

Title of case study

Placing cultural difference, teamwork, and peer-learning at the heart of a new learning design

Staff Lead

Fotios Misopoulos

School/ Department

University of Liverpool Management School

Faculty

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Contact Details

Fotis@liverpool.ac.uk, william.moindrot@liverpool.ac.uk

Name of course and module (if applicable) case study took place within

EBUS616 – Executing, Controlling and Closing Projects

Please briefly describe the activity undertaken for the case study

At the Management School we wanted to explore how our developed practices and experience delivering teaching online (via Liverpool Online) could be used to similarly improve the experience of on-campus students on our postgraduate module.

We have found on this module that on-campus students take a very different approach to our online students, they are often very reticent to engage with each other in peer-learning activities, cultural differences can present challenges as well as opportunities, and in our subject area of teamwork, engaging with others particularly where there are cultural differences is very important.

Studying the existing literature, we identified a range of factors that can determine student satisfaction and performance on online programmes, including:

- Course ease of use
- The instructor's attitude to technology
- The quality of the course
- Diversity of assessment
- Dimensions of student interaction

A Carpe Diem learning design workshop at the Management School presented the opportunity to rethink the design of the module and bring in new learning activities within the course to scaffold interactive forms of learning. The course is much easier for students

to use now, making much more effective use of Vital (Blackboard VLE) in ways that we can roll-forward year on year, and since running the module we have seen a broad range of benefits and results.

How was the activity implemented?

Student learning is designed to take place through activities rather than just through the delivery of lecture content. These activities (termed 'eTivities' to reflect their blended nature) tend to always have an element of student-to-student interaction, aided through appropriate use of the educational technologies available.

Through Carpe Diem and producing a storyboard we thought carefully about where these are placed in the module, to stage student progression and factor in any logistical challenges:

- Our design featured six eTivities spaced over the five weeks of the module, starting with very simple tasks that made students feel comfortable with using the technology and interacting in this way, before building up to more complex and interactive tasks.
- Every eTivity had an 'invitation' or placeholder within the course structure in Vital. This helped with the ease of use of the course, as students could easily see what they had to do each week and what they were going to get out of it, making it much easier to navigate, and enticing to engage. Even where activities included face-to-face elements in class we covered these within the invitations so that students knew what was coming up and could prepare.
- One of the larger eTivities built upon our experience of running discussion board tasks and counted towards the final assessment for this module. Here students were given research topics to collaborate on in small groups. Students were expected to respond to the question by engaging with additional independent reading and using appropriate references from the literature. A rubric was shared with students to explain how their responses were going to be assessed. One of the key concepts of the module is learning how to work in virtual teams through technology, and this gave students first-hand experience of this.
- Other eTivities gave us an opportunity to explore using new technologies and innovations within face-to-face teaching. One such activity (eTivity 2.2) involved using student response software 'PollEverywhere' to pose 20 multiple choice questions in-class. This allowed us to record initial individual student responses to the questions, and then re-record responses following small group discussion. This gave students a framework through which they could explore and learn from different perspectives on the scenarios presented, and at the end it very visibly demonstrated how group-work had influenced their pass rate of the MCQs - a valuable lesson in considering cross-cultural engagement and benefits to learning.

Has this activity improved programme provision and student experience, if so how?

Anecdotally, we have seen the new design has given improvement in programme provision:

- The course's presence in Vital (VLE) has been greatly improved. It's now much more than a receptacle – it's also a guide that students use throughout their studies and a leap pad into the interactive tasks. It's become very difficult for students to become lost and disengaged by the course.
- The new activities certainly facilitated increased opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction, maximising opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, and coercing students outside of their otherwise homogenous social groups.
- The online element in particular gave students experience of collaborating virtually in teams. Something that they might not have experienced previously at university level, and something that they can reflect upon in their learning and further studies.
- Students could engage with activities from the comfort of their own homes, taking their time with their responses, which may have encouraged them to engage, particularly those students for whom English is not a first language.
- We have also been able to collect some of the data which gives an insight into effect on student performance. In eTivity 2.2 where students were set 20 MCQs in class with a pre- and post-discussion vote, we found that on average there was a 30.7% increase in the number of correct answers following the in-class group-work. The technology PollEverywhere made this much easier to do and revealed an aspect of learning that we as tutors may have overlooked, and a valuable lesson for students.

Did you experience any challenges in implementation, if so how did you overcome these?

- Employing new technologies or even using Vital (VLE) in a new way can be daunting, but because we had gone through Carpe Diem learning design workshops we had ongoing access to our school Learning Technologist Will Moindrot, who had seen the course design from inception and was able to work with us in a sustained way. This not only related to the development and conceptualisation of approach, but also incorporated advice around pedagogy, which allowed us to get so much more out of the design. He was also interested in observing delivery, to help us continue to improve on the design in the future. Having this partnership and collaboration really reduced the fear-factor of trying new things.
- With the in-class technology PollEverywhere we saw initially low voting numbers, but again having Will on hand in that lecture helped to mitigate problems and made us feel much more confident to go it alone with this technology in future.

Which Liverpool University Hallmarks and Attributes does this case study relate to (tick all boxes that apply).

Research-connected Teaching X

Active Learning X

Authentic Assessment

Confidence

Digital Fluency

Global Citizenship X

How does this case study relate to the Hallmarks and Attributes you have selected?

Research-connected teaching

Research-connected activities require students to engage with the literature, allowing them to develop skills of enquiry and become critical in their understanding of the nature of research. Through the collaborative tasks, students are encouraged to co-construct their method of approach and understanding of the issues under investigation. The course design and innovative approaches are in themselves leading to research, including where students feed into and reflect upon their learning and how they respond to methods. In this way, students are collaborators and are aware that they are helping to shape the way we teach and learn.

Active learning

The approach used for the design of the module focuses heavily on learning through activities rather than traditional delivery of content. The course is set out in an active way that puts students in control of their learning. Activities are collaborative in nature, providing experiential learning that is aligned to the learning outcomes of the module, working within virtual teams. Students are prompted to reflect upon their experience, and by being mediated through technology and engaging with students from different backgrounds they gain valuable experience for their future careers.

Global citizenship

The range of activities and small-group tasks encourage students to engage with each other and to move outside of their usual social groups. The studentship of the course displays a rich cultural make-up, and through group work we make this evident and provide a chance for reflection which allows students to see the benefits of having engaged with different cultural perspectives. This is a key learning outcome of the course, and by providing students with this experience we are helping to develop well-equipped, future-fit graduates.

How could this case study be transferred to other disciplines?

The Carpe Diem module design methodology that we used to think about the design the module is universally applicable. If you recognise a need within your area of teaching where students would benefit from increased interaction, engagement, or innovation then Carpe

Diem can provide a framework for you to begin to address that. This case study outlines some of the design we ended up with due to participating in a learning design workshop like Carpe Diem. You may already use some of the tools or pedagogies identified within this case study, maybe it has given you some ideas for ways to get more out of these activities.

If someone else were to implement the activity within your case study what advice would you give them?

- Our design is not final, or a finite example of 'best practice'. It is evolving, and we will learn from how things run year on year, with different groups of students, as the subject area itself evolves. So if something doesn't work as you expected the first time, don't panic, learn from what has gone well and what hasn't, and think of ways (including engaging with others) to improve things next time round.
- When you are trying something new it can be scary, particularly if you are using a new piece of technology that you have not used before. Partnership and collaboration are key.
- Let your students know that you are trying out a different approach to teaching to improve things, and that you will all learn from the new approach and innovation and that you value their feedback.
- Make use of the resources available to you, including people within your school. Find out who the learning technologists are for your school, let them know about your ideas, and be open to suggestions.
- Align your efforts to school and university strategy. This makes it a lot easier to get resourcing and support.



© 2018 by the University of Liverpool, Centre for Innovation in Education.

[Placing cultural difference, teamwork, and peer-learning at the heart of a new learning design](#) is made available under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).