

Digital or Physical – a teaching space is a teaching space

I'm now 15 weeks into my new position as Learning Technology Support Officer for Educational Design and Engagement – and I'm seeing a lot of similarities from my previous position in Learning Spaces Technology. Both teams look after services, providing user advice and support, contribute to service improvement and course design. EDE mostly supports the Virtual Learning Environment and LST supports physical teaching spaces on campus.

Designing and supporting teaching spaces, whether it's in a physical or an online digital space, is very much the same thing. I find it has a lot to do with user awareness, knowledge of the technology and the reliance on it.

Yes, technology fails. So we do regular maintenance – such as testing of services and updating software and equipment. We can put in place a work-around to make sure we minimise the disruption of teaching and services, but other issues occur due to user error and lack of technical knowledge of systems and tools.

Therefore it's up to Learning Technologists to educate the user and help design a course that works well, both in the physical and online teaching spaces to make sure tools are used correctly and effectively to enhance the student

experience. After all – hybrid teaching, blended learning and flipped classrooms are certainly not a new concept.

Providing training sessions, workshops, user guides, training videos, drop-in sessions and one to one training sometimes just isn't enough. Users don't seem to know where to find the materials or know what support is available. Some might not feel the need to engage until they have a problem.

This was highlighted more so due to the current Covid-19 pandemic forcing users to teach in different ways and using technology they may not have used before. We have evidence of this with the sheer number of support calls coming through Unidesk, with the volume of calls increasing by approx. 400 percent on last year. I do understand it can be quite frustrating and time consuming for the user at times and the “why doesn't it just work” approach to an issue could be avoided by adding a bit of knowledge.

So how do you educate the educator and make them aware of all the help and support that is provided that would prevent them for putting in so many support calls?

Should we be introducing training during course design, during on-boarding or should certain training be mandatory?

Communication on a university level is definitely key and users do need to fully engage for it to be a success. That way we all can help provide the best possible student and user experience.

What exciting technological times we live in and thank goodness for Microsoft Teams.

I have recently been looking to make the leap from working and supporting teaching in physical learning spaces to the virtual learning environment (VLE).

Due to the current pandemic forcing the university to close the campus and moving teaching and events online – I have seen a large reduction in my workload given the fact my department *Learning Spaces Technology* supports 400 physical teaching spaces, over 2000 open access PCs, on site conferences and events alongside the equipment loans service. Therefore, I have taken this less-than-ideal situation as an opportunity to utilise my existing digital knowledge and learn new skills within online technology enhanced learning by helping-out colleagues in other *LTW* departments.

I have recently started a secondment assisting the *Technology Enhanced Learning Service and Media Team* within *DLAM* who look after the University's VLE and all its tools.

I have found the experience of starting with the new team very surreal having not physically met my new colleagues, although we are on regular video calls and instant message chat, I have still been made to feel very welcome and part of the team. After a lot of online sessions and a couple of weeks of shadowing (very much online support for the online support) I believe I'm now pretty much up and running and have gained a lot more knowledge in using and supporting the following:

- VLE *Blackboard Learn*
- Virtual classroom and meeting tool *Blackboard Collaborate*
- *Turnitin* assignment submission tool
- Online portfolio *PebblePad*
- Blogging services (which helped me start this blog)
- Lecture recording tool *Media Hopper Replay and Create*
- *Kaltura Capture* desktop recording tool

I have also taken the opportunity to complete online *LinkedIn Learning* courses on Learning Technologies such as Teaching with Technology, Flipping Classrooms, Teaching Techniques: Blended Learning and Creating Multimedia Learning. I am also in the process of completing courses on WordPress, HTML Essential Training and Python programming fundamentals. So much learning!

I do feel my skills have transferred well as I am still helping to look after services, providing user support and contribute to service improvement. In a way a lot of it feels very familiar. When you feel that dread as you read that unidesk call for the first time and think oh no!!! To the satisfaction of closing that same call after working through the problem or issue with a "thank you for all your help" from a grateful end user or colleague. I do still have a lot to learn but I'm really enjoying the experience and new challenges so far and look forward to what the coming weeks will bring.

Working within a Technology Enhanced Environment

The progression in technology has always interested me and I'm in the fortunate position of working within ISG, LTW at the University of Edinburgh to see how new technologies emerge and change the way we support teaching.

I have been working with Learning Spaces Technology for eight years now progressing from AV/IT Service Team Technician to Service Team Supervisor.

Within that time I have witnessed teaching spaces evolve from having a roller screen, overhead and carousel projectors with wired remote controls, a chalky blackboard and no sound reinforcement – to a completely integrated audio visual system. This integrated system features 4k resolution projectors and LCD touch screen, a dedicated PC, multimedia players, document cameras, inputs for user devices wired and wireless, system sound reinforcement and multiple radio microphones, with system capabilities of recording and live streaming all controlled by a button or touch panel... incredible! The lecturer now has a way of engaging with the students by producing multimedia and blended learning – quite literally “flipping the classroom”.

Technology has come a long way in such a short space of time and I am impressed by how well we all have managed to keep up

and adapt. I understand that rapid progress is key to the student experience and enhances learning.

My experience has always been in physical learning spaces but recently I have been getting a taste for virtual learning environments. I believe this is due to my interest in keeping up with the progression of technologies and their role within teaching. This is where I think the university really can enhance learning for the students and further improve on the student experience.

I'm looking forward to utilizing my digital skills and learn new skills within technology enhanced learning online.