

ELP2 Case Study

Use Case	ELP2-CSB14	Title	MEd in Training and Development (Ning, Delicious, LibraryThing, podcasts)		
Institution	Bradford	Timescale	Jan to Jun 2007 & Jan to May 08		
Project Officer(s)	NC	Risk level	Low Internal Masters degree module		
Contact	Neil Carrant, Module Tutor, University of Bradford				
Target Groups	Young (n=)	Excluded (n=)	Mature (n=9)	BME (n=)	Non-trad (n=9)
Description					
<p>Target group background: The students taking part were mature distance learning students. They were all work based learners who had chosen to study the course to improve their own professional practice and for career development. Around half of the students had no previous experience of Higher Education. Those that did have first degrees had been out of formal education for a number of years. Prior experience of using technology was mixed. Some had good IT skills and others had limited IT skills.</p> <p>Course Background and Rationale for use of technology: The course is a professional part-time, distance learning degree for those working in Training or Human Resource Development. Distance learning students need some form of remote support to help them in lieu of the regular face to face contact that students who attend regularly get. Often, University website and systems can be difficult to grasp for new students and this is doubly so for distance learners who will not be able to attend library induction sessions, learner development workshops or library seminars and workshops. Additionally distance learners are often not able to meet up with their fellow students to discuss their work and how they are progressing. Therefore it makes sense that online mediated communication is likely to be a vital tool for them. It allows them to communicate with both their peers and tutors at a time that is convenient to them. Traditionally this online communication has been provided in the institutional Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). However, these institutional spaces are seen as very formal and seem to inhibit vital online socialization. Previous experiences of using discussion boards in the VLE led to limited and unsatisfactory use which did not really provide the level of peer support that was desired. So called 'white label' social networks (such as Ning) allow anyone to set up social networks based around any subject or theme. These tools are easy to use and provide a number of features that encourage networking and socialization. It was felt that using such a social network would increase the socialization between the students and allow a greater deal of peer support, communication and social learning.</p>					
Progress					
September 2007	Course starts with new cohort of students using social network.				
January 2008	Second cohort of students start using social network				
Outcomes					
February 2008	Poster and presentation at JISC RSC YH e-learning in HE symposium, title: 'Who needs a VLE?'				
April 2008	Interim evaluation				

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	<p>Key findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Greater ownership of online environment because the space does not feel like an institutional space and each student has their own personal space as part of the group space. – More motivated to work and share online than previous use of the VLE. – Those that have contributed the most online have built strong personal relations that are evident online and during infrequent face to face sessions. – Better quality and quantity of group discussion. – Learning processes are more explicit and obvious, so tutors can pick up problems earlier. – Those who have engaged in blogging to the group have shown evidence of reflective practice. – Allows for a collection of resources using web 2.0 technologies to create a resource gateway for students; this includes web resources via social bookmarking, book resources via LibraryThing (social library tool) and podcasts.
May 2008	Evaluation and research on this case contributes to a presentation and paper for the European First Year Experience Conference, title: 'Defining Generation Y: towards a new typology of digital learners.'

Target groups

1. Younger learners (13 to 16 year olds), particularly those at KS4; **Young**
2. Excluded school pupils; **Excluded**
3. Mature learners; **Mature**
4. Black, minority and other ethnic learners; **BME**
5. Learners from non-traditional routes, eg. individual learners, access courses, WBL; **Non-trad**

Issue

Version	Date	Description of Change	Author
Draft V0.0	26 Oct 2007	Draft for comment	CAH
V1.0	1 Nov 2007	TGs, description and Progress added	NC
V1.1	14 Apr 08	Additional information added about 2 nd run of module	NC