



# Engaging prison officers on a blended learning programme – a case study of the Irish experience

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Problem: how do we engage students in full-time employment, working in stressful job, on a blended learning programme with limited face-to-face time?

Solution:

Seek to build a 'community of learners'

Use technology to support face-to-face workshops

But, what is the reality?

# Engaging prison officers – today's presentation

## Part 1 Context

- Custodial Care: programme background
- Pedagogical approaches
- Prison officers – Irish / UK research

## Part 2 The Research

- Key Research Questions
- Research methodology
- Research Findings
- Further discussion & lessons for the future

## Programme background

- **Higher Certificate in custodial care introduced in 2007**
- **Obligatory for all new recruit prison officers to take and pass the two-year programme**
- **Aims to promote ‘professional practice’ – mix of social science, vocational and professional studies**
- **Four semesters, two years, 120 ECTS**
- **Delivered via ‘blended’ methodologies – face to face workshops and Moodle VLE**
- **Important programme in changing work practice and culture, upholding human rights principles**
- **Positive impact on prison officers, prisoners and wider society**

# Pedagogical approaches

**‘Cognitive’ – “active learning, enquiry-led, problem-based, goal-based, reflective practitioner, cognitive apprenticeship, constructive-based design”**

**‘Situative’ – “e-moderating framework, dialogue / argumentation, experiential learning, collaborative learning, activity theory, apprenticeships, action research, reciprocal teaching, project-based learning, vicarious learning”**

**Source:** Helen Beetham and Rhona Sharpe (2007) ‘Rethinking Pedagogy for a Digital Age, Designing and Delivering E-learning’, Oxford, Routledge, Farmer pp236

**‘Social Constructivist’ - “knowledge is constructed through personal understanding and meaningful shared experience”, Edudemic 2013**

## **Prison officers – Irish research**

- **Work in a challenging environment (McGowan 1984 and Lonergan 2010)**
- **Stressful job (Regan 2009)**
- **Emotional environment (Crawley 2004)**
- **Complex, demanding roles: security & rehabilitative (Liebling and Price 2007)**
- **Attitudes to professionalism (Share and Timmons 2011)**

## My Research

- **Equality and Diversity module**
- **One cohort of 36 students, February to June 2012**
- **Attempted to build ‘online learning community’; ‘bring professional knowledge-sharing from the workplace into academia’, Buckley (2011)**
- **How?: ‘connection, participation, safety, support, belonging and empowerment’ (West et al 2012)**
- **Why? To engage learners in a range of activities, to supplement face-to-face time**
- **4 activities – Moodle page, Discussion Forum, Twitter and Live tutorial**

## My Key Research Questions

- **Students' backgrounds – gender, age, academic qualifications, IT skills**
- **For what purposes did students use Moodle?**
- **What influenced their propensity to engage on Moodle and on the various activities?**
- **How did they rate their experience?**



## Research Methodology

- **‘Practical action research’ approach’ (Oliver et al 2007)**
- **Students engaged in module activities in the usual way**
- **Survey administered via ‘Polldaddy’ to students via email**
- **Used adapted ‘Likert Scale’: ‘extremely unhelpful’ to ‘extremely helpful’**
- **Open space at the end of survey for participants to elaborate**

## Research Findings (1)

- **Cohort – 36 in cohort, 33 engaged in the module, 3 Deferred,**
- **13 responses to questionnaire (39%),**
- **All male, mostly in the 25-34 age category,**
- **Almost half listed Leaving Cert as highest education qualification,**
- **Small majority (54%) described their IT skills as good or excellent. Only 15% said they had poor IT skills,**
- **Treat results with caution, but worth investigating findings due to uniqueness of student group.**

## Research Findings (2)

### Moodle Usage

Activity	Number (n=13)	Percentage of total
Uploading assignments	13	100%
Finding useful readings or other resources	12	92%
Getting information on assessments	12	92%
Getting feedback on earlier assignments	12	92%
Downloading / viewing lecture notes / slides	10	77%
Gaining general information about the course	10	77%
Viewing tutorials on Moodle related activities	9	69%
Links to IT Sligo Library / E-brary Ebooks	8	62%
Downloading journal articles	8	62%
Communicating with teaching staff	8	62%
Viewing study skills tutorials / information	7	54%
Communicating with fellow students	5	38%
Finding information for gaining an extension	1	8%
Finding out more about Moodle	1	8%
Other option	0	0%

# Research Findings (3)

## Evaluation of e-learning resources

Question	Extremely Unhelpful	Unhelpful	Neutral	Useful	Extremely useful
How would you rate your experience of using Moodle?	0	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	2 (15%)	6 (46%)
How would you rate your experience of using Discussion Forums?	0	2 (17%)	3 (25%)	4 (33%)	3 (25%)
How would you rate your experience of using Twitter?	1 (9%)	2 (18%)	6 (54%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
How would you rate your experience of participating in the online tutorial?	0	0	4 (36%)	6 (55%)	1 (9%)

# Research Findings (4)

## Factors influencing propensity to participate

Individual Factors	E D Moodle page n=13	Discussion Forums n=12	Twitter n=12	Online tutorial n=12
Time available	11(85%)	8 (67%)	5 (42%)	8 (67%)
Structure / content of the Moodle site / activity	4 (31%)	5 (33%)	-	-
Own motivation levels	3 (23%)	3 (25%)	1(8%)	2 (17%)
Interesting exercises	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	4 (33%)
Own perception of importance of activity	2 (15%)	6 (50%)	3 (25%)	-
Staff encouragement	1 (8%)	0	2 (17%)	4 (33%)
My IT skills	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	2 (17%)	1 (8%)
Self-confidence	0	3 (25%)	-	-
Feedback from fellow students	0	1 (8%)	-	-
The fact it was not mandatory or assessed	-	2 (17%)	4 (33%)	1 (8%)
Other (I don't use Twitter)	-	-	3 (25%)	-

# Summary of Research Findings

- **Students engaged in a wide range of Moodle activities**
- **Students rated the ‘learning community’ activities positively**
- **Students felt their IT skills level were adequate, good or excellent**
- **‘Time available’ was most important factor in propensity to engage in ‘learning community’ activities**
- **Structure / content of Moodle site also important**
- **‘Own perception of importance’ of activity and fact ‘activity was not assessed / mandatory’ also important**

- **More research required with wider cohort**
- **Clearer ‘signposting’ within Moodle site**
- **Accessibility audit, and explicit commitment to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0**
- **Clearer guidelines for facilitating online participation – ‘protocols’ to govern Discussion Forums and ‘Salmon’s 5-stage model’ to guide e-tivities**
- **More ‘scaffolding’ for Twitter activities**
- **Consider making activities mandatory**
- **Continue to listen to students views, feedback and act appropriately**





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**Thank you, I am happy to take questions !**