

Conseil Scholaire and LearnNowBC LMS Evaluation

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Precis

Le Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique is planning to expand their current course offerings. Presently, they offer online courses at a primary and secondary level to francophone students within the province. Through the École virtuelle, and a partnership with LearnNowBC, a new initiative would be launched for francophone adults interested in completing high school. Most of these adults reside across the province in a range of locations including both urban and rural settings. The adults are uncomfortable in English, making access to Francophone programming and supports a primary consideration. Le Conseil is seeking a rubric that could be used to determine which LMS system would support the new program.

Rationale

The team felt that the SECTIONS model (Bates and Poole, 2003) provided a valuable structure for establishing the evaluation categories as it goes beyond single categories of instructional design and encompasses structural questions relevant to an organization facing such a decision. However, while all categories within the SECTIONS model are included, not all categories have equal weight. First and foremost, Le Conseil is catering to a Francophone market that requires a fully functional LMS system in the French language, placing greater emphasis on categories that speak to this requirement. Second, the LMS system must support and engage a range of learner skill levels and bandwidth access. Lastly, is the issue of cost. Le Conseil is currently using Claroline and Savie as their LMS but will be moving to Moodle, a free open source system, in September 2012 (C. Côté). Therefore any LMS system that would substantially increase costs should also provide substantial gains in pedagogical features and other evaluation categories. Using the SECTIONS model as adjusted in this evaluation rubric, Le Conseil can evaluate various LMS systems for teaching and learning as well as the ability to integrate into their existing organizational systems. The evaluation rubric has been established to support Bates and Poole's (2003) notion of

first level decision making, where “strategic decisions may be made by the institution, and tactical decisions made by the individual teacher”. (pg. 80).

Using the Rubric

The Rubric is designed to assist in evaluating various LMS systems. The criteria have been written as the expected requirement. If the system offers less functionality, it does not meet expectations. If the system offers greater functionality, it exceeds expectations. In addition, several categories have been bolded. These categories are considered to be non-negotiable where the absence of meeting expectations would remove the LMS from consideration at the initial stage.

LMS Evaluation Rubric

		Key Considerations	Does not meet (-1pts)	Meets (0pts)	Exceeds (1pt)
S	Students	Francophone adults: Course system is fully functional in French: spell check, help, navigation			
		Rural access requires functionality in low bandwidth areas			
E	Ease of use and reliability	User-friendly Navigation and Interface: learn navigation in under 20 minutes (Bates & Poole, 2003)			
		Student technical support is available within 24 hours from host institutions (in French)			
		LMS Platform provides easily learned templates for instructors to create consistent course design and structures for students.			
		LMS can be accessed through multiple devices (including smart phones, tablets, etc)			
		Main host server maintained and reliable for access 24/7.			
		LMS easy to maintain with regulated software upgrades			
C	Costs	Cost of LMS, either Open source or commercial license is within organizations' budget.			
		Operational, maintenance, and support costs such as IT and helpdesk personnel are within organizations' budget			
		Development and Instructional cost per learner (over 5 years) is within budget given projected enrollment.			
T	Teaching and Learning	LMS supports multiple methods of representing content including video, images, text, audio			
		Easily designed templates for incorporating interactive content – wikis, e-portfolios and blogs, discussion forums			

		Assessment tools, on line grade book to provide timely feedback to students			
		Compatible with organizations’ systems for registration, tracking, and assessment.			
		Calendar tool to remind students of due dates			
I	Interactivity	Interactive group-defined discussion boards available to Instructors and students			
		Email and Instant messaging allowing direct contact synchronous and asynchronous interactivity.			
		Interactive tools available – wikis, blogs, Wimba, e-portfolios.			
		Integrated with social networking (Skype, Twitter, Facebook, RSS aggregators)			
		Ability for instructor to monitor student interactions and participation			
O	Organizational Issues	Current technology of host institutions meets specific requirements of the LMS System			
		Le Conseil provides training for use of LMS and for support team to maintain and troubleshoot LMS			
		LMS integrates with current systems for security and technology support with no required changes.			
		Course content can be archived, imported or exported to other LMS easily			
N	Novelty	LMS has a proven track record and demonstrated stability and reliability in other institutions over five years minimum.			
S	Speed	LMS supports quick course design, upload and implementation			
		Course content can be easily updated and changed as required.			
Total Points		Bolded criteria meet or exceed expectations? Yes/no			

References

Bates A. W. & Poole, G. (2003). A Framework for Selecting and Using Technology. *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education*. A.W. Bates and G. Poole (eds.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 75-108

Cote, C. (2012). Directeur de l'école virtuelle du CSF. École virtuelle. Personal interview conducted January 24.