

Course Prototype Description

Online and blended learning environments are thriving in BC with over 284,000 students currently enrolled in some sort of online class (Barbour, 2013). Both online and blended learning environments offer students a great deal of flexibility and provide students the opportunity to work with their peers as they develop essential 21st century skills such as collaboration and problem solving. As BC teachers implement the new curriculum into their practice, it may also be timely to reflect on their pedagogy and practice to see where they can meaningfully add technology and elements of blended or online learning. Furthermore, teachers also need to consider various learning management systems that best suit their technical skill level as well as their students' needs. Below are the details of a blended learning course currently being designed for a grade 6 middle school Physical and Health Education classroom in BC using WordPress as the LMS.

The Learning Management System (LMS)

While it is apparent that online learning is here to stay, the delivery method of these courses is constantly evolving. Currently many online courses rely on a LMS such as Moodle or Blackboard to deliver the content of the course. This type of online learning platform allows instructors to create and administer courses as well as manage learning within these courses (Porto, 2015). With these traditional forms of online course delivery, instructors can create courses and manage student learning and information; however, these platforms are not very mobile friendly. With increased use of mobile devices by students new delivery methods that are mobile friendly are beginning to emerge (Spiro, 2014). An alternative to the traditional LMS is WordPress. For the course currently under development, WordPress has been selected as the LMS and the site will be hosted on School District 34's intranet. WordPress was chosen because it is a straightforward site that allows for a great deal of customization through the additions of plugins (Scott, 2014). Additionally, this LMS is also supported by the District where I work which allows me to create and store the site on the District Intranet, forgoing privacy issues as outlined by FOIPPA (Guide to FOIPPA,

2015). Furthermore, WordPress is an ideal LMS for the middle school age group as it is mobile friendly. Quite often students have greater access to mobile devices than a family or personal computer; devices such as an iPod touch are relatively inexpensive and with WIFI, allow students to access the classroom website; for this reason, a mobile friendly LMS is imperative.

In addition to being mobile friendly, WordPress is also user-friendly. When using WordPress much of the guesswork is taken out of the site set up process. A concern for many teachers is the time that it would take to set up and maintain a LMS. A WordPress site is relatively easy to set up; one would just need to ensure that the selected theme supports the type of set up (for example parent pages etc.) and the ability to run the plugins that are required for the LMS as certain plugins have limited functionality with some themes (Scott, 2014). Once the theme is chosen applying plugins is literally as simple as the click of a mouse. For those teachers who may not be confident in their technical abilities, support may be available at the district level, as it is within my district, or through videos posted on YouTube. There is no official tech support available for WordPress, likely because it is an open sourced software and is constantly undergoing changes by many of the users of the site (Scott, 2014).

The Structure & Design

One of the most important things to consider when designing an online course is the structure itself. Having a clear vision of the intent of the course and learning outcomes is essential in developing an effective course. This next section will outline many of the structural and design aspects of my course.

The objectives in this course reflect the learning outcomes as outlined by the new BC Curriculum set for implementation in September 2016 (BC Curriculum, 2015). According to the outline of this curriculum, the Physical and Health Education (PHE) course is “designed to develop educated citizens who have the knowledge, skills, and understanding they need to be safe, active and healthy citizens throughout their lives” (BC Curriculum, 2015). Through this course student will not only learn how to play specific sports and the rules that govern play as they have learned through the PE curriculum in the past, but now students will also focus on elements that contribute to physical health such as

nutrition and living a balanced lifestyle. Factors that contribute to physical and emotional safety as well as personal development and friendships will also now be covered in the Physical and Health Education course (BC Curriculum, 2015). Finally, respect for and safety in online environments will also be covered within PHE. In this course we will focus on awareness and exploration in the above-mentioned categories and focus on the roles and responsibilities of individual students in each of these areas (BC Curriculum, 2015). The new edition of BC's curriculum breaks courses down into learning strands. This course will follow that same model. Each of the 4 strands in this course (Physical Literacy, Health & Active Living, Social & Community Health and Mental Well Being) will have their own landing page. From there each unit in the will have its own page that will act as a landing page to filter down to individual lesson pages. A WordPress theme that allows for parent pages will be used to ensure that this type of structure can be carried out. Individual units and lessons will be able to be access through the unit landing pages or through the hover over drop down menu along the top of the site.

Assessment is a challenging yet essential part of the teaching and learning process. Teaching a PE course is especially challenging in an online environment as many outcomes require an instructor to actually see an individual complete specific tasks in order to be able to assess them, especially within the *Physical Literacy* and *Healthy and Active Living* strands of the curriculum. It is for this reason that this course will be developed for a blended learning environment. The strands of *Social and Community Health and Mental Well Being* lend themselves well to the online environment. For these two strands variety of assessments will be used throughout the course including quizzes, tests, written assignments, blog posts and final projects. Students should expect each unit to contain at least one quiz and one test or end of unit project for summative assessment. Tests and quizzes can be completed in an online manner either through the BuddyPress plugin or quiz generator plugin. Assignments will also be delivered through the course's WordPress site with the use of the BuddyPress plugin. Badges, through the use of the BadgesOS plugin, will be given for the successful completion of assignments for individual lessons. Each lesson will take approximately one week to complete and students should

expect to complete one assignment per week. Elements like forms are also a possibility for the completion of some less complicated assignments. Furthermore, adding a drop box to the WordPress site will allow students to submit larger assignments directly to the instructor.

Since this course is designed for a blended learning environment traditional face-to-face communicating methods will be used for a significant portion of the course. When teaching the strands that deal with physical fitness much of the teaching feedback for students will be verbal and demonstrative in nature. Likewise it is expected that most of the daily communication between instructor and student will be verbal. For the online portion of the course communicating lessons will be a combination of written instruction and instructional videos. Videos will be recorded using Smartboard tools, screencast -o-matic or other similar screen-casting tool. Videos can be uploaded to YouTube and then either linked in the pages or embedded. Storage limitations may prevent embedding video for an entire course at once, and the use of links may be required. Furthermore, discussion boards and email will also be used to facilitate communication between instructors and students and students amongst themselves. Teaching an online course for students at the grade six level (11-12 years old) may prove to be challenging, as students may need more monitoring and instruction to ensure that they stay on task. However, blended learning, where students spend some time face to face will allow the instructor to clarify concepts and assignments and at the same time develop skills that students will need in the future if they choose to take a fully online course.

To ensure that students are clear on the learning objectives and goals, learning outcomes will be posted on the unit page; furthermore, each individual lesson should also have a reminder of the learning outcome for that particular lesson. This is a visual reminder of a goal students are working towards. As each learning outcome is demonstrated through the completion of an assignment students will receive a badge. Badges are collected and will be displayed on the individuals' WordPress login as lessons are completed. These badges serve as a reminder of the tasks they have accomplished and the outcomes they have completed.

In terms of graphic design, much of this is taken care of with the use of the WordPress theme. This is the benefit of using an LMS like WordPress is that one doesn't necessarily need to focus much attention on aesthetics and design as this is done with the layouts designed for WordPress. I simply need to pick a layout that will enable me to do what I want to do; in my case allowing for parent pages and for the plugins that I require for this site to function as an LMS. Photos and videos will be added to add interest throughout the site.

In regards to navigation tools, a theme will be used that will allow for parent pages so that each strand of the Physical and Health Education will have its own landing page. From there each unit will have its own landing page where students will be able to access individual lessons and learning outcomes. In the specific units, where it is applicable and beneficial, the BuddyPress plugin will be used. Students will be able to access their lessons through this plugin. They will also be able to communicate with classmates through the discussion boards within this plugin and submit their assignments here as well. At this point I foresee much of the online portion of this course being taught through the BuddyPress plugin for WordPress. This, of course, may change once the course is fully developed and undergoing the trial stage as problems tend to arise often at this stage. I envision uploading content in the form of PDF documents as well as videos in order to teach the material and allowing forums and group discussions around topics to enhance the social aspect of the online portion of the class.

Students at the grade six level are between 11 and 12 years old and generally have an understanding of social media and are frequently users of such. Barbour (2013) mentions that when social networks are integrated into formal teaching and learning students "described deeper and more meaningful understanding because they interacted and engaged with more people and more digital content" (p. 12). By using a plugin like BuddyPress to set up the class and distribute information I will be able to monitor student activity and students will be able to access information, chat with their peers and submit their assignments all in the same place. Keeping things simple and centralized will be essential for these young learners as adding too many, or confusing steps will certainly lead to frustration for both student and instructor as confusion leads to the increased

need for clarifying questions as well as assignments being completed and or submitted incorrectly.

Ideally a drip feed would release lessons on pre-determined days to prevent students from working too far ahead, looking to finish the course quickly rather than spending the time to complete assignments adequately. Additionally, the use of a drip feed also ensures that the conversations on discussion boards are all on the same topic.

The Planning

Designing an entire course is a daunting task and quite often it is more efficient for colleagues to work together to break up the workload. While I typically spend a great deal of time collaborating with colleagues when designing a course, for this project I have chosen to work alone because I would like to customize this blended learning course to my specific classroom needs. As the saying goes many hands make for light work, however with the decreased amount of work on my behalf would also come at a loss in terms of customization for my classroom. While there are others within this class that may teach at the same grade level or even within my district, in order to justify the amount of time and energy that will be invested to do a good job of this assignment and content module that follows, this course is going to have to be something that I will actually use in my classroom. It is for this very reason that I have also selected to host this course through my district intranet. Since I am only required to completely produce the content for 1 unit, rather than the content for the entire course, I do feel that this is possible, even though it will require a great time investment. Setting up the WordPress site, complete with my plugins was not overly time consuming, giving me confidence that this task is possible for me to complete on my own. Currently landing pages for strands and units have been set up, but as of yet are empty. The content for a unit based in digital citizenship will be included for the next assignment.

The Audience

The target audience for this course is students at the grade six level who are BC residents as my course deals with BC's curriculum. Ideally these students would also be part of District 34 as that is where I currently teach, and this is also where my WordPress site will be hosted in order to ensure FOIPPA standards for student security are met (Guide to FOIPPA, 2015). This course is designed for a blended learning experience, but could be altered to be taught in a fully online setting if necessary for individual students. Students who are at the grade six level are not generally mature enough to handle the independent learning environments of online learning. This puts too much onus on the learner, and based on my current teaching experience, students at the age of 11 or 12 are not ready for that type of responsibility. However, with the number of courses that are available online and the increased number of students registering in online classes in recent years, it can be assumed that the students who are currently enrolled in grade six will take a fully online course or training at some time in their education career. Barbour (2013) states that students need to have a good sense of digital literacy and personal digital identity before engaging in online learning. This course accomplishes this in a few different ways. To begin with the unit that will be fully developed is a course on digital citizenship also dealing with digital identity. Additionally since the learning in this course is blended it allows students to experience aspects of online learning and collaboration such as working on projects together and completing assignments online all the while still providing that physical connection with a teacher who is able to monitor very closely how students are doing in the course and how they are engaging with other students. Hosting the course on WordPress and using the plugin Buddy Press will allow the instructor to oversee individual students activity as well as how groups are working together.

References:

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