

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ORGANIZE WORK-BASED TRAINING AND RE-TRAINING OF PRACTITIONERS USING E-LEARNING

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Modern universities face difficulties with motivating students to acquire knowledge that may be relevant to their ‘distant’ professional future, while everything around them is changing so dramatically and rapidly. So when it comes to lifelong learning, it should be focused on the nearest professional future – ‘tomorrow’ or even better ‘today’, because not so distant prospect arouses greater interest and curiosity in learners [1]. Successful integration of eLearning and communities of practice in providing the opportunity for life-long learning means that up-to-date knowledge and current experience are concentrated in one space - in the virtual learning environment (VLE), where everyone can be involved in communication with other students to share practice, expertise, culture and where all relevant technological solutions support the VLE.

The art of knowledge management in such VLE within the framework of a competence development strategy means the ability to run processes of constructing meaning through collaboration and co-creation. Students – practitioners, teachers and psychologists who work in the context of inclusive education, need advancement and diversification of their knowledge and skills through immersion in various meaningful learning activities and through gaining various experiences that stimulate (positive) emotions. Educators are aware of the fact that emotions have the power to open or close access to effective learning, memory, and the ability to make connections [2]. Besides, according to social constructivist approach, theoretical foundation of which were laid by such thinkers as Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bruner, understanding or constructing a meaning is an active and continuous process based on student’s previous experience, and fits eLearning as ‘learning among learners’ [3], or collaborative learning. Recently, an updated theory of e-social constructivism has been proposed [4], taking into account the milieu of e-communication and eLearning.

In a VLE everyone can choose his/her own eLearning trajectory for achieving the set learning objectives (acquisition and development of required competences and mastering of professional skills). At the same time, effective knowledge management supports the state of flow in students during the process of joint construction of meaning. Each process is viewed as an event where participants should feel immersion and get memorable experience.

We have successfully exploited such knowledge management techniques as community of practice and eLearning for locating up-to-date knowledge and experience in the VLE. Since 2011, our value innovation strategy has been creation of a community of practice (CoP) [5] – where we can offer specific tailored e-courses. The CoP brings together practitioners who share the topic of interest, deal with complex issues, who are ready to broaden their knowledge and experience as well as interact online. Over time more practitioners join the CoP in order to look for new solutions required by their professional activities. Furthermore, the prepared CoP is passionate for collective learning and is a perfect place for eLearning where universities can provide students exactly with what they need.

When we design e-courses, we use modular-based system where every module is a complete learning event [6]. I.e., it has specific purpose (message), learning objectives, all necessary resources and types of activities, expected outcomes and their assessment. All modules have recommended time limits, though learning activities within modules are flexible. Every learning event has a defined level of challenge, so learners should be prepared and ready to overcome it. Modules can be either interrelated or independent, depending on the specific instructional design and curriculum.

The ‘4A’ model is focused on guaranteeing cognitive presence of e-course participants during every learning event, where:

1A – drawing attention to a specific learning event (module), understanding its place in the curriculum and role in overall e-course outcomes;

2A – actualizing the need for participating in this event through evaluation of one’s knowledge gap (to assess learners’ readiness to perform – i.e., to overcome the specific level of challenge) and through setting achievable goals;

3A – attract: engaging learners in interaction with support resources (training materials, experts, tutors), which help them get ready to perform and be aware of how their performance will be evaluated;

4A – act: being involved in learning activities (forums, assignments, project tasks, glossaries, choices, quizzes, tests and other activities possible in VLE) where students demonstrate knowledge, understanding, mastered skills, generate ideas, ask questions, give feedback, analyse, synthesise and evaluate, i.e. act as subjects in the process of cooperation and co-creation of knowledge.

Immersion in the VLE means complete social and cognitive presence of students. When immersion takes place in a specific learning context, different subjective experiences are cumulated by students and help them develop wider life competences such as idea generation, decision making, reaction to a specific situation in an inclusive classroom, teamwork, communication with children with special learning needs and their parents etc.

Our previous investigation has demonstrated the importance of a well-chosen balance between task difficulty (level of challenge) and learners’ ability to fulfil the tasks (level of knowledge and skills), which creates the environment of success where learners’ immersion in the learning activities can be achieved [6]. Currently we see our goal in transforming students’ behaviour in the VLE from passive absorption – through social and cognitive presence – to active immersion, when during the eLearning process students share experiences, generate and contribute ideas as well as construct meaning: new knowledge and skills. Memorable (positive) experience is gained when eLearning is used to engage every learner in the learning event.

Our recent benchmark in eLearning has been: over 40% of students (CoP members) are actively involved in learning events, while 23% of students in each e-course experience the state of complete immersion.

References

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