Reflections: eLearning Colloquia enhance a Community of Practice

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DOI: 10.26907/esd13.1.03

Abstract
In this context specific reflection on an annual eLearning Colloquia hosted by the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), in Cape Town, South Africa; the researchers explore how the colloquia contributed to the institutional Community of Practice (CoP). Furthermore, it highlights the shifts in the institutional discourse on blended teaching and learning practices over an eight year period. The paper showcases CIECT's efforts in driving the effective use of eTools to increase awareness and understanding of concepts such as agency, culture and structure. This awareness is critical in a post-modern Higher Education (HE) setting where the need to create a knowledge-intensive institutional culture exists. The human agents are central to the formation of a sustainable CoP which contributes to effective teaching and learning practices. Secondary data was used for the study and non-probability, purposive sampling resulted in a sample group of 78 individuals comprising of the Instructional Design team as well as the academic staff members at UWC who utilize the institutional Learning Management System or a range of Personal Learning Environments (PLEs) in their teaching and learning practices.
Keywords: higher education, South Africa, teaching-and-learning, blended learning, community of practice.

Размышления о том, как коллоквиум по электронному обучению обогащает деятельное сообщество

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Аннотация
В данной статьей особое внимание уделяется ежегодному коллоквиуму по электронному обучению, организуемому Центром инновационного образования и коммуникационных технологий (CIECT) в Университете Западной Капской провинции (UWC) в Кейптауне (Южная Африка): авторы изучили, как коллоквиумы повлияли на деятельное сообщество (CoP). Кроме того, в статье освещаются основные этапы восьмилетней работы на институциональном уровне по трансформации дискурса, касающегося вопросов смешанного обучения. В статье демонстрируются усилия CIECT, предпринимаемые для эффективного использования электронных инструментов (eTools) в целях продвижения таких понятий, как деятельность, культура и структура, что имеет решающее значение в условиях постмодернистского высшего образования (ВО), в котором существует потребность в создании активной институциональной культуры. Человеческие ресурсы играют главную роль в формировании устойчивого деятельного сообщества, которое сможет способствовать улучшению процессов преподавания и обучения. В ходе исследования были использованы вторичные данные, а именно: детерминированная целенаправленная выборка из 78 человек, состоящая из команды «Проектирование обучения» и из научных сотрудников UWC, которые используют в своей работе институциональную Систему Управления Обучением (LMS) или Личную Среду Обучения (PLE).
Ключевые слова: высшее образование, Южная Африка, обучение и преподавание, смешанное обучение, деятельное сообщество

1. Introduction

In 2000 an eLearning unit was established at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to support staff and students, and to promote the use of the university's learning management system (LMS). The unit became known as the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies (CIECT). CIECT is engaged in eLearning dialogues on an institutional, local and international level and explores the benefits of eLearning for teaching and learning practices. CIECT's focus is on the use of unique and ground-breaking educational technologies, while encouraging educationally sound teaching practices and the sharing of online content. Additionally, CIECT is involved in research, administration and management related to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Higher Education (HE).

At UWC an annual eLearning colloquium has been hosted by CIECT since 2008. Since its inception, the colloquium has evolved and contributed to the emergence and growth of blended learning. At the same time the institution has changed through the use of various LMSs, mind-set shifts, and the increased adoption and use of eTools to enhance teaching and learning practices. In 2000 UWC developed its own online LMS to provide a vehicle for teaching and learning, evaluation, and the monitoring of results (Brown & Johnson, 2007). There were several versions of the home-grown LMS and each presented challenges; however, the CIECT team remained dedicated to finding a lasting solution. Ssekakubo, Suleman and Marsden (2011) warn that operational problems, in addition to other factors, can result in the failure of an LMS; however, at CIECT a focus on research meant to bring about improvement and change eventually resulted in the establishment of a new, efficient LMS.

In 2012 a pilot project was launched to test and implement the new LMS, iKamva/Sakai, "to enhance teaching, learning, collaboration and research" (Apereo Foundation, 2014). After a successful pilot, in 2015 iKamva became the sole institutional eLearning

platform and remains stable, reliable and user-friendly, hosting "educational materials in an effective manner for teaching and learning" (Rees & Herring, 2005).

The various systems implemented at the institution over the years have had a direct impact on the initial topics of discussion at the eLearning Colloquia; however, these topics have changed over time and are reflected on in the following sections.

1.1 eLearning Colloquium

Between 2006 and 2007 CIECT hosted eighteen lunch-time seminars where the champions (lecturers who were early adopters of the LMS) presented and shared both their challenges and positive experiences of supplementing their teaching and learning activities with online activities. Additionally, these sessions provided motivation and encouragement for other lecturers to adopt eLearning practices and create blended environments. The CIECT team also conducted departmental visits to share good practice and motivate academics to participate. Several combined initiatives assisted in the mind-set shifts of staff and the resulting growth of the adoption of eLearning at UWC.

Owing to the rapid increase in the use of eTools, it became impractical to continue the monthly lunch-time seminars. This resulted in the lunch-time seminars being replaced by an annual eLearning Colloquium in 2008. The colloquia enabled lecturers from various disciplines to share their understanding of eLearning as well as their multi-modal approaches to teaching and learning for enhanced student delivery. The annual eLearning Colloquium also became a key structure of CIECT, allowing for knowledge to be shared and an ideology (culture) of good practices to be developed (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005) in the UWC community.

Between 2008 and 2015, 103 academics and external partners have presented papers at the colloquia. Each presenter was allocated between 10 and 15 minutes to share information about their online experiences and approaches to blended learning. It has been evident from numerous presentations that the use of technology in the curriculum has increased and has become more prominent; in addition, this shift meets the expectations of 21st century students.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of literature related to CoPs, Human Agents and PLEs.

2.1 Communities of Practice

"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

While the term Community of Practice (CoP) is fairly recent, the practice itself has been in existence for decades (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). It has been referred to by various names such as "learning networks" (Downes, 2007), "thematic groups" or "tech clubs" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A CoP is a system used to exchange and share knowledge that benefits both the individual participant and the community as a whole (Johnson, 2001). People are not always enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge with others (McLure Wasko & Faraj, 2000) but in a CoP people benefit through engaging with peers, solving problems and discussing real-life situations. By teaching others experts are able to reapply previous knowledge and experience (Johnson, 2001) and this allows the knowledge to remain current to them while simultaneously enlightening others.

It is important to note that the term Community of Practice (CoP) used within the context of this paper refers not only to the eLearning Colloquia but to the engaged

community formed over an extended period of time. This includes the constant marketing and showcasing of good practice via email, blogs and the YouTube channel as well as; face-to-face consultations between IDs and lecturers, staff training sessions and departmental workshops. "Communities of practice have been advocated as a less formal way of developing and spreading new knowledge about technologies and teaching" (Russell, 2009). All these provide opportunities for interaction and sharing on challenges and successes with regard to eTools, blended practices and pedagogy.

In a CoP human agents engage because they find the interactions to be mutually beneficial, and because when they provide an opportunity to exchange information, they, in turn, obtain guidance and knowledge (Tremblay, 2007).

2.2 Human Agents

According to Bandura (2006) human agents purposefully influence their functioning and surroundings by "self-organizing, [being] proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting". Thus human agents are "contributors to" their environments, not only "products of them".

Human agents respond to challenges through experimentation, innovation and modification in their teaching practices (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005) The platform provided by something like the CIECT colloquium , helps alleviate some of the fears prompted by changes in the culture of a university. The CIECT team can be regarded as human agents because they "hold ideas" (Case, 2013) on the effective application of eTools to enhance teaching and learning practices, and provide support to UWC academics in their selection and effective application of eTools to benefit student development. Thus human agents are critical in the "[s]uccessful integration of ICTs" to ensure that students interact positively with information and develop advanced thinking skills (problem-solving, reasoning, comprehension, and so on). As a result, students are more employable and better equipped for "participation in the knowledge society" (Department of Education, 2004). Therefore, the "interrelation of culture with agency" (Case, 2013) cannot be overlooked.

2.3 Personal Learning Environments (PLEs)

In order to prepare students to engage in the knowledge society, the Personal Learning Environment (PLE) created by the CIECT supports "learning [which] is ongoing" (Attwell, 2007). PLEs have become increasingly popular as they give the control to the learner (van Harmelen, 2006) and allow them to navigate their own learning pathways. This has encouraged a new outlook on education in which learners move from a passive position to an active one in relation to their education (Wilson et al., 2007).

As McLoughlin and Lee state (as cited by Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012), PLEs allow for "on demand" learning which combines both "formal and informal" aspects (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). As a result, there are fewer restrictions enforced on learning as individuals are "able to present their learning to prove they possess […] [certain] competencies" through development of ePortfolios rather than relying only on formal structures and qualifications (Attwell, 2007).

3. Methodology

In this case study the researchers examined eight years of recorded data to establish how the eLearning Colloquia have contributed to an institutional CoP and how the discourse on blended teaching and learning practices have changed institutionally over this period. The 7th and 8th colloquia's recordings are available to be viewed on the CIECT YouTube channel; and earlier colloquia recordings which were stored on a server and on CD-discs can be obtained on request, from the authors.

The data collection process, sample group, and identified limitations are discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1 Data Collection

Only secondary data was used for the purposes of this study. All data was extracted from CIECT's documentation, which includes, amongst others, CIECT's YouTube channel and the CIECT weekly emails that are linked to a blog. All the data was collected and stored by the Instructional Design team between 2005 and 2015 and are owned by CIECT. Content analysis was used to study the existing videos and record the necessary data for use in the research (Neuman, 2003). Owing to the large amount of data, the researchers decided to focus on every alternative colloquium (the odd numbered colloquia, e.g. first, third, fifth) for the purposes of this study. Although the year in which the study was conducted fell on an even number (eighth), the team decided to include it in the study.

3.2 Sample

Non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select the sample group for this study. The sample group (78 people) comprised of the Instructional Design team as well as the academic staff members at UWC who made use of the LMS or a range of PLEs for teaching and learning purposes, and who presented papers at the first, third, fifth, seventh and eighth eLearning Colloquia. These individuals have collectively contributed to an institutional eLearning CoP and also form sub-communities in their various faculties and departments.

3.3 Limitations

One possible limitation identified by the researchers was that of researcher bias, as two of the co-authors work as Instructional Designers and, therefore, play a major role in the natural environment. Furthermore, they contributed toward the analysis of the data. However, as many researchers were involved in the analysis process, researcher bias is unlikely; this is because investigator triangulation "consider[s] the ideas and explanations generated by additional researchers" (Johnson, 1997, in Golafshani, 2003) and "provides a mechanism to check researcher bias" (Halcomb & Andrew, 2005).

4. Research Findings and Discussion

In this section the findings related to the eLearning Colloquia from 2008 onward are discussed.

4.1 eLearning Colloquia

The eLearning Colloquia form part of the CIECT eLearning CoP which consists of the Instructional Designers, champions, and other lecturers and professors who have adopted eLearning practices.

The eLearning Colloquia represent the human agents who are able to change cultures through their practices. Even though changes in the culture of a university can create fear, the colloquia highlight those who have "responded to challenges by modifying their teaching and have seized the opportunity to experiment and innovate" (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). These responses emphasize how the "interrelation of culture with agency cannot be ignored" (Case, 2013). The CIECT team has observed how this colloquium structure and its culture of positive, innovative practices have begun to "condition the human agents who enter", i.e. lecturers, other support units and external partners (Case, 2013).

At the colloquia, adopters at all levels, from novices to more experienced users, are selected to present their personal experiences and describe the eTools they are implementing. In doing so, they do not only gain confidence and recognition for their efforts but they also have an opportunity to expose others to the possibilities of eLearning. Thus they are able to reach those who have not yet adopted eTools in their teaching practice.

In the next sub-section an overview of the eLearning Colloquia (specifically the first, third, fifth, seventh and eighth) is provided. It illustrates how the various presentation topics have changed in this time. This includes the changing mind-sets, perceptions and attitudes of lecturers toward the adoption of innovative teaching and learning practices, the application of eTools, the benefits of using eTools for student development, as well as related challenges.

4.1.1 First eLearning Colloquium – 2008

The first eLearning Colloquium represented a major shift and progression from the seminars to the less-frequent annual platform. One speaker discussed "moving beyond a traditional learning system" and highlighted a myth in HE that assumes that all students love reading text via electronic media. He spoke about student adoption being a choice and mentioned the range of social networks available to be utilized for academic purposes, namely Facebook, Blogger and Twitter. He mentioned how social platforms are able to "foster collaboration between learners" (Popescu, 2012) and commented on the benefits of PLEs and the various platforms available for this purpose.

Another speaker outlined the advantages and disadvantages experienced while using the LMS. One advantage was that students were better prepared because they had accessed readings and slides before the class. A disadvantage was that class attendance dropped and students focused less, as they became increasingly dependent on the online offerings. Many lecturers in the audience seemed to relate to this, even though the CIECT team advised that sound instructional design principals should be implemented to enhance face-to-face instruction. This is in accordance with King (1993) who explains that students need to "get […] involved with the information presented – really thinking about it (analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating) rather than just passively receiving it and memorizing it".

A lecturer from an institution in Gauteng Province presented a paper on eLearning support in a department that has 3800 registered students, and classes consisting of 630 – 650 students. The focus was on strategies to enhance teaching and learning for large classes.

From initial discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of using eTools and the institutional LMS, which were present at the first colloquium; in 2010, the discussions shift to include student reactions to new teaching approaches as well as, feedback by lecturers who felt inspired by their peers to adopt blended practices.

4.1.2 Third eLearning Colloquium – 2010

By the third eLearning Colloquium held in 2010, the institution was utilizing the eTeaching system. Discussions focused on a range of topics that included teething problems with the system, student resistance to the use of the eTeaching system, and the use of new technological tools. The speakers were varied and included champions, those who had recently come on board, and those involved in eLearning projects in the community beyond UWC.

One speaker had been involved in a collaborative project with CIECT that had included five schools in the Western Cape and that had focused on using digital media

to educate learners in Grades 7 to 9 about TB and HIV. The presentation focused on the design and development of an interactive CD-ROM as a teaching aid. The learners had been exposed to computers and technology on campus, while simultaneously gaining awareness and information related to TB and HIV. The programme was aligned to the school subject Life Orientation, but provided the students with knowledge and skills that extended beyond the basic curriculum. Owing to CIECT's role in the programme, the learners not only received a workbook and information related to TB and HIV, but also gained computer skills and became more engaged through the interactive activities captured on CD-ROM.

Another two speakers reported that, as a result of the previous year's colloquium, they had been inspired to incorporate eTeaching and create a blended curriculum for their students. People often hold more knowledge than other sources of information they are exposed to (Siemens, 2005) and, therefore, a CoP provides the ideal opportunity to spread knowledge among peers, especially if it is "attractive and stimulating" (Arboleda & Serrat, 2011).

Lecturers also spoke on the resistance of students who preferred using the Shared Drive (S-Drive) system to the LMS. Despite basic instructions on how to navigate the site followed by a two-week trial period, the new approach was met with opposition from some students. However, the lecturers did mention that with time students warmed to the idea and saw the benefits of utilizing the new eTeaching platform. A few students had even suggested that using computer laboratories to access social networking sites should be banned so that these spaces could be made available for academic purposes. These suggestions were seen as a positive display of ownership.

In the following subsection creative teaching and assessment practices relayed at the colloquium in 2012 are described.

4.1.3 Fifth eLearning Colloquium – 2012

In 2012, at the fifth eLearning Colloquium, eTeaching was still used as the institutional LMS because iKamva was piloted only towards the end of that year. However, although some speakers were still new to the eTeaching platform, the majority were engaged in more than just the basic eTools such as Announcements and Assignments. Lecturers now spoke on the use of Discussion Forums, Podcasts, Vodcasts and even online video demonstrations. Even though students battled with the technology and there were the occasional online glitches these aspects were no longer an overwhelming or central theme to the discussions.

One lecturer spoke on the positive impact the Discussion Forum eTool had had on a class dealing with the topic of HIV and AIDS. The forum allowed students, both in a local and global setting, to share personal experiences related to topics that might not ordinarily be discussed in a classroom. The lecturer went on to predict that the experience would become even more effective once students could share in the Discussion Forum via their mobile phones in a private and comfortable setting. He mentioned that (at the time of his talk, in 2012) the cost of mobile and wireless technologies was still restricting African learners from achieving this ideal. As Brown (2003) mentions, "[t]he cost of more advanced mobile technologies […] decline as the technologies continue to develop". As the use of technology is increasing in Africa, hopefully it will become more attainable for the average person.

Another lecturer spoke about the use of Vodcasts for formative and summative assessments in Social Work. He explained how the move from Podcast to Vodcast allowed him to observe how students interacted with clients whereas previously he could only hear their conversation. The lecturer emphasized that this was significant as noting

body language and eye-contact with a client during a session is as important as dialogue. Research on the use of Vodcasts for student assessment is limited, which suggests that UWC staff were not only introducing technology which students found appealing and beneficial (Kay, 2012) but were also making use of technology in innovative ways.

The subsection below focuses on the 2014 colloquium and the transition to the new LMS as well as, the increasingly student-focused outlook by staff.

4.1.4 Seventh eLearning Colloquium – 2014

By the seventh eLearning Colloquium the discourse had changed considerably: there was a shift from system-related complaints to complaints regarding ownership. The discussions also shifted from the old LMS (KEWL/eTeaching) to the new one (iKamva/ Sakai). Despite the changes in the discussions, lecturers still spoke on areas that needed improvement and made suggestions. Lecturers were honest about the amount of time and effort eLearning required in order to be successful; however, there was a definite focus on the students and the manner in which eLearning had benefitted them.

The focus on students is aligned with CIECT's training and support interventions, as well as national policy discourse related to the notion of "successful integration of ICTs" to ensure "the meaningful interaction of learners with information…[and to] advance high order thinking skills such as comprehension, reasoning, problem-solving and creative thinking and enhanced employability" (Department of Education, 2004).

One lecturer spoke about the use of Digital Stories. She explained the process by which students underwent training through CIECT, on the creation of a Digital Story, using the freeware 'Photostory 3 for Windows'. She explained that students received a detailed rubric clearly outlining expectations. Thus students were made aware that content was the focus and not the end product. The lecturer admitted that both she and the students had invested a lot of time in the project, especially with regard to viewing and marking the digital stories. She explained that students had initially found the assignment to be time-consuming and stressful, but that they had enjoyed doing it and had gained additional skills through the process. These additional skills included being able to "construct narratives", "organize ideas", pose questions, research and analyze (Robin, 2006), all valuable graduate attributes that could increase their employability later on. Therefore, despite the time commitment required from both lecturers and students there are "long-term benefits of investment in […] a blended approach" (Benson, Anderson & Ooms, 2011).

Two lecturers spoke on language barriers and how some students had been isolated as a result of their inadequate English language skills. They had translated course materials into formal and informal Afrikaans and isiXhosa and made podcasts to allow students to learn and understand in their home languages. The podcasts were available for students to download and listen to via iKamva. According to the presenters, there was overwhelmingly positive feedback from the class as it allowed for "an individualized experience tailored to [the] personal needs" (Wilson, et al., 2007) of each student.

Hence the seventh Annual Colloquium reflected a structure that engaged with the national policy discourse about "increased participation" and the focus on "improving student performance", specifically on the development and use of educational technologies to support teaching and learning" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

From increased participation to innovative uses of eTools, the 8th eLearning Colloquium is discussed below.

4.1.5 Eighth eLearning Colloquium – 2015

The most recent colloquium provided a platform for lecturers to share the innovative ways in which they used technology to enhance their teaching and learning

practices. Although a few lecturers had spoken on similar topics in previous years, some groundbreaking uses of technology were shared.

One example was a presentation on the use of live video-streaming to broadcast lectures to multiple venues. The speaker emphasized the effectiveness of a two-way feature, and explained that it allowed students to participate, even when they were in a distant physical location. Students had the option of watching from the comfort of their homes while still being fully "present" in class. This method of class delivery was not only convenient but "enable[ed] students to view, interact, and connect with their instructors and classmates" (Abdous & Yoshimura, 2010). When the researchers reflected on the first eLearning Colloquium, where speakers expressed fears that the adoption of online teaching and learning would result in a lack of class attendance, they were pleased to note that lecturers were putting the needs of the student at the fore and finding methods to work around challenges by embracing the eTools they once considered a threat.

A second speaker delivered a presentation on emerging technologies and the use of Doctopus and Goobric. He emphasized the convenience of using the built-in rubric offered by Goobric, especially in the marking of assignments submitted via Google Drive. The platform was convenient because lecturers and students had dual access to folders. This enabled adaptation and personalization for each student, therefore breaking the "homogeneity" which Wilson et al. (2007) describe as restricting the "learner's ability to organize the space".

4.2 Summary

The annual colloquia have consistently included relevant theory related to the challenges and positive practices in eLearning environments. This is key as there remains "a need to build an extra set of theoretical tools", as CIECT re-thinks issues that are pertinent to the enhancement of the structure of the colloquia (Case, 2013).

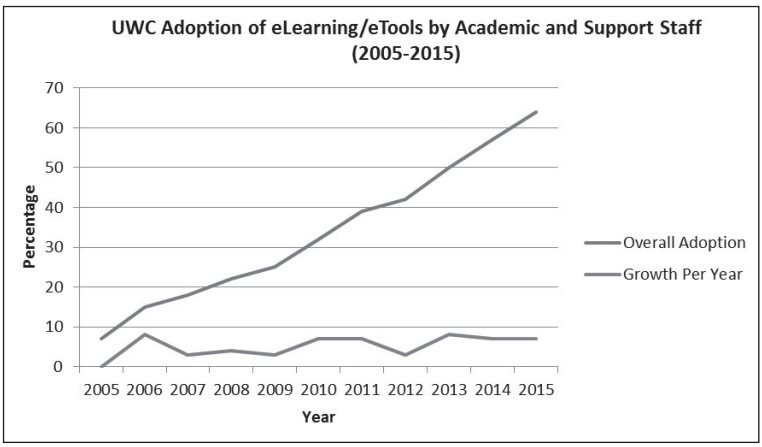
The CIECT team works towards providing the best support for lecturers and students and ensuring that the eLearning Colloquia maintain a high standard that benefits all attendees. Therefore it is rewarding when the team receives encouraging reactions from the UWC community. Examples of such positive feedback are:

> "In the short period I participated in the event I found it very informative. This was also my very first presentation at a colloquium so thanx for the opportunity."
>
> "I've learnt a lot and once again felt motivated to improve my teaching methods, to engage students more and to make use of e-learning."
>
> "Last year's gathering was inspiring (even for the faint hearted) and seeing how colleagues from a variety of faculties have grown, in leaps and bounds since then, I congratulate you on your wonderfully supportive teamwork."

In addition to the growth and positive feedback received from participants at the eLearning Colloquia, it is evident that the colloquia have contributed to the growth of a CoP. It has been observed that following the colloquia, academics have contacted CIECT to further explore blended approaches in face-to-face workshops and consultations. The support offered by the CIECT staff is crucial for staff to feel well-supported when they adopt new technologies into their teaching and learning practices (Russell, 2009).

The graph below indicates how the adoption of eLearning and eTools has steadily increased at UWC between 2005 and 2015. This growth further displays the considerable role the colloquia have played in the development of a CoP.

It is essential that the annual colloquia continue to grow and transform to meet the needs of the UWC community and beyond.



5. Discussion and Recommendations

The researchers found that the institutional eLearning Colloquia, contributed to an institutional CoP as it allowed open dialogue to take place not only within but also beyond the boundaries of the formal structure. The colloquia encouraged the formation of deeper relationships within various departments and CIECT around the use and effective application of eTools.

In addition, this study found that during the eight-year period in which the colloquia have taken place, the institutional discourse on blended teaching and learning practices has changed. As a result of being made aware of and being exposed to technology and eLearning by the CIECT team, academic and support staff have an increased awareness of what is possible through the use of eTools and their fears related to eLearning have been allayed.

Some of the challenges which lecturers highlighted included, drops in class attendance due to increased online offerings; lecturers needing to shift their teaching and assessment practices to incorporate eTools and blended approaches; and student resistance to and battling with unfamiliar technology.

These challenges were addressed by lecturers focusing on sound instructional design principles and shifts in teaching approaches to ensure students were engaged during contact time. This shift in approach meant students needed to prepare prior to attending class, through pre-readings, online quizzes and discussions. Traditionally, students only engaged in written assessments however, through the use of technology, they were able to create podcasts and later vodcasts as well as, digital stories for assessment purposes. Lecturers also made use of podcasts to assist students who were not first-language English speakers by providing translations of lecture material in both formal and informal Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Students who battled with the new technology were supported through class demonstrations, just-in-time material which included screencasts as well as, hands-on training sessions in labs.

Through the colloquia, lecturers were able to reflect on and share their blended teaching practices with the institutional community. This fora enabled all stakeholders to discuss challenges and find solutions collaboratively.

Due to the growth and shifts of the blended teaching practices institutionally, CIECT envisions replacing the current format of the annual eLearning Colloquium with a mini-conference that will enable profound discussions related to the impact of online teaching and learning initiatives. The new format will also expand the reach to include more external stakeholders as well as, the student voices. Both keynote speakers and UWC

lecturers will be able to present papers based on research-focused projects for student development and will be invited to submit papers to be published in a, special edition of an accredited journal.

6. Conclusion

It is evident from the above analysis of almost a decade of eLearning colloquia that there has been consistent development of improved teaching and learning practices; as well as, mind-set changes of the UWC community. As a result of this, and the growth of the CoP, there has been a shift from resistance to an immersion in blended learning approaches. This serves as an indicator of the success of CIECT's interventions and its impact in driving the effective use of eTools. Changes that have ensued based on the voluntary adoption and implementation of various eTools have resulted in the development of an organizational culture which is more responsive to change and innovation in teaching and learning. Hence, the activities of the CIECT staff are evidence of human agents collaborating in the maintenance and growth of blended approaches of an institution.

7. Statement on Open Data, Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The data used for the purposes of this study may be requested in writing from the Director of the Centre for Innovative Education and Communication Technologies at the University of the Western Cape, Dr Juliet Stoltenkamp. She can be contacted at: jstoltenkamp@uwc.ac.za.

The researchers complied with the University of the Western Cape's ethical guidelines and the research was approved by the institutional Research Ethics Office.

No conflict of interest was identified by the researchers.

Acknowledgements

The concept for this paper was drawn from the original, personal academic work of Dr Juliet Stoltenkamp. This concept was further expanded on by Ms Liesl Leonard, Ms Carolynne Kies and Ms Norina Braaf. The authors would therefore like to thank Dr Stoltenkamp for allowing her concept to be developed for this paper; as well as, the lecturers / participants in the eLearning Colloquia whose recorded presentations provided valuable data to draw from.

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