

Beyond access and skills: From Moodle Evaluation to Digital Literacies in situated practices.

Type: Paper presentation

Themes:

What are the opportunities and challenges for educational institutions heading towards 2020?

What are challenges for pedagogical design and development in a post digital age?

What are the emerging practices, tools and approaches that may enhance student learning?

Key words: *Digital Literacy, Access, Skills, Situated Practice*

This paper considers the ‘frame of reference’ for the discussion and evaluation of technologies for learning and teaching in Higher Education. As gaining access to existing and emerging technologies become easier to achieve, there is a need to upskill staff and consider ‘digital literacies’ as inherently interdisciplinary and situated practices.

“Digital literacies are those capabilities which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society” (JISC, 2013). This definition acknowledges, albeit implicitly, that technical and pedagogical distinctions are blurred, open to interpretation and influenced by context.

Institutionally, an evaluation of digital literacies as an interdisciplinary and situated practice is multi-layered and includes an account of access and skills related issues. The extent to which these issues dominate the discourse will influence any proposed improvements. For example, a focus on providing access and skills training to use Moodle as a system will affect the design of staff development and possibly result in a technologically deterministic approach. Conversely, a focus on how course objectives can be better achieved through the use of technologies will encourage programme teams and learning technologists to think beyond the technology and more about learning design.

This tension between an access-skills (Epstein et al., 2011) and skills-situated practice (Hinrichsen and Coombs, 2014) discourse was partly observed when reflecting on data collected from a Moodle Evaluation of staff and students. The evaluation took place 6 months after the first phase of the implementation of Moodle and involved 50 members of staff and 600 students who took part from April 2013 to April 2014. Data from staff was predominantly gathered through structured conversations, focus groups and email feedback, whilst data from students was gathered via an online anonymous survey and focus groups.

Findings allowed for improvements to be made to the Moodle installation such as navigation (fewer clicks to arrive at course space), access (on mobile devices) and also resulted in a formal request for a new learning, teaching and assessment video solution. However, the findings revealed a predominantly techno-centric focus with little information garnered about the complex and dynamic nature of negotiating digital practices alongside engagement with disciplinary content. This was more consistent with transferring rather than transforming the curriculum as it had existed within the previously adopted system (Blackboard Vista).

These observations paved the way for a working group of Teaching Fellows and Academic Developers to scope and understand how staff across services, schools, departments and in distinct

roles, define and implement digital literacies in their practice. A questionnaire has been distributed to scope and collect definitions of digital literacy, example uses of technologies for teaching and learning, and to identify drivers and recommendations for enhancing digital literacies among staff and students. This has been followed up with interviews and focus groups aimed at exploring how identified themes and examples can be harnessed to enhance digital literacies through improved collaboration between academics, learning technologists/academic developers and students.

Executive summaries of analysed data will be made available. Equally important is the qualitative account of the journey and findings of one Higher Education Institute moving from an access, skills oriented discourse to one of digital literacies not limited to the 'virtual', but extended to the "learning environment" (Istance and Kools, 2013) more generally.

References:

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