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Event report: M25 Learning Technology Group meeting (March 2015)

Posted on 01 June 2015. Tags: [CDE](#), [Colin Laughlin](#), [Julie Voce](#), [Leo Havemann](#), [M25 LTG](#), [Sonja Grussendorf](#)

A joint meeting of the [ALT M25 Learning Technology Group](#) (M25 LTG) and the University of London's [Centre for Distance Education](#) (CDE) in March attracted a record turnout for a programme of high quality, informative and entertaining presentations focused on learning analytics and learning design. The event was opened and organised by Colin Loughlin (University of Surrey) on behalf of the M25 LTG.

Lynda.com for staff and student training. **Anna Williams** and **Bryony Bramer** (Regent's University London) reported on a pilot project using Lynda.com videos or 'courses' (collections) either before/after or as an alternative to face-to-face IT training sessions. Lynda.com was selected to meet needs for more software training (particularly online, out of hours and off campus), and to support students who work with specialized technology. To make the delivery seamless and integrated, Lynda.com has been presented to staff and students via the Blackboard VLE. Currently the LTI (Learning Tools Interoperability) integration allows single sign on to the Lynda.com platform but it is hoped that a building block, currently in beta, will allow a more bespoke embedding of selected materials into courses. Lynda.com is currently being rolled out to all staff and students.

Reviewing VLE use with Google Analytics. **Hendrik van der Sluis** (Kingston University) has employed Google Analytics to evaluate the impact of two institutional policies on Blackboard VLE use: 1) the revised academic framework and 2) the e-submission, marking and feedback policy. Hendrik presented results on content distribution and content creation, which, as expected, showed that content viewing dominated, and the nature of the content (mostly documents with very few multimedia files) did not change substantially throughout the period under review. Discussion boards were viewed frequently, but added to infrequently. There was some – but not much – modifying of wiki pages. Usage of blogs and wikis remained very low. However, Hendrik reported some significant changes, including impact of the e-assessment policy. There had been an increase from 2% to 75% (!) of staff using

Turnitin to provide online marks and feedback. Of course, data alone do not tell us whether there has been any actual impact of policies on actual learning or retention.

Using learning analytics to support learners. **Bart Rienties** (Open University) highlighted the importance of focusing on the effect of teaching (and edTech) interventions on student progress. He raised a number of questions: How can we use learning analytics to help students? Should we concentrate on *learning* analytics (clicks, posts, length of comments) or *learner* analytics (e.g. prior education, prior language skills) – and why, or when? Bart problematized these and similar questions: What can analytics tell us about student motivation – and how might we extrapolate from this how students will fare by the end of a course? Can analytics help us identify less intrinsically motivated students so that teachers can intervene in a timely manner? He also posted questions about learning design that could be addressed with analytics? Which design style engages students more regularly and maintains momentum? Which design style leads to the highest number of students ultimately succeeding?

Bart suggested that course designs that follow a social constructivist model, and therefore demand more varied activities and more social engagement from students, have a more positive impact on their performance – but they are also given lower satisfaction ratings by students. However courses with a more content-focused design produced greater student satisfaction. One attendee tweeted: "Point being confirmed today at #m25ltg is that what students want is often not where the interesting pedagogy is."

'3 box' model of digital engagement. **Dave White** (University of the Arts London) presented this simple [model](#) for mapping the role and value of the digital in teaching creative disciplines. Dave contextualised the model in terms of the 'postdigital' (the idea that 'the digital', far from being over, has disappeared into use), and also his previous work on users of digital spaces as 'visitors and residents' (rather than 'natives and immigrants').

Dave suggested that the '3 box' model can help teachers who still struggle to comprehend the relevance or advantages of technology in education. These teachers have not been persuaded through 'tools focused' training so there is a need to go beyond the tools and address their motivation to engage. Dave also used the '3 box' mapping process to show the difference between visitors and residents in digital spaces. Visitors think of their tools as having particular purposes and will engage with what they believe they need to use to do their work. They tend to do what they need to and depart. Residents leave traces in the environments the more they 'inhabit' them, will make tools their own, repurpose them as they see fit – they are naturalised in spaces they inhabit with the tools and feel comfortable enough to stop being anxious about them.

The Jisc CANLearn course. **Mark Anderson** (University of Greenwich) discussed his involvement in the [Jisc Change Agents' Network (CAN)](#) and the development of a SEDA-accredited [CANLearn](#) course. This course, which recognises students' learning and work as co-producers, is split into two sections: a module delivered entirely online and assessed through MCQs, and another with a summative portfolio submission. The benefit for students is a '*recognised award that supplements degree awards and will enhance student employability and job prospects*' (Jisc). For staff the course can contribute to SEDA or HEA Fellowship portfolios. The design is based on Helen Beetham's model, which considers activity based on learners, learning environment and intended outcomes. At the University of Greenwich the implementation of the Moodle course will help to build a learning community. The University are coming to the end of the first pilot run with 94 students (45 actively engaged). Early indications are for a positive evaluation from both staff and students involved in the project.

UCLeXtend. **Matt Jenner** (UCL) provided a lively and entertaining demonstration of UCL's open learning environment [UCLeXtend](#). This is a Moodle VLE which has been running for two years. The slick landing page has a course catalogue through which people can sign up for both paid and free online courses. UCL staff make modules available as either self-paced or cohort courses and UCLeXtend is proving popular for continuing professional development, taster and introductory formats. UCL are using the UCLeXtend platform to engage with staff to drive the quality of their online pedagogies from 'baseline' to 'enhanced' – with a long term ambition of achieving 'rainbowawesome'. This approach is underpinned by UCL's vision of the 'connected curriculum' which entails a shift to research-based rather than research-led education. The platform is an elegant solution and serves a growing demand for this type of environment in the HE sector.

Next meeting

Our next M25 LTG meeting will be hosted by UCL in July. For more information sign up at the [M25 LTG Ning site](#) and [M25 LTG JiscMail list](#).

Further information

The CDE, which explicitly encourages practitioners to join it as a community, currently concentrates its efforts on three main activities:

- a teaching and research awards scheme for small projects
- events e.g.symposia, [smaller](#) workshops and seminars
- consultancy and report writing.

Tweets from the session have been [storified](#).

Julie Voce, Imperial College London

Sonja Grussendorf, London School of Economics

Colin Loughlin, University of Surrey

Leo Havemann, Birkbeck, University of London

If you enjoyed reading this article we invite you to join the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) as an individual member, and to