

Citation: Moloney, D. and O’Keeffe, A. (2016) “A case study in language teacher education”. In M. J. McCarthy (Eds.) *The Cambridge Guide to Blended Learning for Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 176-199

## **A Case Study in Language Teacher Education**

**David Moloney and Anne O’Keeffe**

### **Introduction**

This chapter looks at the potential of blended learning (BL) in the context of higher education teaching, in particular in relation to language teacher education. BL offers new opportunities for learning and it can enhance learning by complementing the traditional classroom method with computer-mediated activities and electronic resources. It also enhances flexibility of learning as students can access material from different locations, and at any time that is convenient. In this chapter, we will examine a case study of the use of BL tools and activities in two undergraduate English Language Teaching modules. We will show how some of the challenges of real-time face-to-face learning environments can be overcome (for example, the short-lived, or what is often referred to as ‘ephemeral’ nature of live lectures and the stress of capturing what is being said in a lecture). The case study will also evaluate the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) in tandem with the traditional classroom, including the use of lecture capturing software, uploaded to an LMS (in this case, Moodle), and the use of related activities, such as quizzes and discussion forums. We will show that these strategies have enhanced opportunities for learning and increased student engagement with content. We will draw on LMS participation statistics, student evaluations of teaching (SETs) and questionnaire data for our analysis.

Young (2002: A33) quotes the President of Penn State University (at that time) as saying that the convergence of classroom and online learning is ‘the single greatest unrecognized trend in higher education today’. With hindsight, this was undoubtedly prophetic. Many factors have driven the move in mainstream higher education from solely presenting courses in traditional face-to-face contexts to offering a range of formats for learning, ranging from face-to-face lectures or small groups to online and even Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). This paper focuses on BL as a format of enhanced teaching and learning. BL entails both face-to-face teaching and learning and the use of a LMS, within which teaching and learning also takes place. We do not see BL and traditional learning as being in a mutually exclusive binary relationship. In fact, we contend that one enhances and complements the other (see also King, Chapter 6, this volume).

Specifically, the focus of this paper is on an English Language Teacher Education undergraduate course in an Irish Higher Education (HE) institution. It is worth setting this course in context. At a macro-level,

an Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) policy context, *The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (Higher Education Authority, 2011) stresses the importance of building more flexible learning opportunities within the Irish higher education sector. It notes that while there are isolated examples of programmes and courses available on a flexible and online basis, these are the exception rather than the rule. It acknowledges that, for most institutions, launching blended and online learning courses represents a significant cultural and operational challenge. At a meso-level (i.e., a middle level between *macro* and *micro*), within the managerial context of our institutional Strategic Plan, there is an overt statement regarding targets to increase the number of flexible programme delivery options and the greater use of our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (Mary Immaculate College, 2012). This aspiration mirrors the goal of enhanced flexible learning options by the Higher Education Authority at a macro-level, as detailed above (cf. Higher Education Authority, 2011). Therefore, it is within the context of these macro- and meso-level imperatives that our case study is situated. At a micro-level, within the context of the course team, there were also factors which drove change. These were more pedagogically based motives, as we shall detail below.

The course that we focus on is one-year in duration and comprises two sequential modules in English Language Teaching. It is open to second year undergraduate students within a Liberal Arts degree programme (i.e., Humanities and Social Sciences) who have no prior knowledge in relation to Initial Teacher Education in any context. Therefore, the programme has to induce them into the essentials of teaching in general (e.g., classroom management, assessment, motivation, lesson planning, and so on); it has to cover the essentials of language teaching (teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar, teaching pronunciation, skills development, using games and role plays, language teaching methods, and so on) and it has to cover the essentials of the English language as a system (i.e., morphology, syntax and phonology). The latter is quite challenging. Though the students are native speakers of English, they are *ab initio*, 'beginner' level, in terms of their grammatical and general language awareness. Annual Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) conducted by the Centre for Teaching and Learning consistently generated the following pressure points:

- There was too much content covered in the face-to-face contact time and not enough time to discuss it.
- Students found the grammar component particularly dense and challenging (and their results confirmed this).
- Students felt that they could understand the grammatical explanations in class but then struggled with the end-of-semester grammar assessment (an exam).

- Students did not feel adequately prepared for the classroom in terms of their content knowledge.

The overhauling of the programme, at a micro-level, came about in the context of trying to address these concerns raised by students on the course. These can be essentially summarised as:

- 1) a need to provide more opportunities for students to engage with the course content;
- 2) a need to enhance how grammar is taught and how it is consolidated;
- 3) a need to re-examine how grammar is assessed; and
- 4) a need to integrate content knowledge from the course so as to build students' confidence in their expertise as teachers of English as a Foreign Language<sup>1</sup>.

The move from a solely traditional delivery format was a gradual one and the present chapter aims to reflect on this from the perspective of the lecturers and the students, as well as from a theoretical perspective. We will outline the process of moving to a blended format on this undergraduate course. We will detail the learning activities and online resources that were used and report on the varying degrees of success which each had.

We are keen to recognise that moving from a traditional classroom to a virtual one is a major challenge. To begin with, traditional classrooms do not crash or freeze, as computers and websites can and you do not usually need a username and password to get into them. Faculty need training and a support team to make the virtual classroom happen (see Comas-Quinn, Chapter 5, and Lázár, Chapter 9, this volume). First and foremost, they need an LMS in place. Students also need training on how to use new online tools despite their seeming 'knowingness' in relation to technology. All in all, we recognise that innovation is challenging and time-consuming but it brings many new teaching and learning opportunities that could not have been envisaged in a traditional classroom context (McCarthy, Chapter 1, this volume). Most of all, using a BL format has brought a multiplication of both teaching and learning opportunities. Through this, teachers have more opportunities to engage with learners, and vice versa. Additionally, in the spirit of constructivist models of education where learners are actively involved in building understanding and knowledge, BL offers far more opportunities for formative and peer-to-peer learning (see below).

Before we detail the innovations that we put in place and how these were evaluated by the students, we will first explore further the rationale for BL approaches.

## **Traditional learning and blended learning**

### ***Rationale for blended method***

The turn of the millennium saw the landscape of higher education change markedly due to the increased presence of and access to technology. Information communications technologies (ICT) have been absorbed in almost all sectors. The present authors have grounded this case study in instructional theory which, in the context of BL, focuses on the structuring of e-learning materials to improve and manage learning. The theoretical framework underpinning the constructivist-based instructional design of two English Language Teaching modules will be presented (the next section will detail these modules).

Conventional Irish higher educational institutions offer face-to-face course delivery. However, since the turn of the century, progression towards integrated learning approaches in Higher Education (HE) has become a significant priority (Department of Education and Skills, 2003). BL constitutes the integration of face-to-face, mobile and e-learning delivery methods in no predefined ratio. Each method is recognised as having distinct advantages and disadvantages. The social and pedagogical advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face teaching and learning are well documented. Numerous researchers (Al-Qahtani and Higgins, 2013; Akkoyunlu and Soylu, 2006; Klein and Ware, 2003) identify a range of advantages of e-learning including the following:

- Learning can be branched to meet individual learner needs (for example, online quizzes can use adaptive feedback to enhance formative learning for individuals who need it).
- The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) caters for individual learning preferences (for example, learners can access materials when and where they choose).
- Synchronous and asynchronous learning provides flexibility and enhances student interaction.
- Access to knowledge and information is enhanced and increased.
- E-learning can be cost effective to both students and institutions, alleviating the need, on one hand, for students to travel, and on the other, for physical classrooms.

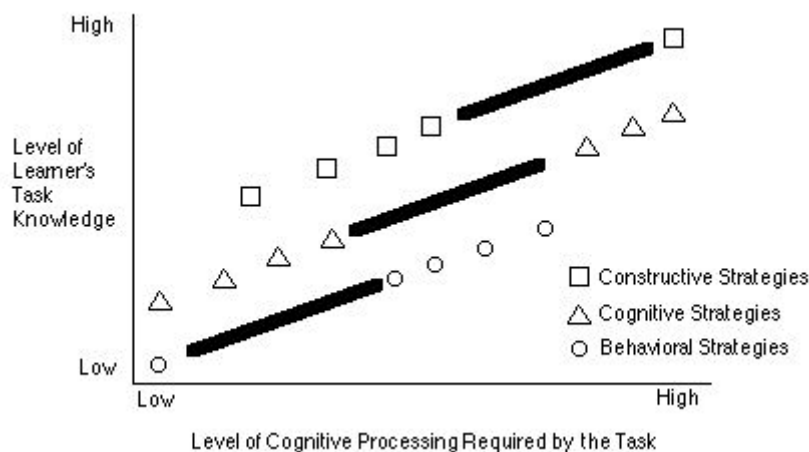
Disadvantages are also readily identifiable, such as:

- The possibility of student isolation.
- Success in this environment is dependent on IT and communication skills and it is acknowledged that many parts of the world still have sub-standard internet bandwidth speeds and/or lack of appropriate hardware, platforms and infrastructures.

- E-learning may be less effective than face-to-face learning with regard to providing explanation and clarification to student questions.
- The apparent prospect of online cheating in certain circumstances.

In order to capitalise upon the advantages of each method while simultaneously overcoming the negative aspects associated with each (Al-Qahtani and Higgins, 2013; Garrison and Kanuka, 2004), a blended approach to learning may be employed.

Research on the major theories of learning needs to be reflected upon in relation to BL and, in our case study, the work of Ertmer and Newby (1993) was very apt. Essentially, Ertmer and Newby contend that major learning theory strategies overlap, as represented by the continuum in Figure 11.1.



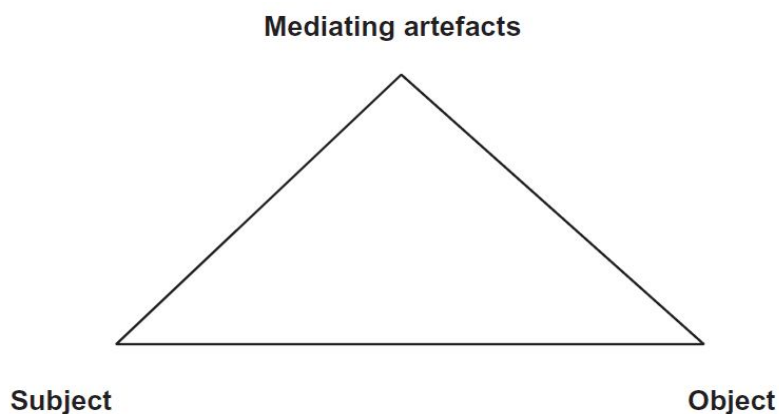
**Figure 11.1: Ertmer and Newby's comparison of associated instructional strategies (Ertmer and Newby, 1993)**

They suggest that for varying levels of learner task-knowledge and required cognitive processing, different learning strategies can be applied to produce optimum return. According to this, instruction for a new learner or novice to a topic could be appropriately delivered for a low-level cognitive task by employing a behaviourist learning strategy. It is suggested by this model, as the level of knowledge that the learner has of a particular task and as the cognitive processing required by that given task increases, the more inclined a learner is to benefit from a gradual shift along the continuum to a cognitivist, and furthermore, a constructivist strategy for learning. Higher education settings are indicative of requiring these high levels of learner task-knowledge and cognitive processing skills to achieve higher order skills, such as those skills associated with learning a language (Bloom et al. 1956). The concept of a gradual shift and employment of a constructivist approach was borne in mind during development and implementation of the present BL study.

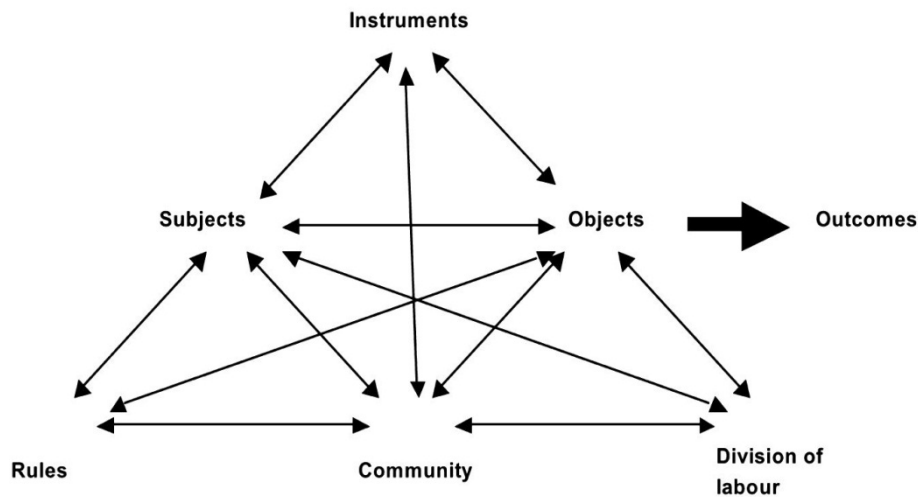
## Theoretical Framework

Piaget and Vygotsky are credited with the foundation of constructivist learning principles (Palincsar, 1998). Constructivist principles are founded upon the most basic premise that learning environments should be designed with a focus on facilitating students in the process of knowledge creation, not merely knowledge transmission and reproduction.

In order to aid in the design, development and structure of constructivist learning environments (CLEs), Gómez and Duart (2012) suggest incorporating a theoretical framework. In their paper on designing CLEs, Jonassen and Ronrer-Murphy (1999) argue that activity theory, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978) and subsequently supplemented by Engeström (1987), provides a suitable theoretical framework to analyse needs, tasks and outcomes when designing CLEs. Activity theory acts as a lens through which many forms of socio-cultural human activity can be analysed. The framework is particularly relevant to those activities that form part of the teaching and learning process (Gómez and Duart, 2012; Jonassen and Ronrer-Murphy, 1999).



**Figure 11.2: Vygotsky's activity system (Dixon-Krauss, 1996)**



**Figure 11.3: Engeström's activity system (Dixon-Krauss, 1996)**

Vygotsky's proposed activity system (Figure 11.2) includes the subject, object and mediating artefacts (materials and activities designed to promote learning) as respective components. Learning, as an activity, can be described as the interactive process that a group of people (subjects) go through in order to achieve a specified purpose (object) (Gómez and Duarte, 2012). Peer interactions and student-lecturer interactions are achieved, as outlined at the top of Figures 11.2 and 11.3, through the use of mediating artefacts and instruments. In the BL context of this study, mediating artefacts and instruments are understood as the face-to-face and online factors – lecture and tutorial content, use of an LMS, activities and resources (discussion forums, wikis, blogs, other collaborative online activities) – through which communication, collaboration and ultimately constructivist intervention to facilitate knowledge creation is achieved. Jonassen and Ronrer-Murphy (1999) contend that little meaningful activity can be accomplished individually. Leont'ev (1981) substantiates this, stating 'the human individual's activity is a system of social relations. It does not exist without those social relations' (Leont'ev, 1981: 46–7). Figure 11.3 outlines that rules, community and division of labour also play key roles in the learning process when the aim is to produce favourable outcomes. Community, and in particular how to create a sense of community online, will be discussed later in further detail. Elements of this socio-cultural activity theory framework were used as a reference to support the design and development of the CLE for this BL case study.

***Role definition***

In a blended CLE, with particular regard to a higher education setting, the roles of the traditional lecturer and student change to assume diverse attributes. The traditional classroom lecturer takes on many roles to successfully function in a blended CLE. In line with constructivist strategies, the student role within a blended CLE also shifts from a passive to a more active nature (Jonassen, 1991). At

present, the Irish primary and secondary education system is based predominantly around behaviourist and cognitivist approaches to learning indicated by a passive classroom-based approach with little focus on community and collaboration. This is changing; however, it can still pose difficulty when trying to facilitate undergraduate student integration into a CLE at the third level. In terms of an asynchronous online discussion forum, Ruey (2010) proposes that the lecturer occupies a facilitator role where the primary focus is on mentoring while students themselves are seen as moderators. This is contested by Salmon (2000) who associates the teacher, instructor, tutor or facilitator with the e-moderator role. Both of these perspectives on the role of the online lecturer, as both a mentor and moderator, were adhered to at different stages during the learning cycle of the present study, as would be expected within such a flexible approach.

### ***'Deep Learning' and 'Communities of Inquiry'***

'Deep learning' and 'surface learning' (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Chin and Brown, 2000) can ultimately be compared to the processes by which students approach their learning. Deep learning promotes critical understanding and application of knowledge while surface learning refers to a more passive approach to knowledge where it is memorised and often not processed critically and not linked to previous learning. Deep learning lends itself to a constructivist approach to learning in which students are compelled to ascertain an ownership of their own education. If a student actively relates new knowledge to existing knowledge, thereby creating associations between new and existing concepts and theories, he/she is undertaking a much deeper approach to learning. Relevant prior knowledge exists to create correlations between learned concepts and new ones. In the context of this BL case study, the active construction of one's own meanings, consistent with prior knowledge, was advocated above the passive acquisition of knowledge to generate a learning experience.

In their study on understanding cognitive presence in an online and blended community of inquiry, Akyol and Garrison (2010) place substantial emphasis on both deep and surface learning approaches and outcomes and on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001) with particular reference to the dynamics of online and BL environments. A CoI refers to an active learning experience within a group of individuals, involving collaborative engagement with materials usually in a problem-solving situation. The importance of both of these structures to the success of a BL initiative was taken into account in the present study.

Weigel (2002) establishes a deep learning model categorising deep learning into three stages:

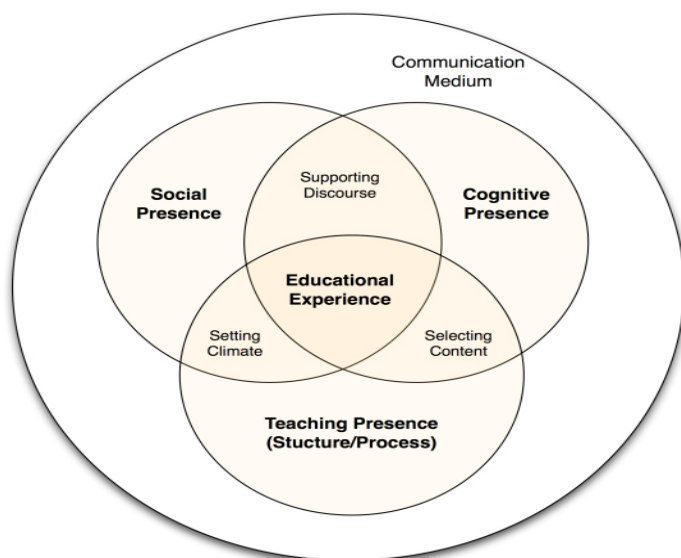
1. Conditionalised knowledge – essentially the ability to use existing knowledge and relate it to a number of different scenarios.



2. Metacognition – reflective thinking about your own cognitive processes.
3. Communities of Inquiry (CoI) – different elements that must be present in order for an educational experience to happen.

A deep approach requires a student to be motivated and interested in learning about the subject matter. Without this motivation or interest in a subject, students may only skim the surface and learn what is thought to be necessary. In the context of the present study, there was a feeling on the part of the lecturers, especially in the case of grammar, that students were only operating at a surface level. The authors were aware that this can often be driven by exam-based summative assessment. For this reason, continuous assessment was discussed as an alternative. Surface learning may be demonstrated through rote memorisation of facts about the subject matter and through placing pressure on oneself due to feeling obliged to complete a task for someone else's purposes. This surface learning, learning for the sake of meeting a demand, suggests that a student might know certain things about a subject without ever really fully understanding it. With this in mind, the focus of CLEs should be to bring about a dynamic and motivating learning and assessment context to promote deep learning.

A CoI consist of three fundamental elements that must all be present in order for an educational experience to take place: a social, cognitive, and teaching presence.



**Figure 11.4: Community of Inquiry model cited from Garrison and Vaughan (2008)**

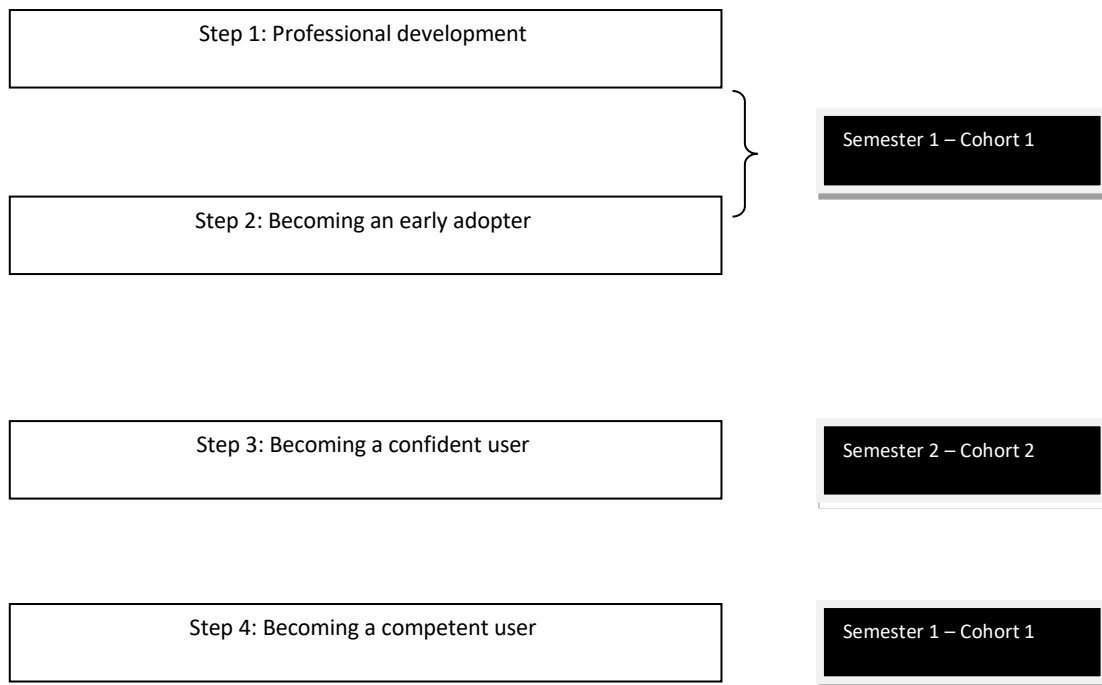
It is favourable for both the lecturer and student to be active within each presence, fostering student-lecturer interactions and student-student interactions which in turn facilitate a deeper approach to both group dynamics and individual knowledge construction. In online environments it is especially

important to foster each presence among students. One avenue is through the promotion of peer-to-peer mentoring. In a study on the impact of BL on students' achievement, as compared with both face-to-face and e-learning respectively, Al-Qahtani and Higgins (2013) found that BL supported students' learning more effectively than either of the elements on their own. It was suggested that course coordinators aim to foster these CoI presences to redress limitations of the traditional face-to-face approach.

In this section, we have presented the theoretical backdrop underpinning the rationale and frameworks which enabled the design and development of this blended CLE. We will now provide the context in which our case study took place.

### **Moving from Traditional Teaching to Blended Format**

As we mentioned above, the move from traditional learning to BL was gradual and, in all, it took three semesters, i.e., a year and a half. In that period, the following graduated staging took place in terms of how the VLE actually moved from being a file repository, replacing the shared network folder which we had used, to being a collaborative learning space. This gradual building of confidence on the part of the lecturers is also linked to a building of competency in relation to how to use the new learning tools offered by the LMS. Figure 11.5 illustrates the four steps that we took over the three semester period. Note that Semester 1 in this diagram refers in fact to the second semester of the academic year 2011/12. In other words, halfway through that academic year, we decided to stop using the shared network folder as a repository for our course notes and PowerPoint presentations and instead to move over to the LMS, in this case Moodle. For this cohort of students, there was not any major change in their teaching and learning. The LMS, in this semester, was used as a file repository in the same way that we had used the network folder. However, it was a crucial stage for the lecturers in that it allowed them to become confident in the basic processes of the LMS. Without this stage, the real innovation that we embarked on in Steps 3 and 4 could not have taken place. These changes were introduced with a completely new cohort of undergraduates in the academic year that followed, 2012/13 (see Steps 3 and 4, Semesters 2 and 3).



**Figure 11.5: overview of stages of transition from traditional learning to blended learning**

**Steps 1 and 2** These first steps in our path were the most basic but the most crucial: simply to learn how to log onto the LMS and go through the procedures of loading files. This was achieved through a combination of professional development courses and trial and error. For faculty, the multifunctionality of the LMS can be daunting and we decided to take things slowly and to learn the basics of how to use the LMS in Semester 1 of the academic year 2011/2012. The basic competencies to be acquired by the end of Steps 1 and 2 were: how to create a course and enrol the learners; how to load lecture files and other supporting notes and materials; how to add basic hyperlinks to web-based material on video upload sites such as *YouTube* or blogs and how to use the discussion forum facility as a class bulletin board. These were achieved in Semester 1 (Figure 11.5), and were essentially about overcoming the fear of clicking on the wrong link and losing everything and about becoming familiar with the routine and processes of just doing the most basic of functions properly. By the end of Steps 1 and 2, we felt that we had become accomplished in the basics and were ready to learn more in terms of the added potential of this space. For learners on this course, apart from having to log into the LMS, not much had changed for them compared to when they went to the shared network folder to download our lecture notes and handouts.

**Step 3** A new student cohort began in the academic year 2012/13 and for this cohort, we were able to take the next steps towards BL and, in doing so, try to address some of the issues raised in our 2011/12 Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). As mentioned earlier, this feedback had told us that students felt that there was too much content covered in the face-to-face contact time and not

enough time to discuss it. They particularly felt that the grammar component was dense and taxing and their results confirmed this. Some students felt that they could understand the grammatical explanations in class but then struggled with the assessment (an exam). Overall, it was clear that students did not feel adequately prepared for the classroom in terms of their content knowledge in ELT, especially in relation to grammar. We wanted to move away from solely using the LMS as a file repository to using it for content delivery. To this end, in Semester 2 of the process of moving from traditional face-to-face teaching to blended mode, the following steps were taken:

1) We recorded all lectures and loaded them to the LMS (*via YouTube*). This meant that learners could watch them again at any time, in any place. It also meant that we were able to overcome some of the ephemerality of the traditional classroom by capturing it for the students. Student feedback on this simple change was overwhelmingly positive. Examples of feedback and further discussion of this and the following points can be found in the Evaluation section.

2) We created additional offline content in the form of short video recordings, known as 'vodcasts', to supplement class content and we loaded these to the LMS. This meant that we were not trying to squeeze too much into one face-to-face lecture. We were able to break content up into more manageable amounts. It particularly allowed us to take grammar lectures at a slower pace. 15-minute vodcasts were made on specific grammar topics and students then accessed these via the LMS in their own time. Again, feedback on these was very positive (see Evaluation section for more detail).

3) We created grammar quizzes within the LMS so as to give additional formative practice for learners and we also used them as a means of assessment to replace the final summative examination in grammar that we had previously used and which had caused a lot of anxiety. The previous assessment instrument entailed an end-of-semester exam, part of which was a section on grammar, worth 20% of the total module grade. Learners, in their formal Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET), in 2011/12, detailed how they struggled with this task at the end of the semester. In our revised format, these quizzes were directly linked to the grammar lectures and vodcasts (e.g., a vodcast on prepositions had a corresponding quiz on prepositions). They were also phased over the 12 week semester period so as to make them more manageable. For each topic, there were two grammar quizzes, one for practice and one for assessment. These are discussed further below in our evaluation.

**Step 4** by Semester 3 (academic year 2012/2013), buoyed by the positive feedback from the previous semester (see Step 3 above) and having gained further in confidence and competency in terms of using the LMS, the lecturers decided to use even more of the LMS's functionality both to enhance the

course itself and also as an innovative assessment tool. To this end, the use of grammar vodcasts and quizzes was continued and increased (see Step 3). Vodcasts linked to practice and assessment tasks were also developed for areas other than grammar. These are detailed below.

### ***Discussion forums***

Discussion forums were used to integrate various language teaching methodologies that had been covered in detail on the course and in vodcasts. The task set for students, which was part of their assessment, was to review the lectures and vodcasts on language teaching methods and, in their randomly assigned groups of six, to make one post of 500 words on the following and to make at least one reply to another class member's post (maximum 200 words):

**Topic for discussion:** In the lectures and vodcasts on Language Teaching Methods, we looked at the *Grammar Translation Method*, *Direct Method*, *Audio-Lingual Method* and *Communicative Language Teaching*. We can learn something from each of these in terms of how best to teach a language.

You can use URL links to support your points (e.g. a youtube clip of a class).

**You will not see anyone else's post until you have made a post. You will then be able to reply to another post. You only have to reply to one post (200 words max.)**

**Marks are given individually based on your posts.**

**Figure 11.6: An example of a topic used in a discussion forum**

### ***Wikis***

Wikis were used as an integrating assessment tool for the materials design component of the course. They also served an independent study function: the course was focused on teaching English to adult learners rather than young learners. In previous years, the best that we could hope to fit into the schedule was one two-hour lecture on Teaching Young Learners and we were conscious that this really was not ideal. Therefore, we gave one two-hour lecture as a starting point and loaded a number of vodcasts, *You Tube* clips, blog links, readings (pdf format) and infographics on the topic of Teaching English to Young Learners. The integrating task for the learners was to create a wiki, in randomly formed groups of six, to address the following:

## Wiki Task

In your group, choose **one** theme and then select **four** activities or resources that you could use to teach English to children based on this theme. Choose an age group for your activities (under 7 or between 7 and 11/12).

**Theme:** any theme appropriate to children can be used (e.g. talking about myself, talking about my family, food, hobbies, my house, the weather, clothes, travel and transport, different cultures, actions, likes and dislikes, holidays, toys, etc.);

**Activities and resources:** these can be anything that you will base a lesson on (e.g. song with movements, rhyme with movements, chant with movements, dialogue to act out, mime, game, youtube clip, arts and crafts, pictures, matching tasks, sports activity for outdoors, game, etc.);

**You must use four different types of activities or resources (e.g. you can't have two songs and two picture matching activities)**

**What you need to do for each activity:**

- 1) In your group, pick one theme. All of the activities will have to link to this theme.
- 2) Find the **four** best activities that link to that theme. Provide the URL to link to that material.
- 3) Write up your entry using these headings:

**Theme:** (say clearly what theme you are using for all of your activities)

**Age group:** (under 7 or between 7 and 11/12)

**Activity 1:** (say what it is: a song, a rhyme, a game, a puzzle, etc.)

**Link to activity URL:** (give the website link)

**Why we chose it:** (explain, in a sentence or two, why this was chosen. This will probably tell what the activity is and how it links to the theme and why this is a good choice)

**Figure 11.7: An example of a topic used as a basis for a wiki task**

Students had one month to complete this task. The wiki function on Moodle has a 'behind-the-scenes' chat area which they were able to use as a place to 'meet' and plan, so in theory they did not physically need to meet to do this collaborative task over that time. An example of this chat function in action is shown below:

Extract 1 [mid-way through the discussion]

**STUDENT 1** [Friday, 17 May 2013, 1:28 PM] Okay so this could be the general format of the activities. We could start with Michael's song to teach the children the basic animal sounds and the names of the animals. Then using Mark's Old MacDonald song with pictures as said by Marion, we could teach the children of animals in certain places and settings as well as further teaching them their names and sounds. The third game could be Marion's card game as this would be perfect for recognition and

ensure they fully recognise certain animals and it is a fun group activity. For the fourth activity I think we could use this as it is interactive and fully checks they recognise certain animal sounds. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLTSNbNvv1s>. So what do you think?

**STUDENT 2** [Friday, 17 May 2013, 2:38 PM] Ya that sounds good! Perfect. Should we put it together now so?! :) A small introduction naming the theme etc. as well at the start!

**STUDENT 3** [Friday, 17 May 2013, 4:27 PM] I'm happy with everything guys. I think we've done a good job. Now, how shall we put this together? I think we put each activity under the 'Edit' heading!!

**STUDENT 4** [Friday, 17 May 2013, 10:05 PM] Everything looks great guys. We have everything we need so that's great. We just need to put the activities under the edit heading I think.

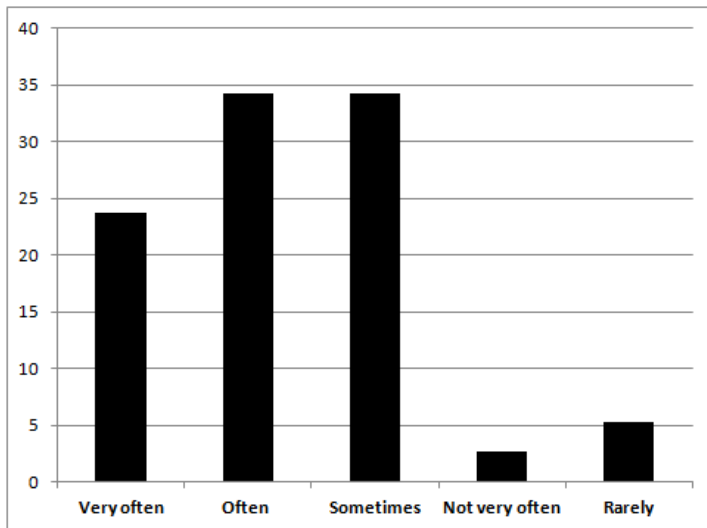
Extract 1 is just a short excerpt from a much longer discussion. As the time stamps show, this collaborative work was done over a period of time thus illustrating the benefit of the LMS as a collaborative learning space, at a time and place that suits the learner. The other spin-off of this task was that the end results (i.e., the wikis) would make a resource for the students which they could use in year 3 on their teaching placement if they were teaching young learners. Hence, it had a real-world dimension as an activity (cf. Seedhouse et al., Chapter 10, this volume).

### ***Evaluation***

Two evaluations points took place. The first was at the end of Semester 2 (see Figure 11.5), coinciding with the introduction of a number of innovations in terms of BL, namely the introduction of recordings of all of our lectures onto the LMS and the use of vodcasts and quizzes. The second was at the end of Semester 3, when the 2012/13 cohort had completed their one-year programme. By the end of this semester, we had added further BL innovations, including the use of wikis and discussion forums as well as continuing the use of quizzes, video recordings of face-to-face lectures and vodcasts. Both surveys were conducted online using *Google Drive* and this was linked via URL to the LMS course page. The response rates were: 44% (of a sample of 39 students) for survey 1 at the end of Semester 2 and 45% (of a sample of 40 students) for survey 2 at the end of Semester 3. Both surveys were given to the same class cohort. In summarising the findings, we will focus on the video recordings and vodcasts in relation to Semester 2 and discuss the remaining innovations in relation to Semester 3.

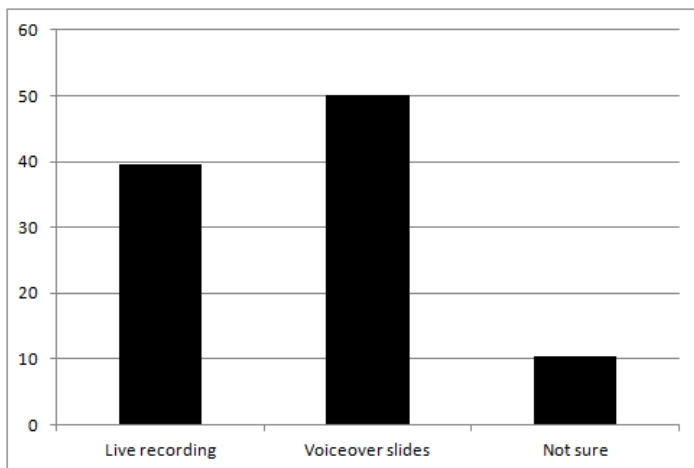
### ***Video recordings and vodcasts***

In survey 1 we asked students how often they used video recordings on the LMS (both lecture recordings and vodcasts). Figure 11.8 illustrates the findings.



**Figure 11.8: ‘How often do you watch the videos and videocasts on the TEFL Moodle page?’ (results as percentages)**

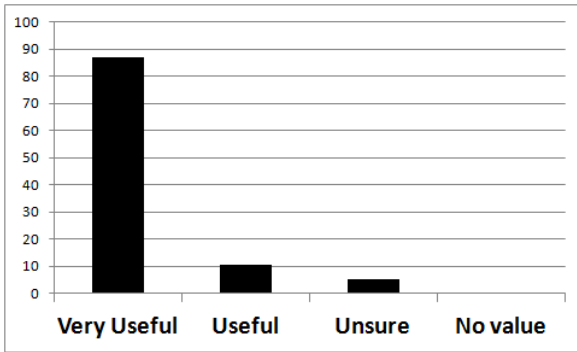
We also asked them if they had a preference for the live recordings or the shorter vodcasts, which contain voiceovers on PowerPoint slides.



**Figure 11.9: ‘Which do you prefer to watch, the recordings of lectures or the slides with voiceovers?’ (results as percentages)**

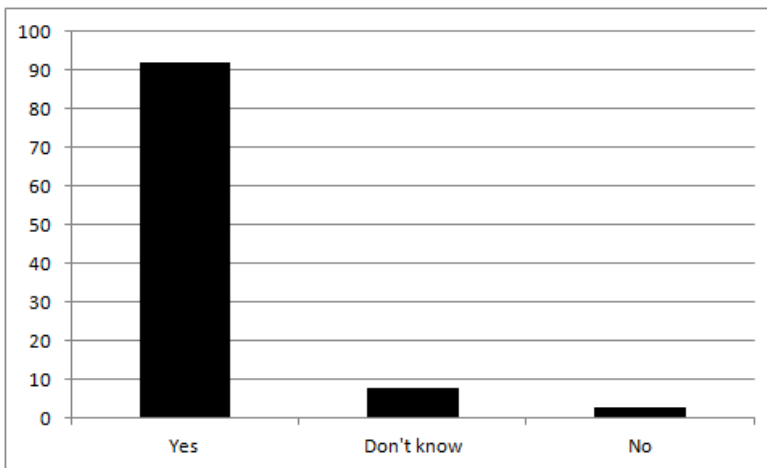
We asked them to evaluate the usefulness of these resources.





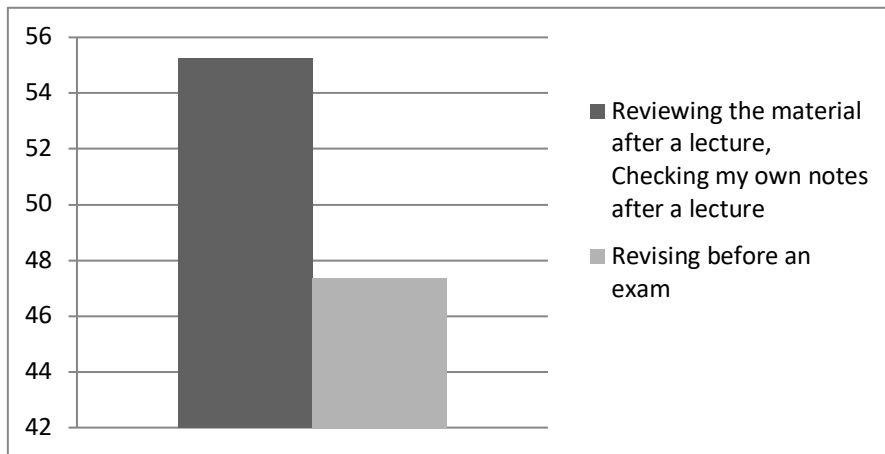
**Figure 11.10: 'Evaluate how useful the video recordings and vodcasts were for you as an aid to learning?' (Very useful; Useful; Unsure or No value) (results as percentages)**

We asked them to consider whether video recording and vodcasting was something that they would like their other lectures to use as a teaching aid.



**Figure 11.11: 'Are video recording lectures and vodcasting something that you would like other lectures on your degree programme to use?' (results as percentages)**

We posed the question as to their learning purpose in relation to their use of the recordings and vodcasts.

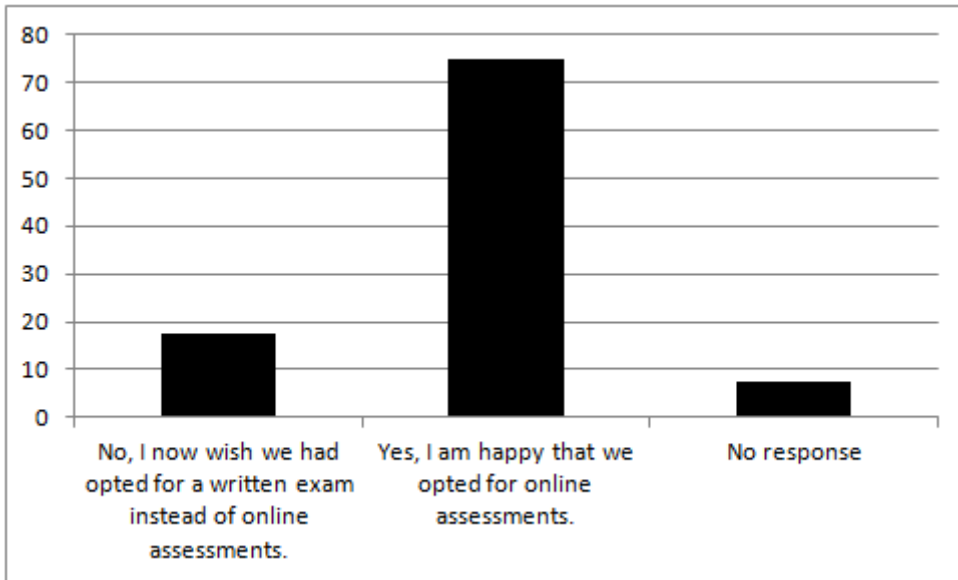


**Figure 11.12: ‘How do you use the video recordings and vodcasts as an aid to learning?’ (results as percentages)**

By way of qualitative questioning, we asked the cohort the following question: ‘If you were trying to persuade your lecturer to do this, what is your best argument from the point of view of the student?’ Some typical responses were:

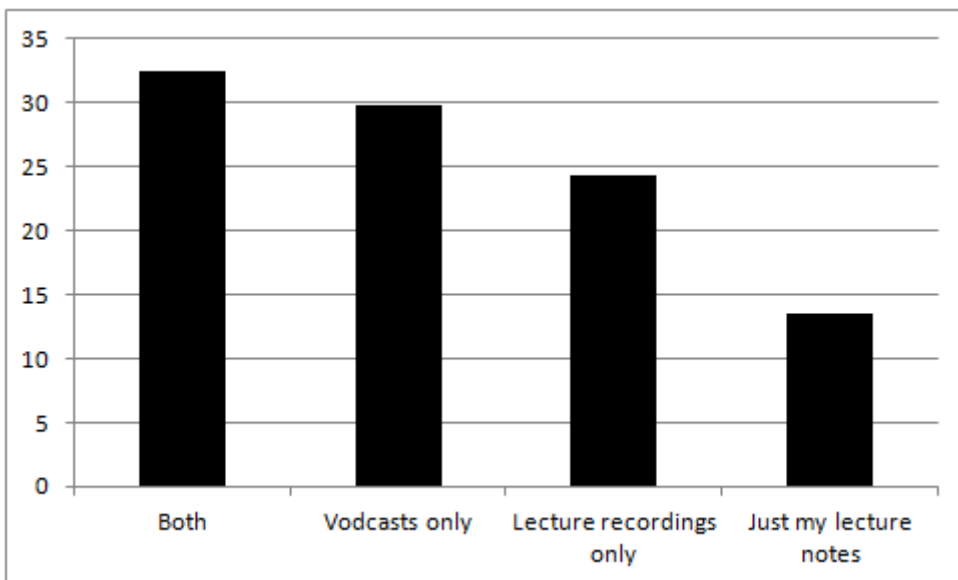
- *Because lectures are recorded I am able to listen in class. I learn best by listening and sometimes find that by taking notes I miss out on what the lecturer says because I am focused on writing and not listening . . . I know that I cannot possibly miss anything and if I happen to miss a lecture it is comforting that I will not miss any course material and can catch up straight away.*
- *This method of teaching provides a service for students who are shy and wouldn’t like to speak up and ask a question in the lecture. I find it allows me to go at my own pace and double check anything I didn’t understand as the majority of the class including me would say they understood the material or subject even if we didn’t.*
- *Being able to listen more in the lecture and take fewer notes and then catch up on the video and take down notes if needed. This would be very beneficial in my opinion.*

The first survey focused on the use of video recordings and vodcast materials. In the second survey, we wanted to explore in detail students’ opinions on the use of the quizzes, wikis and discussion forums, especially as assessment tools. Using online assessment as an alternative to the traditional end-of-semester exam through the following question: ‘The class had a choice between an exam or online assessments and opted for online assessments. Now that you have done the grammar quiz, discussion forum and wiki, are you happy with this decision?’



**Figure 11.13: Opinions on online assessment choice versus traditional end-of-semester exam (results as percentages)**

Asked whether they used lecture recordings or vodcast summaries when revising for grammar quizzes, the following mixed response was elicited, probably reflecting various learning styles.



**Figure 11.14: 'When preparing for the grammar quiz, did you use the recorded class lectures or the shorter summary recordings? Explain your choice.'**

Some explanations give further insight.

Both:

- *I watched both but I found the shorter summaries to be much more to the point. It really showcased the beneficial aspects of this method of teaching to a large body of students. I think it is something that should be pursued by more lecturers.*
- *I watched the recorded class an hour or 2 before doing the quiz, then a few minutes before the quiz I revised using the shorted summary recordings.*
- *When preparing for the quiz, I first of all used the class lectures. I took notes from the class lecture, after I had done this I used the shorter summary recordings and the lecture notes for any areas I needed help clearing up.*

Vodcasts only:

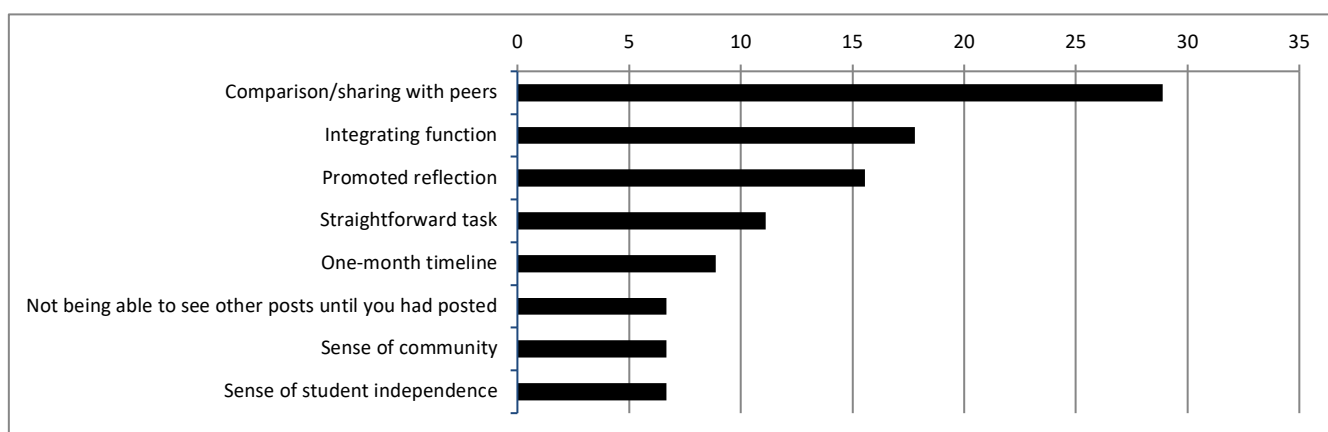
- *I use the recorded lectures. Everything important as well as extra information is included in them. The summaries are simply a summary and do not go into the detail of the lectures.*

Lectures only:

- *During the lectures I had taken down the slide notes as we went along so when I went to prepare for the quiz, I looked at the notes.*

### **Discussion forums**

We asked students 'What did you like most about the Discussion Forum activity on Language Teaching Methods?' Figure 11.15 summarises their responses thematically. Indicative examples are presented below for each theme.



**Figure 11.15: Student responses to discussion forum task (results as percentages)**

Comparison and sharing with peers

- *That we could exchange ideas and opinions and gain valuable insight into the subject by learning from others. Competition among students.*

Integrating function

- *It prompted the student to independently go back over what he/she had learned over the semester. It also gave the student a chance to compare their work against that of their fellow students.*

Promoted reflection

- *I liked that you could express freely what you thought about each method, exploring the different styles and approaches there are, in turn this allowed me to discover the language teaching method that I would use in the classroom.*

Straightforward task

- *I liked the forum as we got to discuss our opinions on these methods yet it was shorter than an essay.*

One-month timeline

- *I liked that it was a broad question and could be completed in my own time. It was not like an exam that you were rushing trying to get everything done.*

Not being able to see other posts until you had posted.

- *I liked how it was private until you posted to stop others copying etc.*

Sense of community

- *It is a good system and I believe it fosters a sense of community as well as competition among students.*

Sense of student independence

- *It inspires you to read and to research the topic further in order to be able to contribute something in the forum. There is a level of student independence and freedom of purpose.*

### Wiki assignment

We also addressed the use of a wiki to assess their understanding of designing materials for young learners, as detailed above. We posed two questions: 1) 'What did you like least about the wiki activity?' and 2) 'What did you like most about the wiki activity?' These elicited the following responses.

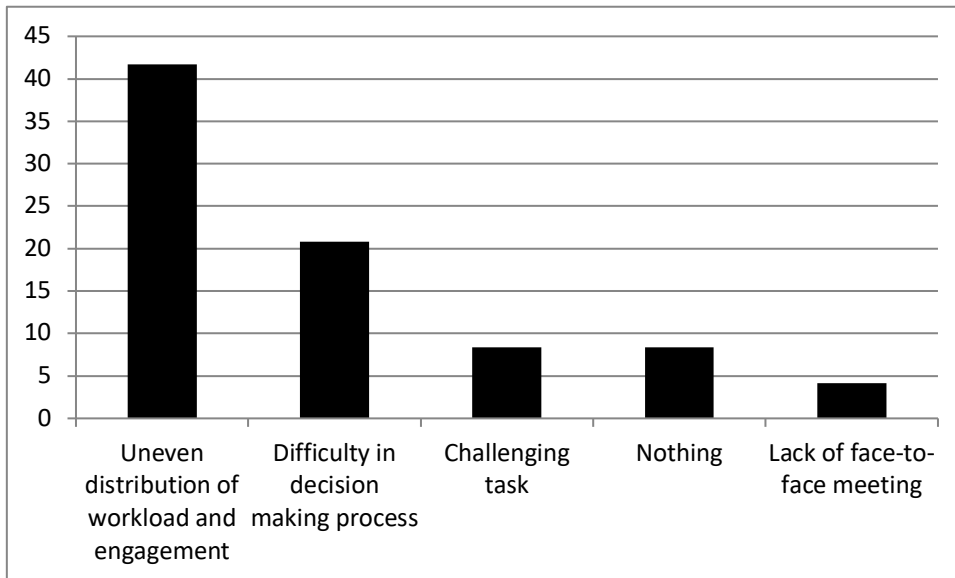


Figure 11.16: 'What did you like least about the wiki activity?' (results as percentages)

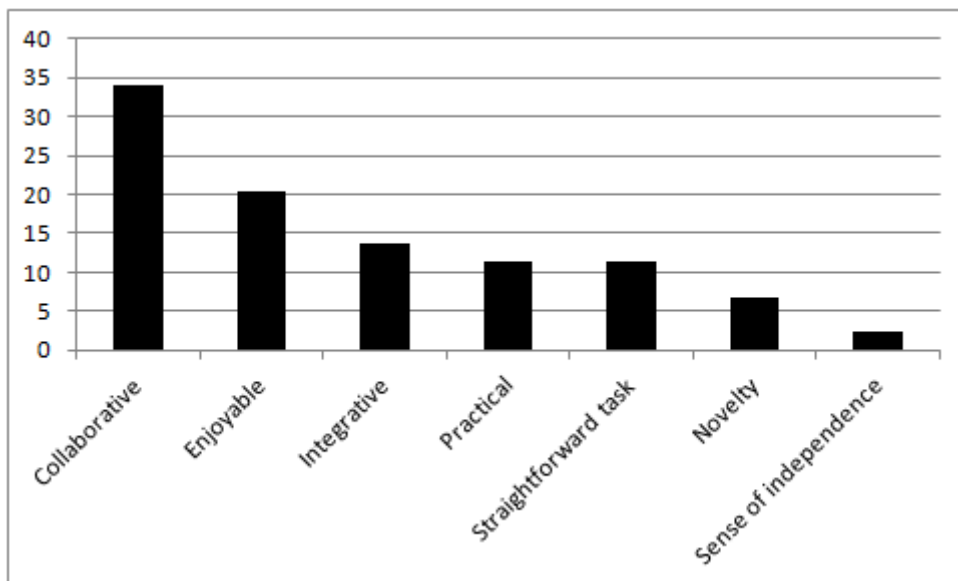


Figure 11.17: 'What did you like most about the wiki activity?' (results as percentages)

These results from the wiki activity are interesting. On one hand, we find that there were quite a few negatives for the students, including the sense of uneven distribution of workload within groups; the difficulty of the task, the difficulty of bringing it to a conclusion through decision making. On the other hand, this is offset by highly positive comments about how enjoyable it was and how much they liked the opportunity to work collaboratively. It was highly encouraging to see that they found it practical and could see its application to their future classroom contexts and also the integrating function of the activity, where they could see the application of so many areas of the course and how they inter-related. Some of the comments extracted from the data illustrate these contrasts between the positive and the negative (all responses from the same students).

'What did you like least about the wiki activity?'

Uneven distribution of workload

- *Some people didn't join the discussion until two days before it was due. This maddened me as we had already done most of the work . . . Also, I don't like group work much but that's only me.*
- *I found that there were only a few in the group that were doing most of the work. It depended on all the members logging in daily and the decision process was slow.*

Difficulty in decision-making process

- *Some people seemed to take up leadership without it being discussed. This, I disliked.*
- *We could not contact one member for quite a while which meant we had to take decisions upon ourselves and hoped it would be okay.*

'What did you like most about the wiki activity?'

Collaborative

- *The fact that it was group work and we had to make decisions based on each post.*
- *I especially liked the way we were able to discuss our opinions as a group and see what everyone else was thinking.*
- *I liked the interactive aspect. I have never participated in any exercise like this in college before so I found it interesting. It's slightly similar to the tutorial experience but the 'online' element renders it new and refreshing.*

### Integrative

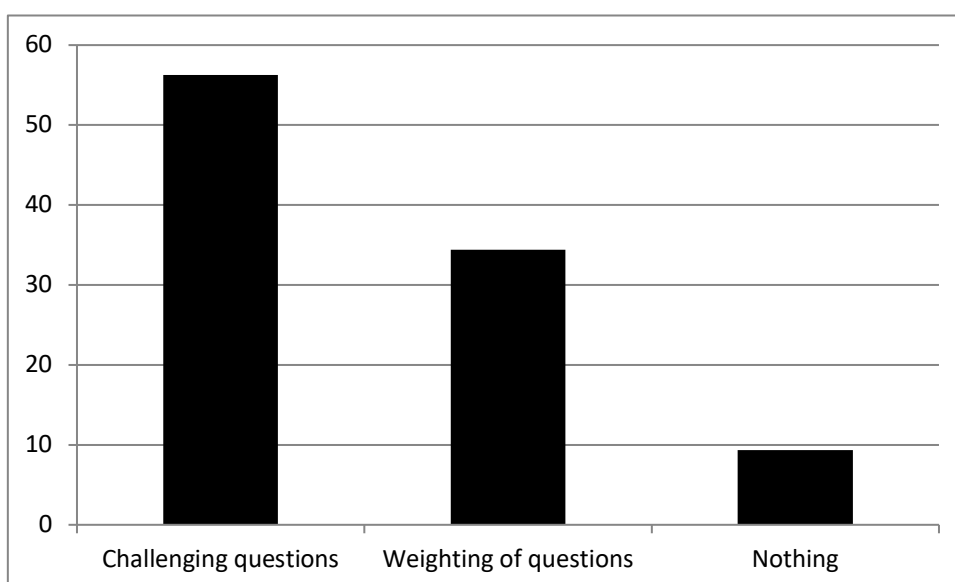
- *It makes you more aware of the differences between teaching children and adults and the different techniques you have to use to keep them interested etc.*

### Enjoyable

- *Enjoy chatting through wiki.*
- *I really enjoyed doing the wiki page.*
- *It was fun.*

### Grammar Quizzes

We asked the learners what they liked least and what they liked most about the grammar quizzes.

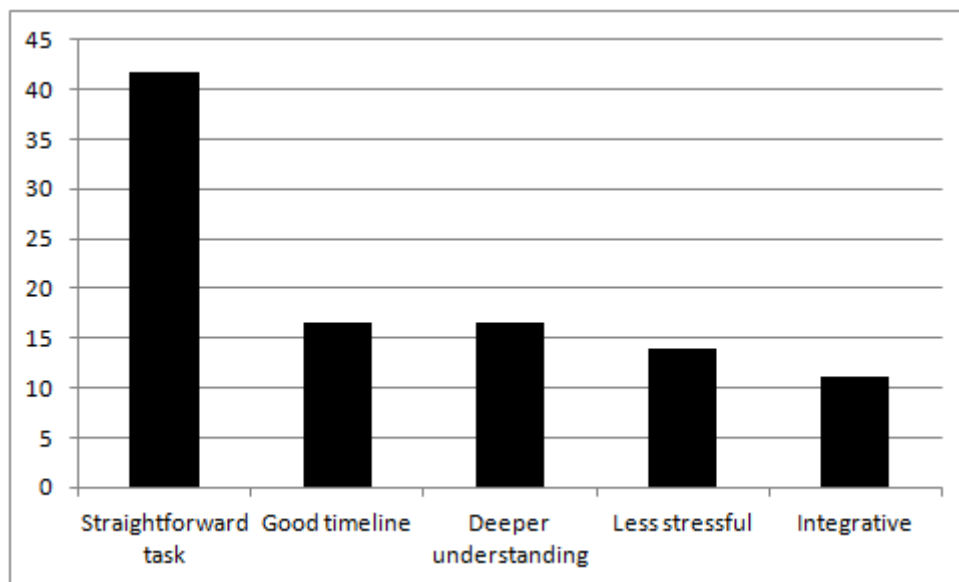


**Figure 11.18: 'What did you like most about the grammar quiz?' (results as percentages)**

It is highly encouraging that nearly 10% of learners had nothing negative to say about the quizzes. However, over 55% felt that the questions were very challenging and over 30% felt that the weighting of questions was a concern. In order to promote integration between the quiz questions and the recommended reading, class notes, lecture captures and vodcasts, the questions were quite challenging and there were only six in each quiz. This meant that students had to revisit the learning materials a number of times and this iterative process between assessment and learning materials



meant that they worked much harder to understand and engage with the task. Each question required a lot of consideration and, to reflect and promote this, each question carried a lot of marks. However, the students felt that more questions with a spread of weighting would have been more favourable as they felt that each question carried a high risk for them (in terms of its percentage of their overall module grade).



**Figure 11.19: ‘What did you like most about the grammar quiz?’ (results as percentages)**

The most positive result in response to this question was that the task of answering online questions was very straightforward as a format of assessment. They also greatly appreciated having long timelines in terms of quiz deadlines, usually one month, and within the quiz itself, students could save their attempts and change them until they finally submitted. This meant that they would often reconsider answers on reviewing material (this ‘process’ information is available to the teacher for analysis in terms of learning analytics). For us, this was evidence of an iterative learning process, where learners moved between course materials and assessment task in a self-regulated attempt to arrive at an understanding. This promoted deeper learning (as discussed in Section 2). In fact, a number of students overtly referred to the instrument of assessment affording them a deeper understanding of the material and almost 15% referred to this form of assessment being less stressful than an end-of-semester grammar exam. There was also reference made to the integrative element of the assessment.

### Straightforward task

- *I liked the way that the questions were based on sentences and we had to guess the verb structure.*
- *As we did the grammar quizzes in the first semester, I was familiar with this exercise. I liked these from the start as it is a little different from the usual exam layout.*
- *There were not too many questions and it was well structured in terms of the questions themselves.*

### Good timeline

- *I liked it because there was no time limit on the activity. This gave you plenty [of] time to complete the quiz.*
- *It was a black and white way of getting marks but you were not pressured by a time limit to see how much you know, which is one of the biggest faults in exams.*

### Deeper understanding

- *It helped me to be able to differentiate between the different tenses and helped me to grasp more of an understanding of the tenses. I really liked the idea of a grammar quiz.*
- *I finally learned for myself the differences between tenses, especially within the past tense and how to use them.*

### Less stressful

- *It is a less pressurised way of examining.*

### Integrative

- *It was a great method of revision for such a theory-based part of the course.*

### Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the transition from a purely face-to-face delivery of a course on Teaching English as a Foreign Language to a blended format, combining traditional face-to-face elements and enriching them through the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). We have moved from a situation where traditional instructional formats were used (namely lectures and tutorials in tandem

with end-of-semester written exams and other written and classroom-based assignments) to a situation where some of these still apply but have been enhanced by the flexibility afforded to us and our learners by virtual learning applications such as wikis, quizzes and discussion forums. Additionally, we have been able to overcome the ephemerality of our classroom presence by recording our lectures and further add to their value by making vodcasts. These provide an opportunity to both summarise face-to-face lectures (and in so doing provide an extra embodiment for learners) and they allow us add more content in manageable amounts, which learners can then access at a time and place that suits them best. We feel this has promoted deeper learning through more manageable content for learners.

Our evaluation shows that while there are challenges and things that we can improve upon, our learners have responded very positively to these innovations and that there is certainly enough evidence that this is something to continue with on our programme. For us, it has been an interesting journey and it could not have happened without the appropriate professional development to bring our e-learning skills into the 21st century. We, in turn, had to provide learner training for our students so that they too could engage with new learning tools. Along the way, there were many frustrations and it was, with hindsight, important to have taken a one-semester lead-in (see Figure 11.5) where we simply became confident in the new virtual learning space.

For our learners, we could see, in comparison to previous years on the programme, that we had provided much more depth of content. We had fostered a level of collaborative learning that we had never before achieved. We had given students the chance to learn independently of us in a scaffolded environment. We have been able to address the challenge of trying to cover extensive content on grammar without properly affording our learners time to engage fully with it. We could watch their work from within the LMS and see how their collaborations were progressing (or not) and yet we did not intrude on their work.

A spin-off that we had not anticipated is that by capturing our lectures and recording vodcast summaries, we have been able to closely scrutinise our own teaching and reflect on how we could better present our material and construct more learning opportunities. We have done this both individually through personal reflection but also through Peer Observation of Teaching (POT).

All in all, despite the challenges of becoming a competent user of e-learning tools, we have found this a highly rewarding experience and cannot see a reversion to solely using face-to-face teaching and exam-based assessment as our key platform for learning.

At a theoretical level, through observance of the instructional strategies laid out earlier in this study, the successful design, development and deployment of two English Language Teaching (ELT) modules was accomplished. A gradual shift along Ertmer and Newby's (1993) continuum (Figure 11.1) from a behaviourist model of learning to a more constructivist one was realised, aided by consistent and moderated use of the student-centred activities available on the Moodle LMS. Allied to this was the implementation of activity theory as a sound framework for designing a CLE both in the classroom and online. Communities of Inquiry (CoI) were fostered among students where a deeper and more self-regulated approach to learning replaced more superficial and summative exam driven engagements with the course and its content. The issues outlined in Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) have been addressed and assessment now has a formative as well as summative dimension.

This chapter documents a process of change and transition, which had many challenges and many rewards. At an institutional level, other colleagues followed a similar path and we are now at a point where there is a critical mass of academics who have moved from traditional face-to-face to BL teaching modes. Crucial to this transition has been the establishment of a support unit called the *Blended Learning Unit* (BLU) and the existence of a stable and supported VLE. With the help of Educational Technologists in this BLU, we have been able to sustain this change within our institution (as advocated by McCarthy, Chapter 1, this volume). On this particular module, we have continued to survey and tweak our materials and assessments every semester. Through the cycle of innovation and evaluation, we can keep learning from our students and improving what we do. Overall, we have learned that both students and lecturers need a lot of support in the transition to BL.

### **Suggested Resources**

Akkoyunlu, B., & Soylu, M. Y. (2006). A study on students' views on blended learning environment. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 7, 43–56. Online at:

[http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde23/pdf/article\\_3.pdf](http://tojde.anadolu.edu.tr/tojde23/pdf/article_3.pdf)

Conole, G. (2013). *Designing for learning in an Open World*. New York: Springer.

Garrison, D. R., & Kanuka, H. (2004). Blended learning: uncovering its transformative potential in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 7(2), 95–105.

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Salmon, G. (2000). *E-Moderating: The key to Teaching and Learning online*. London: Kogan Page Limited.

## Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on your current teaching context: is there any aspect of what you do in a face-to-face classroom environment that might be supplemented by an online task? For example, grammar revision or developing writing skills.
2. If you were to introduce this online supplementary activity, what would be the most suitable type of task, for example, an online quiz, a discussion forum, a wiki, a blog or something else?
3. What challenges do you think your students would face in the transition from a face-to-face to an online task and how would you support them?
4. What challenges would you as a teacher foresee in this transition to an online task and how would you address these in terms of professional development?
5. When you make a change in your teaching or design new materials, it's always important to find out or evaluate whether it has worked and whether your students liked it. If you were to make a change, such as to use a discussion forum, how would you evaluate the transition from a face-to-face discussion task to an online forum?

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#### **NOTE**

<sup>1</sup> Note: in year 3 of the four-year degree programme, undergraduates take a one-year work placement. Many of those who take the modules in English Language Teaching teach English in private and state schools in Europe.