simpler design makes the experience more effective and learners learn more.

Mark Anderson (University of Greenwich) talked about **Sharing Designs for distance learning**, describing a new initiative based around a Distance Learning working group, chaired by the deputy PVC for TEL with cross-institutional representation. The working group identified main areas of focus for distance learning including MOOCs, collaborative and creative learning, OERs, nurturing learning communities, multiple platforms and social networks (e.g. what is the best platform to use?) and identifying mechanisms for sharing best practice. Mark invited us to contribute our thoughts to the [discussion via the M25-LT Ning site](#) with conversations around case studies, learning designs, strategies and challenges/pitfalls.

Finally, **Bing Choong (University of the Arts)** presented a **free task management system called Asana** which was used at the University of East London to assist with managing student helpers who were working on the migration from Blackboard to Moodle. The team initially considered using a spreadsheet to allocate and manage tasks but this didn't work particularly well with 10 students so decided to look for another tool. Asana enables you to use it with up to 15 people for free. Projects can be split up so people only have access to the projects they are working on. Tasks can be allocated to individuals with notes on

the task. The team used tags to flag up key information, e.g. when access had been granted to a course. Other tools mentioned by the group included [Producteev](#) and [Slack](#).

Overall it was another successful meeting with great presentations and an excellent turnout. Copies of the slides and recordings of the presentations will be made available via the [M25-LT Ning site](#) in due course. The group intend to meet next at [ALT-C 2014](#) for a joint meeting with the [East Midlands Learning Technologists group](#). The Autumn meeting will take place in November at the University of West London. Dates and further details will be circulated to M25-LT group members in due course. We look forward to seeing you there!

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