

PRACTICAL OUTPUTS TO APPLY DIGITAL TOOLS IN LIFE LONG LEARNING: MODERN PROJECT

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Abstract

The MODERN project aims to help you teach more effectively through incorporating new digital learning tools into your day to day teaching delivery. It is expected MODERN will be a key resource in teacher and trainers' professional development. It has been identified, assessed and categorised the latest and best digital learning tools. This is a project with a website that has actually had real educators looking at and rating every tool. Want to find the best tools for creating courses? Done! Want to find the best tool for testing students? Done! Want to find the best tools for project work? Done! In fact, the unique 10 category classification system makes it easy for anyone to find the best tool for the learning objective that anyone wants to achieve.

Keywords: Digital tools, benchmark, project work, learning resource, teaching support.

1 PROJECT GOALS

MODERN has been funded by the European Commission under the ERASMUS+ Programme, so there are no adverts, no sponsors to please, the project is objective and concrete. The project is solely interested in pedagogic potential, not "gimmicks" or commercial gain. By engaging with the project anyone:

- a) Learns intuitive powerful tools for engaging students.
- b) Understands the pedagogic potential of digital learning tools.
- c) Motivates to incorporate some of these new tools into your teaching practice.
- d) Increases own digital literacy.

MODERN aims to increase the ability and motivation of teachers, trainers and lecturers to use digital learning resources as a means to more effective, relevant teaching, thereby causing a positive impact in students, learners and trainees.

2 PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The project hoped to achieve the above goals by:

- a) Providing educators with a convenient and highly usable set of innovative tools which they can use to engage their students on mobile devices.
- b) Offering clear guidelines on which tool offers the best solutions to achieving pedagogical objectives.
- c) Presenting project toolkit in a highly attractive manner and user friendly format.

Smart phones and tablets have revolutionised the way one lives and works, but not yet in many cases the one teaches students in vocational training or higher education. There are fantastic opportunities however for interactive, student-led learning inside and outside the classroom via these powerful mobile phones [1].

It is known that digital and mobile resources are proven to increase adult learner engagement and information retention [2]. They're also well suited to "hard to reach" learners or those who direct their own learning activities "on the go". Yet only one in five students are taught by digitally confident and supportive teachers. So the project tries to address these issues and newcomers are invited to explore the project site, to take a learning module, to try out a learning tool and to become more digitally confident and capable.

3 PROJECT PARTNERS AND ACTIVITIES

Partnership is formed by VET and HEI specialists, from across the profit, non-profit and public sectors. The project is led by Canice Consulting, an international consultancy in the field of business VET with a growing specialism in digital elearning and marketing platforms. Canice Consulting is accompanied by The Universitat Politècnica de Valencia (Spain) a Higher Education Institute (HEI) known for their dedication to providing students with an integral education through creation, development and critical reflection. A further joining partner was The University of Szczecin (Poland) a HEI known for its commitment to collaboration as a means to pursuing excellence. Momentum Consulting is leading the resource creation, they are an Irish training organisation focused on developing progressive vocational education programmes and platforms to enable entrepreneurs, employees and young people entering the world of work to participate as fully as possible in the contemporary labour market. The project was further aided by partnerships with the EUCEN the largest European multi-disciplinary association in University Lifelong Learning and with the EfVET a unique European-wide professional association which has been created by and for providers of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in all European countries.

The partners produced several initiatives to promote the project and debate the progress of the project and the quality of results. One of the types of activities consisted of webinars. As example one of these webinars had a title proposed as “Innovative Training Methods and Teaching Tools”. These webinars had several topics and of the proposed topics was Assessment of Learning Outcomes. In this case the goal was intended to present the web-tool TALOE – Time to Assess Learning Outcomes in E-learning [3].

The content of this webinar was fulfilled by the description of a conceptual model that aligns Learning Outcomes (LO) in with assessment strategies based on e-learning. The research problem was made taking into account three areas of research: Assessment, Engineering and e-Learning. The work done in this web-tool managed to verify to what extent e-assessment methods may be used to measure intended Learning Outcomes of e-learning courses. The web-tool was planned to facilitate the curriculum design, the teaching delivery planning, the recognition of e-learning courses and to improve definition of assessment tools.

In general terms, the approach chosen was to develop a model that matches various common assessment methods to measure the achievement of the main Learning Outcomes (LO) in education. This means that it should be possible for a teacher to define the intended LO of the e-learning course and, considering this definition, to write proper and possible adequate assessment methods. The work done in the study proposes a conceptual model ALOA (Aligning Learning Outcomes with Assessment) [4]. ALOA model was used to describe the Learning Outcomes and the proper assessment and to achieve alignment between these two components of the educational process. The implementation of the model was done defining the web based tool that allows teachers to obtain suggestions for proper assessments in accordance with the type of LO.

Another important activity of this MODERN project was the internal evaluation process to identify and correct any deviation from the operational objectives. By doing so during the project lifespan, the object of the evaluation is the performance of the partners. The continuous and systematic control of the project's progress means that all activities were carefully checked, verified and, if necessary - re-oriented and adapted, thus improving the partnership performance and the quality of the project results and impact [5].

Therefore, the objective of the quarterly monitoring questionnaires was to assist the project quality coordinator in compiling a synthesis report which will be circulated to all partners and copied also to the external evaluator. This internal quality evaluation addressed the management, collaboration and communication among partners. Questions asked if each partner was able to complete all planned activities for a certain period of time in accordance with the timetable, if there comments about any deviations, if the deadlines established for the planned activities were feasible, if the quality of the working relationships between the partners was acceptable, what was the rate of the effectiveness of the partnership, what was the level of satisfaction with the partner communications and if each partner felt there was opportunity to share expertise and experiences in order to contribute to the planned activities. Concerning the project deliverables partners were asked they were able to produce the deliverables and products according to the work plans, what was their opinion about the value of the work plans, what were the areas of the work plans that required attention, what effectiveness had the dissemination work and what were the challenges or areas of dissemination that may require attention.

4 PROJECT OUTPUTS

The project has developed four resources to help you learn and introduce new digital tools and innovative practice into the teaching and training delivery. Each of the resources is stand alone, but together it is considered they form a holistic package which leads teachers and trainers from the broad objective (Audit of learning tools) to a quite specific output (Online training course) [6].

First output is the Audit of Learning Tools. In this report it has been identified, assessed and categorised the latest and best digital learning tools. Since there are endless lists of learning tools out there this project has actually had real educators looking at and rating every tool. Since it is a subjective assessment the option was to have the task led and undertaken by a capable and known university.

Together with the assessment a ten category classification system was created. This system makes it easy for anyone to find the best tool for the learning objective you want to achieve. Anyone can use the audit in two ways: first, one can download and read the Audit Report which will provide an excellent overview of learning tools in general and their applicability; second, one can search by category to find specific tools to do a particular function like testing students.

The second output is the Pedagogic Assessment of the considered as top twenty-five tools. Again the project has categorised the tools in with the ten category classification system. This report presents a more detailed analysis of the pedagogic potential of the tools that were considered most useful. Each assessment is no more than three pages long and provides all the essential information needed to decide if this is a tool that might be useful in a teaching or training activity. Then anyone can learn how to use it, in less than one hour, with the third output called Toolkit!

The Toolkit is the third output. It is an online platform designed to teach and train about the top twenty-five. It follows a four step process: read the pedagogic report, watch the introductory video, view some examples of the impact of the tool in real life learning environments and then learn the tool itself. It is hoped to encourage anyone interested to try one or two of the tools initially, to gauge the impact and then to learn some more tools. The Toolkit is online since December 2016.

The fourth output is an Online Training Course to help anyone learn some of these new and innovative teaching digital techniques. It has five modules:

- a) Introduction to innovative teaching.
- b) The Flipped Classroom teaching model.
- c) Collaborative learning spaces and Peer connections.
- d) Project based learning.
- e) E-learning trends.

The relevant aspect of this online training course is that the five modules have been developed using eight of the considered top twenty-five learning tools. Therefore, while taking the modules anyone will gain new knowledge about these tools and also experiment the learning experience of some of these learning tools. It is hoped that the online course will further encourage anyone to implement these tools in their teaching and training delivery.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

MODERN seeks to generate greater acceptance of the mobile phone and other mobile devices as learning support by upskilling trainers, teachers and lecturers in their knowledge of available tools and appropriate pedagogical strategies. The expected result is that educators and trainers are more confident in their ability to select and use appropriate mobile and digital resources in their everyday teaching and training activities.

This will then cause a ripple effect in the learners and trainees populations, where the majority of whom are young adults, that will benefit from a markedly improved learning experience. This result can be based via improved pedagogical strategies, acquired greater ability to drive their own learning and training process and increased on-the-go access to learning and training when outside the classroom.

It is also expected that the four outputs will also enable teachers and trainers to boost career progression and make their institutions more competitive in terms of attracting students and producing

excellence in results. This can be achieved by understanding how to create robust pedagogic strategies and boost acquired learning outcomes through the use of interactive digital technologies, especially those which are student led and available on mobile devices.

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