

Blending the Library Digital Resources into the Virtual Learning Environment

A Case Study at City and Islington College

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Abstract— Integrating the digital resources of the City and Islington Library Services into the College VLE has been a successful project; the idea consisted to integrate a set specialised digital resources, including a range of e-book selected by a subject specialist librarian in every one of the VLE courses. The idea was to enable students and teachers and to access the library resources throughout the VLE.

Keywords— component; Digital resources; e-books; Virtual Learning Environment; Libraries, Blended Learning.

I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

Nowadays we are facing continuous technological developments which determine how people are finding new ways and approaches to find and access information. The new technological models are changing the way in which we communicate and the way we develop our daily life activities.

This enormous technological development, impacts in the way information is communicated and in the ways information construction. For Vygotsky & Cole (1978) [1] its impact “through enabling and supporting communication, interaction and collaboration, knowledge can be constructed”. Due to the technological impact the ways that knowledge is constructed, storage, retrieved and disseminate is growing exponentially. Knowledge does not belong anymore to a group of privileged ones, belong to people and in people hands is the power to create knowledge and this cultural change had encouraged common people to knowledge every day, spreading the information, disseminating data and collecting resources to activate this process again.

The aim of this project was to integrate the Library digital resources in the VLE of the City and Islington College. The College is an FE institution from north London. The College has been awarded by the OFTED and have Beacon Status which makes it a one the Britain leading FE College. The College is divided in five Centres: Sixth Form Centre; Centre for applied Science; Centre for Business and Technologies; Centre for Health and Social Sciences and the Centre for Lifelong Learning. Each site have a specialised Library which includes in its collection a wide range of

learning resources in printed and digital formats, providing support for students and staff.

The College Libraries are designed to provide excellent services and one of the ways to do so consist in having in each one of the five libraries have a Learning Specialist for each knowledge area depending of the centre. Each one of this specialist librarians administrate and select resources for the courses, working together with the teaching staff.

After some meetings to find the best ways to improve the Library services, the E-Learning department and the Libraries created a partnership to develop a project to blend the services of both departments taking advantage of the high use of the VLE and the digital resources that the College provided to the teaching staff and the students.

After an initial consultation to staff and students about the idea of having integrated the Library resources in the VLE some ideas were taken and at the beginning of 2008 a pilot project for the Centre of Applied Sciences was the first to run which consisted in developing a space into each course in the VLE with a list of online resources selected for an specific class and information about the books and journals in the Centre Library.

II. METHODOLOGY

The VLE was integrated in the College in 2006 with the idea to provide blended learning tools for students and the community responded to the VLE with enthusiasm, every year, the new staff and students are trained in the use of the VLE which has resulted in high levels of use of the VLE. Alongside with the training the teachers get support to build their courses from the E-learning department and from a group of VLE partner librarians.

The success of the Libraries consisted in providing personalised services for students, and as the Library departments and the e-learning department worked alongside in a partnership for different projects the idea of blending services was born to provide an innovative service to students.

The idea of designing a space to integrate the library resources the courses in the VLE was considered the most suitable way to develop this project called at the very beginning “collaborate to innovate” A set of features and formats were designed to decide which one was the most suitable way to integrate the library resources.

The features and formats were subjected to a consultation raised amongst staff and students to know if they would like

the library digital resources in the VLE and which types of resources they prefer. Different formats of this space were planned and given to a focus group of librarians, teachers and students to evaluate the possibilities.

This consultation lasted two weeks and after analysing the different opinions a set of 3 different models were designed, each one of these models at this stage consisted in a set of online resources and a reading list for some specific science courses. The new models were again subjected to consultation to decide which one was the best option, and after two weeks the idea of a specific feature took a form.

When the design of the format was decided 30 courses were selected to be part of the second stage of the project. Five subject librarians selected the best digital materials and placed them in the VLE following a template which contained a folder of online resources and another for digitalised materials (PDF).

This stage was reviewed at the end of the summer term and some amendments were made so the template was updated. For the autumn term all the courses in the Centre for the Applied Sciences were upgraded with a Library Space.

For the winter term the project was expanded to the remaining centres, each subject librarian prepared a set of materials and the e-learning staff designed a tab in each course where the librarians could place the content they selected.

By the end of the academic year 2009, 65% of the courses had a set of digital materials placed in their VLE virtual classroom.

III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

A. Main Objective

Provide the students an excellent gateway to access the library digital resources, blending the VLE and the library services to focus the access to the knowledge throughout the same platform providing personalised services for students

B. Learning Objectives

Take advantage of the VLE integrating the Library's digital resources designing in a space to access knowledge together with their course materials.

Enable the students to access the set of high quality digital resources using the College VLE.

Enhance the learning students providing a collaboratively system between the librarians and the course teachers.

C. Services Objective

Extend the margins of the library services accessing directly the courses and placing a set of resources to be access remotely.

Provide a level of personalised resources and materials designed to improve the students' learning experience.

IV. PROJECT STAGES

A. First consultation (2008)

When the idea of blending some of the library services started to take form it was decided to raise a preliminary consultation to staff and students to analyse their perception to the possibility to have an integrate access area to the some digital resources through the VLE.

The first consultation was raised in the Centre to Applied Sciences and answers was very positive, the consultation included a model of a template so teachers and students evaluated the proposal, and the feedback included some ideas for the pilot project.

B. Pilot project (2008)

A test template for the interface was designed and together with a set of selected materials was placed in the first 30 courses. To start running the project 5 subject librarians were part of the team which selected the digital materials and they placed the content into a template which was already been uploaded in each one of the 30 pilot courses for a member of the e-learning team.

C. Project expansion (2008 2010)

The project has been very successful, and by the end of the summer term the template was reviewed and approved so during the summer holidays, members of both teams worked to integrate the library space in the VLE uploading content using a set of selected materials for each class and knowledge area, at the end of the autumn term, each course at Centre for Applied Sciences had their Library space ready to use.

During the winter term the project start to grow in the other remaining centres, the e-learning team implanted a single tab for the template in the courses and the subject specialists uploaded and updated the selected materials in each one of the full time courses.

During the academic year 2009, 65% of the full time courses were updated with a set of digital materials in their VLE virtual classroom and by the end of the academic year 2010 100% of the full time courses and also the total of the ESOL courses and 60% of the part time had their library tab ready to use, which is a total of 1200 courses divided in 50 different subjects from history to photography; beauty therapy, child care, applied sciences, humanities, physics, dance, arts, psychology and business.

D. Ebrary Project (2010)

The ebrary project consists in set of a 3000 E-books selected for the subject specialists librarians and purchased by the Library Services to be integrated in the library space in the VLE for teachers and students to access a set of specialised e-books directly from their class in the VLE and also on the library portal.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The idea of providing the courses a specific collection of materials, enabling learners to access these resources for guided or independent study using the college VLE was very successful

The innovation has enabled the subject librarians to develop a closer relationship with learners in all their course areas than would be possible in any other way.

The initiative has prepared the college both culturally and professionally to adopt appropriate Web 2.0 technologies to further extend and blend the learning centre service using Blogs, Wikis and Podcasts to support learners in guided and independent study.

VI. RESULTS

100% of the full time courses have integrated a set of digital resources in a specific tab in their VLE space

75% of the part time resources have a set of digital resources embedded in their VLE space

3000 E-books were purchased by the Library Services to improve the quality of digital resources.

2500 of the E-Books are embedded in different courses as part of the digital resources offered in the VLE space

85% of the students agree that the possibility of accessing online resources and e-books using the VLE have improved their learning experience

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