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**Content Module of a Course Prototype:  
Project Documentation**

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**Abstract:**

This project documentation is written in conjunction with the [Course Prototype](#) designed for ETEC 565A through the University of British Columbia and explains aspect of the content module and design. The course prototype is designed for a grade 6 Physical and Health Education class taught in British Columbia, Canada. This project documentation briefly outlines the target audience for the course, a description of the content module including learning outcomes, lesson topics along with communication and assessment strategies. Affordances and limitations of the chosen LMS, WordPress, will also be discussed.

### **Content Module Project Documentation**

The course prototype and completed content module can be found here:

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#### **The Audience**

This course prototype has been designed for students who are enrolled in grade six and who reside in British Columbia as this course is based on the BC's current curriculum. Students who are at the grade six level are not generally mature enough to handle the independent learning environments of online learning as online learning puts too much onus on the learner. For this reason, this course is designed for a blended learning experience where part of the work and instruction will occur in the classroom setting and part will occur online; more specifically, students will be given some class time to work online in the classroom on tablets or computers so the teacher will be able to give guided instruction on how to use the LMS and help clarify any questions students may have. It is also expected that students complete some of the work in this unit at home. Through the Digital Citizenship unit that has been developed for this project students will not only learn how to be good digital citizens, but will also put their knowledge to use as they are working through this unit online. Through monitoring from the teacher students will communicate with each other, participate in discussions, complete assignments and projects in a combined online and classroom environment.

#### **The Unit:**

As BC's new curriculum is being ushered in many teachers are finding drastic changes to certain courses. One of the courses that received a major overhaul is the Physical Education curriculum. The changes are so great that this course has actually undergone a name change to Physical and Health Education (PHE) to reflect additions to the curriculum. Not only will health and nutrition now be taught in PHE, but elements of online safety and community

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building are also being added. The course prototype, as well as the content module, reflect the new strands and outcomes within the PHE course. The fully developed content module lies within the strand of *Social and Community Health* and will focus on Digital Citizenship. The choice to develop a digital citizenship unit comes from a concern found in many middle school classrooms. With the amount of time that students currently spend online playing games and engaging one another in social networks, a certain degree of digital drama finds its way into the classroom. Misunderstandings occur, friends are added to the misunderstanding and bullying sometimes result; all these factors affect learning in the classroom meaning that it is becoming increasingly important for students to learn to be good digital citizen and learn how to behave in an online setting. Furthermore students need to know how to be safe online and how to protect themselves from predators, cyber bullies and digital drama.

The navigation of this course should be fairly straightforward. The course is divided into strands based on the curriculum. Each strand has it's own landing page. From there units related to the strand will be linked. Each unit will also have a landing page where students can find the outcomes and objectives for the unit, a brief description of what they will be learning as well as a list of linked lessons will also be found there. Students can also access units and lessons using the hover over feature in the top menu; for example hovering over the strand will show the units for that strand, hovering over the unit will show the individual lessons. The hover feature may not work on all mobile devices, which is why the lessons will also be linked on the landing page of each unit, and units on the landing page for each strand.

This content module is broken into 7 lessons; each lesson will take 1 week to complete. The unit is broken up into the following lessons: Lesson 1: Cyberspace and Citizenship, Lesson 2: Netiquette, Lesson 3: Copyright, Lesson 4: Online Safety, Lesson 5: Personal and Private Information, Lesson 6: Messaging with Manners, Lesson 7: Cyber Bullying and Digital Drama. Each week students will work through a number of activities (usually between 3 and 4) where they will watch short video clips, read through bits of information,

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participate in discussion forums, take quizzes online and complete assignments that they will post onto the WordPress site.

Assessment of and for learning is one of the most important aspects of teaching and must be considered when designing any course, unit or lesson. Assessment will occur on a lesson basis. Within each lesson students will complete 3-4 activities, where at least one of them will be assessed beyond a simple completion mark. Once students have completed a lesson and posted their assignment for the week each of these will be graded. Additionally, their participation in any discussion forums will also be graded. Criteria for discussions and posts will be established through rubrics and discussion in class. Through the “Grader” plugin the instructor will be able to leave private comments visible only to the author when they are logged in; this is how the majority of assignments will be marked and how feedback will be given to the students. There are also 2 quizzes that students will take throughout the course. These are both on a Google form where students will identify themselves only with a first name to negate any FOIPPA issues. Additionally students will be also complete 2 larger assignments, one in Lesson 4 where students will create a poster and a final project at the end of lesson 7 where students will create a Public Service Announcement. These two projects are larger projects and will weighted as such in the unit. Rubrics for these larger assignments are also provided online.

Upon the completion of weekly lesson tasks students will be automatically awarded badges. Students will need to complete a certain number of steps in order to earn each of these badges; these steps are outlined on the lesson page and can also be reviewed by clicking on individual badges. There are 2 cases where badges will need to be manually awarded by the teacher once the assignment has been marked as these assignments are larger. Furthermore there is a “SuperCitizen” badge that students also have the opportunity to receive once they have completed all the course requirements. Students will also have their participation and posts graded. Furthermore, in order for students to do well in a course, they will need to know the expectations for their assignments. For

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this reason rubrics have been created and are posted whenever there is an assignment that would require further explanation. There are four rubrics that have been posted. The first outlines the expectations for an assignment post, the second the expectations for participating in discussions, the third outlines the expectations their poster assignment in Lesson 4 and the fourth for their for their final project in Lesson 7.

Communication between teacher and students will be a combination of written and verbal instruction. Since students will be spending time in the classroom working online on this unit the teacher has the benefit to give verbal instructions, feedback and answer any questions the students have as they arise. Also, the instructor can, and will, leave feedback in the form of comments on students individual posts, both for the purpose of grading and engaging in discussion. Finally, email will also be used to clarify any misunderstandings that students could have. The instructor will also participate in discussions through forums and the discussion posts that students create. Students can also communicate with each other in similar ways, in fact, students will be expected to comment on each other's posts and respond to each other's comments on the discussion forums as well. The instructor will need to monitor discussions so as to ensure that students are following proper netiquette and communicating respectfully online.

### **The LMS: Affordances and Limitations**

Initially WordPress was chosen as the LMS as it was hailed user friendly and is supported by my school district, meaning that the course prototype is something that I would actually be able to use in my classroom in the very near future. Also, I have been enrolled in a few courses through the MET program where the instructor has used WordPress to varying degrees to deliver the content of the course. I find these courses on WordPress much more visually appealing than those in the Blackboard platform and the navigation seems more intuitive. There are many great aspects to WordPress. After working extensively in this program for the last few months I do believe that WordPress does hold up

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to its claims of being user friendly. It took very little time for me to customize my site with a layout that, in my opinion, works well for my course.

A WordPress site can be turned into a LMS with the installation of a few plugins. There are literally thousands of active plugins that can be used to turn a WordPress site into a powerful LMS. There are a number of plugins, like Buddy Press for example, that allow teachers to manage classes, create discussion boards, create assignments and allow students to hand in their work (Scott, 2012). Badges are available to be issued once students participate in a discussion or post an assignment or project (Scott, 2012). These plugins, and many others, make it possible to use WordPress as a LMS. Plugins that I have used like BB Press and Buddy Press that allow students to communicate with one another and have discussions in Forums which can mimic an actual classroom discussion. Furthermore Buddy Press has the ability to have students form their own groups and work collaboratively within WordPress. Buddy Press apparently also has the ability to set up classes and post assignments within the plugin itself; however, I was not able to successfully do this. Badges can help students have a sense of accomplishment and can be set to automatically appear once students met criteria set by the teacher. The plugin Grader can allow a teacher to post a private grade comment right on a students' post, providing direct feedback while keeping the grade a private matter between student and teacher.

One additional aspect that I appreciate about WordPress is that it is easy for students to navigate and it is mobile friendly. As more students are using mobile devices at home and at school to assist in their learning, having a LMS that is mobile friendly is a tremendous help. Being able to access and work on a course from a mobile devices is very important for middle school aged students as these kids often have greater access to mobile devices than they do a personal or home computer. If students are expected to login and work on a course it is more likely to happen if the LMS is mobile friendly.

While WordPress is easy to use and navigate and does have some great plugins that make it a viable option for an LMS, WordPress is only as good as its

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functional and installed plugins when it comes to teaching. When deciding what plugins to use a quick Google search will turn up numerous blog posts and websites that herald the greatness of certain plugins in terms of educational use. Reading descriptions of some of these plugins made it seem like they could provide life-changing experiences for teacher and student. Upon looking into these plugins more closely, many of these plugins were no longer supported. Since WordPress is open source it is up to the individual plugin creators to maintain their plugin. Along similar lines, frustrations arose when plugins would not work properly and I could not call anyone for help. Since individual creators maintain plugins, there is no help line when the plugins aren't working as expected. One can access videos online to assist them in troubleshooting some plugins, but again, this is only helpful if these videos are updated to reflect the changes in WordPress of the plugin. Several videos I turned to for help were for old and outdated versions of WordPress leaving me without any help to troubleshoot some issues I was having. Other times plugins I had installed were just a let down in terms of functionality. This caused me to change plans and not use a plugin as I had initially intended.

Another limitation to WordPress is the cost. When initially looking into using WordPress there is the promise of free usage. While anyone can sign up for a WordPress blog for free, to turn WordPress into an LMS is anything but. The free version of WordPress does not support plugins meaning that teachers or districts would have to purchase WordPress sites. There are districts that have the rights to host WordPress sites on their intranet, as UBC and my school district both do. In order to maintain the security of the server, individuals are unable to add plugins whenever they want; instead plugins must be requested and are limited in choice. This is understandable from a security standpoint, but frustrating as a student who would like to create something usable. I was able to access more plugins through my district, but again, technical support at the district level needed to be involved. This made it difficult to try out different plugins to see if certain plugins would be a better fit. In the end I found myself



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making due with what I had rather than exploring new plugins that may work better.

There are many great features associated with WordPress. After working with WordPress for the last few months in developing my course I have come to the conclusion that while WordPress does offer simplicity in terms of setting up a course and reliable and easy access for students, these affordances do come with a cost in terms administrative power on the end of teachers. Frustrations with outdated plugins and no technical support to turn to could deter teachers from using WordPress as an LMS. That being said, this digital citizenship content module created for grade 6 students is fully functioning and can be used as part of a Physical and Health Education.

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#### References:

Scott, A. D. (2012). *WordPress for Education*. Olton, Birmingham, GBR: Packt Publishing Ltd.