Life Long Learning @ HU: from vision to practice
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Abstract
Society has changed (you have to be flexible, adaptive, creative, to have discipline and self-control (Adèle Diamond)). That’s why we have changed education. We have turned over the pyramid of Bloom’s taxonomy.
Historically, education at Hogeschool Utrecht (Utrecht University for Applied Sciences) was based primarily on face to face education where part-time students claimed that education and educators were not available when they needed them.
We have changed the didactical approach to education whereby our focus now is on blended learning. We have less face to face meetings, but their character is more intense and important. In this presentation we will trace the complete line from vision on Life Long Learning to the experiences for teachers and students. Doing this we will pass by the design of educational concept and the transfer to an extreme rich digital learning environment

Why Blended learning
Society has changed and so education has to change. The learning context for students and teachers in the 21st century is quite different from that which our educational system was built. Students, teachers and the working world have other expectations and demands of the learning outcome.

Changes, or possible changes, in Dutch educational laws ask for creative solutions from a university. When, for instance, commercial parties are allowed on the market, we have to convince students that our programmes are better and more useful for their future. We must be prepared for demands on flexibility, both in programmes and in learning environment. And we must offer education from 17 to 67 years old.
The programme HU has set up for this is about 14 criteria for redesign in four main topics:

1. Quality
2. Co-creating with the working world
3. Organisation
4. Didactical approach (pedagogy)

Today I focus on Blended learning that is one of the didactical topics.

An important goal in HU is the improvement of the quality of f2f education. Teachers are experts and scarce, so we should optimise the time they are available to students. That's why we want to turn Blooms taxonomy upside down and spend as little time as necessary on remembering, understanding and applying so in class a teacher can concentrate on analysing, evaluating and creating. In the f2f meetings students construct knowledge together and learn deeper. Blended learning is not a goal in itself, but it is unavoidable if you want to optimise the effect of the f2f meetings.

The implementation of blended learning is organised as a project in HU. The project focuses on port-initial and part-time programmes, mostly master programmes.

**What is Blended Learning**

Blended learning is the combination of three different learning environments.

- Face to face
- Distance learning
- Learning in the workplace.

Since HU is a university for applied sciences it is very important to make the link from study to work. All master students in the educational department are employed as teachers and often more students are working in the same school, so their workplace is a realistic environment.
Didactical starting point

When teachers start to redesign their courses, it is important that they understand the motivation for the project. The intention is not to implement more technology into our education, but to improve the quality of contact time, so to change the didactical approach.

Designers are never responsible for their courses as individuals. Redesign always starts with the programme team. The team decides on the curriculum, the general lay out of the courses, the (digital) tools needed and who is ‘gonna do what’.

In this context teachers redesign their courses as blended courses while they keep all criteria for Life Long Learning in mind.

When teachers have decided what will be done in class, they have to be sure the preparation for the f2f meeting can be done in the digital learning environment. To do that, designers need to have great knowledge of content, pedagogy (didactics) and technology related to the course on which they are working. Compare with the well known TPACK model of Koehler and Mishra. Sometimes teachers lack knowledge in one or two of these area's. The ideal route would be to professionalise them first and then start the redesign, but that would take too much time so now we provide a programme team with the knowledge needed. Often that means that an instructional designer is added to the group. It's best to see that as training on the job and in the end the instructional designer will no longer be needed, although this may still be quite some time away.

Translation to a platform

When we translate the digital part of the blend to a platform, we must consider a couple of things.

- Is there a good looking dashboard for students (and teachers) where they get a quick and easy overview of task and courses in which they are involved?

- Can all the content teachers want to offer, like text, video, animations, assignments, quizzes, etc. be implemented on the platform? (Most of the time this is the easy part.)

- Is there a social context available for students. Is there a digital place where students can meet their classmates on and off topic? The most logical way to do this is by making connection with social media that students are actually using, like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google plus etc. These social media will and should be expanded over the years, where some tools mentioned will disappear and others, currently unknown, will become popular. The platform has to facilitate this.

- Can students benchmark themselves on how they are doing in the course? It's not just about ranking, but about staying on the same page with your classmates in the course. I think this is very important in order to keep students motivated.
• Can students work together on the platform? Is it possible to create learning teams and who decides on the team composition?

• Can digital tools be integrated and is there a limit to the number of tools? Can students use those tools without having to login more than once?

Dashboard

The dashboard we have designed shows the assignments due from the students, the latest reactions from colleagues and teachers of the course, the latest activities of contacts in social media, the calendar for each student and the courses he (or she) is attending.

Content

All possible content, even formats we don't know about yet, can be handled in the platform easily. For teachers it is very easy to add text, photo's, video, even interactive video, quizzes etcetera. We have made a course builder that is an easy way to give structure to the course and to change that structure as if it was a mindmap that is being reorganised. All content can be offered in a organised way, to make it easy for students to follow the course.

Social context

All participants in a course, both students and teachers, can choose in their profile via what social media they want to connect to the group. It is their choice. The platform supports as many social media as needed. All communication on social media is informal. That means that it is separated from the official and formal parts of the course like the course forum or assignments from teachers in the course. We do not teach by using facebook, but we facilitate communication between students and teachers around the course. It's like the restaurant in our building that we have where students can discuss topics from their courses, but probably will talk about a lot of other things as well.

Benchmarking

It is important for students to know whether or not they are keeping up with their classmates when talking about a course. To avoid drop outs from a course students should be aware of where they stand and teachers should be able to keep track of each student’s progress.

We have designed a tool we call 'Social score' by which we translate students activities on the platform into a number. There is a kind of mixer under this score, that has buttons for several types of participation. The right mix of this has not yet been decided and there can and will be a lot of discussion about this tool. For now we notice that just by being there the social score stimulates students to be more active on the platform. But I am sure this effect will fade away soon if there is not a more meaningful base for the number.
Integrating digital tools

On the platform we now have tools like a forum, assignments, learning teams and classmates active. This list can be easily expanded with wiki's, blogs, quizzes and all kind of different tools, depending on the requirements of the teachers or students. It is also possible to use tools outside the platform. We can use, for instance, Voice Thread right from within the platform, without having to login again or having to use a new account name and password.

This is all possible because we use SURFconext, a Dutch solution about co-operating in higher education on IT.

During my presentation I will show you the reality of the platform live.

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