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EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE LEARNING DESIGN AND COURSE CREATION (LDCC) WORKSHOP ON THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE ENHANCEMENT OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN BELARUS (BELL) PROJECT

Abstract

Recently, national governments have introduced limitations on traditional approaches to curriculum delivery to cope with the impact of COVID-19. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have had to scramble to adjust their teaching and learning models in order to 'pivot online'. As such, there is a pressing need for professional development of staff to deliver learning at a distance, based on robust distance and online education design frameworks. One such professional development offering is the LDCC Workshop from the Open University UK (UKOU) which, in September 2018, was attended by staff from six Belarusian HEIs involved in the ERASMUS+ funded Enhancement of Lifelong Learning in Belarus (BELL) Project. The Belarusian project partners were tasked with developing and delivering five distance and online courses for the first time in Belarus. The 18-month longitudinal study presented here evalu-

ated the impact of the LDCC Workshop on the working practices of the participants and the design and realisation of their courses.

Context

The Learning Design and Course Creation (LDCC) Workshop allows staff from the UKOU to engage with the professional development of academics and student support workers in other HEIs through workshops derived from current practice at the UKOU. It provides participants with an experience which mirrors as closely as possible the experience of a multi-disciplinary team tasked with creating and producing a new online course at the UKOU, although within a narrower timespan. It has been designed to promote student-focused design and to model the learning design principles of:

- encouraging design conversations and collaboration in design;
- using tools, instruments and activities to describe and share designs;
- developing data and learning analytics to support and guide decision-making (Galley, 2015).

In the BELL Project LDCC Workshop the participants were organised into teams of five and worked together through a programme of activities. Each team decided on their course subject area, duration and level, allocated roles and responsibilities to one another (in line with self-declared discipline expertise, skills, interests and competencies that they perceived as important) and developed a vision statement for their course using the free, online 'learning design wordwheel' (Openlearn, 2016; Olney, Rienties & Toetenel, 2019). The participants then considered the particular needs, characteristics and learning preferences of their hypothetical students by creating one or more student profiles. Once completed, they were supported in the process of generating learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks in accordance with constructive alignment principles (Biggs, 1996). The iterative design cycle process was then visualised and structured using the Activity Types Classification Framework incorporating the allocation of anticipated student workload (Conole, 2013; Olney, Rienties & Toetenel, 2019).

Participants were then given access to their own VLE website with an initial layout of three to five weeks’ worth of study. They worked together to transfer their design online and to see it come to life on the bespoke Moodle-based UKOU Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The participants were encouraged to reflect on both the hypothetical student experience — and their own — through a number of inbuilt reflective activities which included a final presentation to their peers.

Data collection

Data was gathered from LDCC Workshop participants using 3 instruments which are summarised below:

Instru- ment	Question type	Question focus	No. of respon- dents	When
A (written)	Likert Free text	1. How easy/difficult is LDCC to implement? 2. What would need to change to implement LDCC?	18	September 2018
B (online)	Likert Multiple choice	1. Four questions on perceptions of ‘helpfulness’, ‘ease of use’, ‘how used’ and ‘intention to use’ for LDCC activities. 2. What would need to change to implement LDCC?	19	March 2020
C (online qualitative)	Semi-structured interview	Reflections on how the LDCC activities had been used in BELL course design, in other course design, and intentions for the future. Reflections on findings from instruments A & B.	9	April 2020

Results

Instrument A

12 of the 18 respondents (67%) considered implementing the OU approach to be either ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’.

The content analysis of the free text responses suggested that the respondents considered management/structural/policy/leadership and organisational ‘system’ change (n=7) to be the most important thing that would need to change, followed by technical/platform/website and IT ‘system’ change (n=4), and ‘establishing and operating teams’ (n=3).

Instrument B

Responses to the first four questions in Instrument B are summarised in Figures 1–4 below.

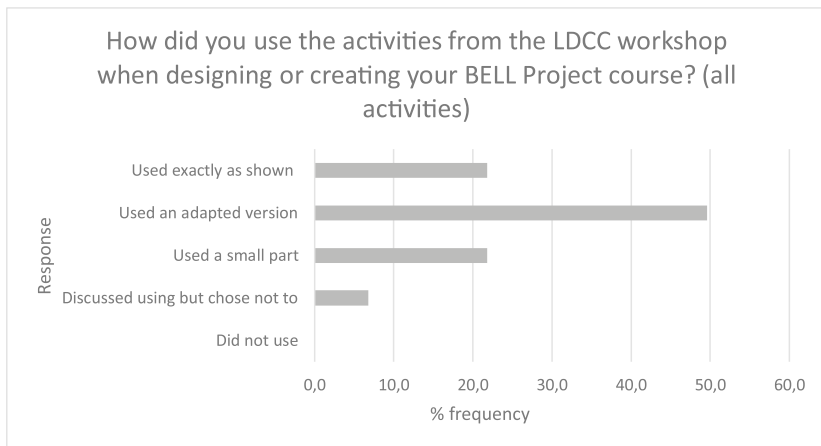


Figure 1 — *Collated responses to Question 1, Instrument B*

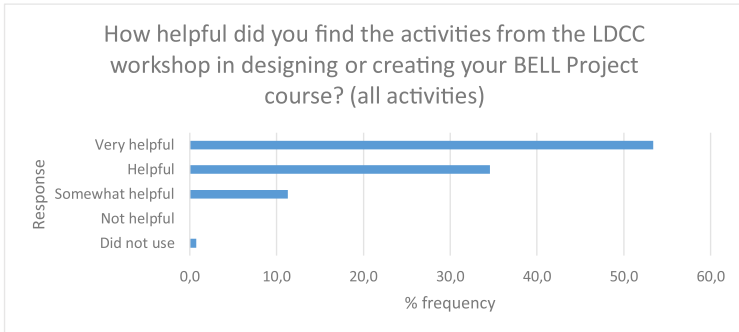


Figure 2 — Collated responses to Question 2, Instrument B

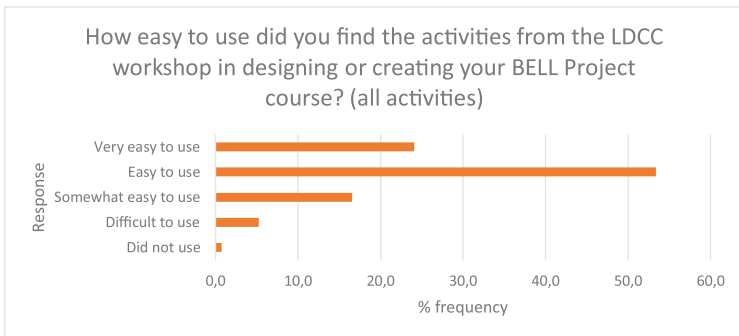


Figure 3 — Collated responses to Question 3, Instrument B

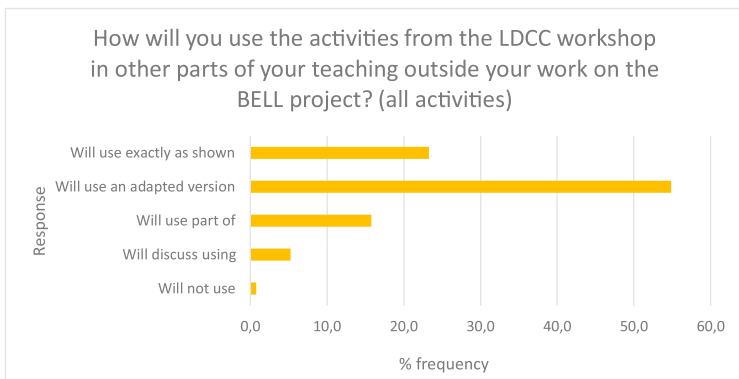


Figure 4 — Collated responses to Question 4, Instrument B

A comparison of the use of the individual activities by the BELL participants is shown in Figure 5 below:

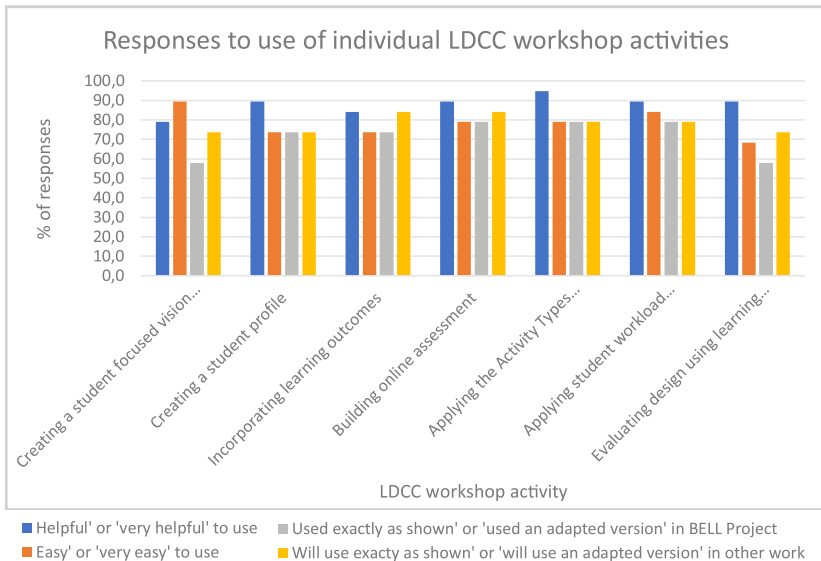


Figure 5 — Comparison of the use of the individual workshop activities

When responding in Instrument B for the second time to the question previously asked in Instrument A, the respondents still considered management/structural/policy/leadership and organisational ‘system’ change (n=8) to be the most important thing that would need to change, followed by technical/platform/website and IT ‘system’ change (n=3), and ‘establishing and operating teams’ (n=3). These results were very similar to the responses from Instrument A.

Instrument C

When asked at interview the general reactions offered by the respondents (anonymised and referred to by the numbers in square brackets) to the LDCC Workshop were very positive. For example, respondents described their experience as, ‘very fruitful’ (06), ‘very useful’ (07), and,

making ‘changes in our way of thinking in our minds’ (08). One respondent went so far as to describe their reaction to the workshop as like the, ‘discovery of a new continent by Columbus’ (02) due to the way it introduced approaches that could lead to design being ‘done in a completely different way’ (02).

The student profile activity appeared to particularly resonate with the respondents as a way to focus in on matching design decisions with prospective students’ needs and motivations (01, 13, 14) in the design of their BELL courses. Several also referred to using the Activity Types Classification Framework to structure their learning designs in their BELL courses (01, 07, 10) and was, for one respondent at least, ‘my best experience of the OU’ (14).

Instrument A responses indicated that immediately after the LDCC workshop 12 of the 18 respondents (66%) considered implementing the OU approaches would be either ‘difficult’ or ‘very difficult’. However, on reflection, after the modules were designed and delivered, those interviewed considered implementing the LDCC approaches to be much easier than originally perceived. Several respondents pointed out that once they started with the work and faced the practical necessities of the challenge any big concerns about difficulties were dealt with successfully (01, 06, 10, 14). On completion, some respondents commented that they actually found the approaches ‘easy to adapt’ (19) or unproblematic because they were similar to what they may have ‘usually used by initiative’ (02). In fact, responses to Q3, *Instrument B* suggested that after using experientially around three quarters of the respondents now considered the LDCC activities either ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to use.

Both *Instrument A* and *Instrument B* found that management/structural/policy/leadership and organisational ‘system’ change was considered the most important thing that would need to be adopted in order to introduce the LDCC design approach more widely into the relevant HEI. For one respondent the key difficulty was clearly found in ‘inappropriate organisational structure and regulations’ (19). However, when asked to interpret this finding, other respondents pointed out that it was

not the aim of either themselves or the BELL project to 'spread it [online education] all over the university' (02) and there was 'no possibility to make some dramatic changes' (08) but better to focus on small developments. Whilst they considered their experience a valuable starting point there was also positivity that the development of their module would make their HEI 'noticeable' (13), able to take advantage of a more general 'digitisation of economy and education' (13) and should be considered as showing 'positive results to use on-line education in our country' (14).

Conclusion and Further Work

The results suggest that on the whole the LDCC Workshop was well received by the participants and the content was very applicable to their context. The LDCC Workshop was not specifically designed for use with Belarusian HEIs (it was developed for Chinese audiences), but this does not seem to have been detrimental. The evidence presented here points strongly to the conclusion that the LDCC Workshop could be utilised effectively as a professional development activity to support other HEIs wishing to 'pivot' online.

LIST OF REFERENCES

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