Lincoln College: Turning a course paperless engages learners

Summary

Using additional e-learning tools and making a fuller use of the open source learning platform, Moodle, has enabled Lincoln College to make its CTLLS teacher training course entirely paper free. At the same time it has led to learners becoming more engaged in the course as it encourages greater sharing, richer submission of evidence for assignments and the development of a broader skill set.

About Lincoln College

Lincoln College is a general Further Education college with campuses in Lincoln, Gainsborough and Newark in the East Midlands.

It offers courses at degree, technician and craft level, as well as basic skills courses, GCSEs, A levels and access programmes.

The College was found to be an Outstanding College by Ofsted in 2011.

The challenge

Lincoln College runs all three levels of teacher training for the lifelong learning sector (PTTLS, CTLLS and DTLTS) using the City & Guilds examining board.

1. PTLLS – Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector - NQF Level 3
2. CTLLS – Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector - NQF Level 4
3. DTLTS – Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector - NQF Level 5
   (Higher Education equivalent to HND)

Like many other learning providers, the College had historically run these courses in a paper-based manner, in terms of both learning resources and assignments.

With an increased desire to use new technologies to support learning and to become more sustainable by abandoning the use of paper, the College needed to find a way of changing its provision.
The College already had some learning systems that the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) team thought could help provide the answer. Their e-portfolio system, Onfile, and BT Qualify were considered but the team felt these were too NVQ focused.

The College has its own Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), the open source learning platform, Moodle. This is in use across the College to varying degrees but, like many other learning providers who make use of this type of system, the team felt that take-up by learners was limited.

However the team felt that there was massive potential for their learners to use Moodle both more frequently and also more effectively. So the question was how to create a course that could be paperless and engage learners?

The activity

The College runs three teacher training courses – PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS – and decided to pilot the CTLLS as a paperless course.

This was because the number of learners on the PTLLS course presented practical problems such as not having a big enough space to do a computer-based induction session in the evening. Similarly, learners on the DTLLS course were already part way through their studies, so introducing this change would be inappropriate.

The CTLLS course runs for a year and comprises one 4-hour session a week of class time alongside private study, with learners coming from both Lincoln College staff and other learning providers.

The initiative at the College was to keep this pattern of delivery but to change the method of the delivery/support.

The course co-ordinator for the CTLLS course, Lorna Page, embarked on her own voyage of discovery as she explored how to develop both the Moodle course and the other e-learning practices required.

With little experience of Moodle, Lorna received some internal training from the IT department at Lincoln College, used information available via the web and engaged with her local JISC Regional Support Centre (RSC).

Although unable to attend any sessions of the regional Moodle Users Group that the RSC facilitates in person, Lorna was able to access resources from these sessions and be part of a mailing list.

A substantial amount of work took place prior to the CTLLS course starting as the Moodle course was created and populated with relevant materials.

The first lesson for the learners on the CTLLS course was solely about the use of Moodle to ensure that they could all access their accounts and were familiar with the different tools within the learning platform.
The approach taken with Moodle was to try to incorporate all the tools that make up the learning platform (see Appendix for more details).

As well as championing the use of the various tools within Moodle, the ITT team took a rounded approach and looked at what **other tools** would help the CTLLS course run smoothly. This included SMART NoteBook software, Prezi, Titanpad, YouTube, Twitter, JANET Txt and e-books (see Appendix for more details).

The approach taken has removed the need for paper for both delivery and assignments, but one of the other vital parts of the CTLLS course is **teaching practice observation**. The ITT team wanted to keep the paperless theme so used Netbooks for recording notes, and video/images for evidence (see Appendix for more details).
The outcomes

Using additional e-learning tools and making fuller use of Moodle has enabled the College to make its CTLLS course entirely paper free. At the same time it has led to the learners becoming more engaged in the course.

The main **benefits** for **learners** have been:

- Gaining more opportunities for producing richer evidence and to showcase their skills;
- Developing a broader skill set (for their own teaching);
- Sharing best practice more effectively amongst their peers;
- Tracking their progress more easily and having no chance of assignments being lost;
- Reliable and timely results and feedback;

In comparison to the experiences of other Moodle courses, the learners really contributed to the success of the transition. The learner journals were extensively updated, lively discussions were had in the forums and many individuals contributed to a growing glossary.

Lorna explains why:

“**Moodle is a really fantastic tool. I think the learners on our course got used to the set-up really quickly. They hadn’t experienced any other way of approaching the qualification, so I guess it just came naturally to do it the way we were proposing.**”

The **benefits** to **teaching staff** were:

- A saving on paper usage;
- Being able to track the progress of assignments better;
- Timely submission of assignments by learners;
- Much simpler for the internal verifier to complete her work;
- The ability to work from home.

As well as Lincoln College staff, the external verifier (EV) for the examining body also benefited. Rather than be presented with a massive pile of folders, the EV was simply given a laptop and the correct credentials to be able to access Moodle in order to access the work of the learners.

Access to the Moodle proved to give the most significant challenge:

- Originally learners struggled, at weekends in particular, to access the site as it was either down or running slowly due to upgrades being carried out. The College had outsourced the hosting of their Moodle site to a third party, but this has since been brought in-house and the situation has improved.

- Mac users have been frustrated in their experiences of using Moodle due to inconsistency in both being able to access the site and with some of the functionality within it.

**The impact**

The impact on moving to a paperless programme has been immediate. 82% of learners achieved at Level 4, which was unexpected as learners were not required to achieve above Level 3.

The general consensus of the learners was that, despite initial fears, this approach has been easy to do.

- Feedback carried out at the end of the course showed that 83% of the learners would recommend Moodle to be used again for the course.

- 92% of students said that assignment submissions and journal entries should be used for Moodle the following year.

Evidence of impact has also come from outside the College. The External Verifier (EV) stated that the CTLLS programme showed:

> “Very good examples of depth and breadth in reflective practice amongst candidates…quality of assessment is high…Very powerful and efficient method of assessment with dated progression and a clear auditable trail…all students agreed that there was excellent support via tutor discussion and email/Moodle exchange and professional debate was to the fore.”

The pilot has been so successful that the College will be continuing to use Moodle with the current learners who are progressing on to the next level, DTLLS, as well as continuing to use it with the new cohort on the CTLLS level, which is much bigger this academic year.
The College is looking to introduce part, or all, of this method of delivery to its PTTLS course, once the new qualification becomes available in December 2011.

The College is currently undertaking a series of five pilots in a mix of curriculum areas with different e-learning tools. The results of those along with findings from the experiences of the CTLLS programme will feed in to recommendations for cross College use of e-learning for the start of the 2012/13 academic year.

The lessons learned

Lorna Page outlines a few tips for how to recreate this experience in your organisation:

- Ensure your Moodle pages are organised well. Create your units as different Moodle courses to avoid excessive scrolling for learners and bring the units together by creating a super course.
- Create a journal for each of the units rather than for the whole course, as this makes the journal more focused and encourages the learner to reflect more.
- Develop a sound induction so that learners feel at ease with Moodle, and be prepared to help out more at the beginning to get the learners comfortable.
- Have open communications between staff and learners, to encourage a dialogue using the different tools available.

Useful links

- Lincoln College website
- Moodle learning platform
- Jisc RSC East Midlands Moodle Users Group

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