**Are we making progress? Progression through learners’ interaction in OpenStudio across a qualification**

**Janet Sumner:**

Nicole, could you start off by telling me how you got involved with eSTEeM in the first place?

**Nicole Lotz:**

My colleagues from Design, Derek Jones and Georgy Holden, we've been involved in other projects like that, that were externally funded and we looked at the virtual studio in different disciplines like architecture or design and eSTEeM offered us the perfect opportunity to look at a studio that was actually created at The Open University and that is used by our students.

**Janet Sumner:**

Now when you say virtual studio is that some kind of online space where students can showcase their designs?

**Nicole Lotz:**

Exactly, that's exactly it. It's a kind of social network which is image based so you basically upload your designs that you produce at home and you show it off to everyone else and other people can like your design work or comment on it and very importantly you have the opportunity to look at everyone else's work so that's quite exciting.

**Janet Sumner:**

So, can you give me some more specific details about your eSTEeM project, you know what was the overall aim and why did you choose to investigate this particular area?

**Nicole Lotz:**

The OpenStudio has been designed actually at the design group and it's been adopted everywhere at the University but we don't quite know how it is used across a qualification so often times you design for a specific module but you don't really know what happens in other modules. So, we ask are we making progress? How are students using the studio across a qualification?

We did five work packages, a lot of work. So first of all we looked at statistics of engagement, so how many design students share, how many comments people do, all these things. In a second work package we looked at the conversations that occur, do they change are they the same over the years?

A third work package looked at the qualities of those designs rated by expert and how that relates to the interactions of those designs by students and we also interviewed students and asked for their experiences of using the studio across the qualification; and very finally, a lot of work I know, very finally we invited other STEM scholars to join in a curriculum workshop where we explored how they could use our findings and helping to design their qualification pathways with OpenStudio in their minds.

**Janet Sumner:**

So, we're talking about a qualification here, we're talking about students using the design, the virtual studio, over a long period of time so level 1, level 2, level 3, and those five work packages, what did you find out?

**Nicole Lotz:**

A very interesting finding was that in fact students decreased their use of the studio over time, I know.

**Janet Sumner:**

I'm surprised.

**Nicole Lotz:**

Very surprising I know but we also found more differentiated kind of the users across each level but we're really interesting and helped us to explain why that is. So, first of all we found that working just looking at what everyone else is doing is actually very important. It helps others to see what everyone else is doing, how I'm fitting in, and this actually relates to student success. This was this one measure that relates to how successful students are.

**Janet Sumner:**

But if they're not posting how do you know the lurkers are there?

**Nicole Lotz:**

We know it because we can count the views of our targets yeah so we know and it's so important you usually don't know what you don't measure but since we can measure the interaction it gives us really interesting insights and here we found that the type of conversation changes. So, in the first level when you just start up you are much more in kind of encouraging or socialising through your comments like oh, well done! In a second level it changes, you're much more critical you're looking for opportunities to use your knowledge to comment on other's work. And in the third level students have much more elaborate comments.

**Janet Sumner:**

What kind of feedback did you get from the students?

**Nicole Lotz:**

The students gave us really good feedback. They say the student is really valuable to develop their skills because they can compared to others and can ask how did you do that? But also to not feel alone and isolated at the distance, I think that's really important for OU students. And also the curriculum workshops confirmed that other disciplines love using the studio pedagogy but might not be aware of the subtle differences or a progression that might be needed so that was great in order for us to also help us implement strategies for progression but not just in design but across STEM.

**Janet Sumner:**

It sounds like a great project, what impact do you think it's had for the STEM Faculty and the wider Open University?

**Nicole Lotz:**

I think it has a great impact because now we know that it's not just one studio but there's slight differentiations and you need to understand them especially if it's used across the faculties at the OU. And I think that will improve the experience our students have learning with the Open University. I think eSTEeM is fantastic and supporting these kind of projects, we've made a lot of progress and have new opportunities as well to connect the scholars elsewhere, and finally, I'm doing a new project with eSTEeM and I can use what I've learned in this project and build up a community of learners using OpenStudio throughout the qualification.

**Janet Sumner:**

Okay, well when you get going on project number two Nicole you must come back and tell us how it's going tell us all about it. Thanks so much.

**Nicole Lotz:**

I will do, thank you.