Discussion - Designing for Clarity & Usability

by Debra CUMMINS - Monday, 2 December 2013, 12:46 PM

Ok, so Mark Smither's quality assurance free zone is perhaps a little harsh but hopefully it got you thinking. After having a look at this, the Moodle tool guide and the draft guidelines for online course design at UB:

• Do you have any reflections in relation to your own course or courses you may have seen? (yes you can include GCERT courses. They, like the guidelines, are a work in progress)

• Do you think that these guidelines would be a useful tool for you to use in designing your own course?

• What other things would help you in designing your own course in Moodle?

## My contribution to the online forum

Mark Smithers’ blog on the lack of quality assurance on eLearning in higher education struck a chord with me. Finding myself on all three corners of the triangle of student, teacher and “management” involved with elearning I can fully relate to all the issues raised in Mark’s comments as well as the replies.

As a student I have encountered some great elearning resources that flowed effortless providing fantastic, current information. On the other side of the spectrum, one short course provided so little information that I had to research and obtain some workbooks from a colleague to enable me to fulfil the requirements of the assessment tasks and pass the subject.

As a teacher I have had to use Moodle to assist colleagues and am about to embark on setting up my first cluster of units on Moodle to support a blended mode of delivery. Moodle training at our institute is on a needs basis; the basics are explained and taught in one or more one-on-one sessions and any issues you may encounter as you set up your unit(s) on Moodle are being dealt with in follow-up sessions at your request. However, support is by Moodle experts who advice you on how to upload documents, YouTube, powerpoint and how to build an accessible platform. They do not provide any advice if your content, activities and links are pedagogically correct and/or acceptable.

As a team leader I find myself being pushed in the back by management to stimulate my delivery areas to get as much content on Moodle as it not only opens the doors to students many miles away but is also a way of cost savings. Most managers do not seem to understand that transferring a unit from face-to-face delivery to online delivery not only takes time, it should also involve more teacher training and support. Just because a unit is on Moodle doesn’t mean we can rest and forget. Besides having a great layout, easy navigation and informative instructions for our students, for Moodle delivery to work, we need to ensure that students still have the interaction with their teacher as well as collaboration with their peers. A colleague of mine called it the 1/3 rule; one third each for self-directed learning, teacher interaction and peer collaboration. This will only work if it is facilitated and guided by the teacher who knows how to do this, which means training and time.

What is sometimes overlooked is the fact that teachers in some delivery areas have a deep founded passion for their trade and a distrust of anything electronical. They are able to work with paper based logs, rolbooks and textbooks, but have difficulty entering student attendance in the computer let alone set up or use a unit on Moodle. They provide great feedback and guidance to their students … verbally. Push these teachers too hard and far out of their comfort zone, they will bypass their learning zone and go straight into their panic zone leading them to leave their profession as a teacher.

Then we should not forget our students. So often do we hear that our students expect to be taught online. This may be the case for students in higher qualifications such as diploma and advanced diploma. However, students doing a certificate II or III often express dislike for the Moodle platform, feeling that it is an easy and cheap copout for a lack of face-to-face delivery or budget cuts. They choose a hands on course such as childcare or aged care for a reason which did not include learning half their units on a Moodle platform. Besides that, not all students possess a computer and even when we offer them the use of a computer in our student computer space they may not know how to use it let alone log onto Moodle and upload documents. And yes, even I have used the good excuse that information technology as well as life-long learning are important employability skills, which we should include in our delivery as per training package rules, but a student’s educational journey should be an enjoyable one, not a struggle leading to failure and giving up.

Reading Mark’s blog enforced the facts that we should spend time setting up our delivery on Moodle, use any advice and guidance we can get, whilst asking a trusted colleague to be our student and provide constructive criticism. As such I am appreciative of the “online course layout and setup guidelines” as they provide good, constructive information. “It is just common sense” as Mark Smithers stated, but sometimes in our endeavour to make our Moodle subject as good as possible we overlook common sense and forget our students may not interpret our information and questions as intended. I will certainly have these guidelines right beside me when I continue setting up my cluster of units on Moodle. In regards to the “Moodle 2 – Tool guide for teachers”, although a little cumbersome to use I will use it to ask myself the question is what I am doing, such as adding a folder, database, wiki and the like, the best thing for my intended purpose.