***Title*** Building an aesthetic VLE for creative visual learners

***Abstract***

This research will present a best practice model for integrating the VLE in creative arts disciplines to augment blended learning through a participatory approach. It is acknowledged that having a VLE alone is not sufficient; its effective implementation is what contributes to a good learning experience. This can only be possible through the conscious and active human intervention, good learning design or pedagogical input, and the sensitive handling of the process by trained professionals (Salmon, 2005; JISC, 2011).

The study is based on a comprehensive VLE content analysis conducted across two faculties within the creative arts (Schools of Art, Design and Architecture; and Music, Humanities and Media) at the University of Huddersfield involving over 700 individual module areas across a number of courses. Initially, a qualitative study was conducted to assess how the VLE is being used in the creative disciplines as an interactive and collaborative tool for teaching and learning. This involved a number of focus groups and interviews which explored the themes of good practice, knowledge gaps, and future mechanisms for embedding and enhancing learning through the use of technology. It was found that the four main barriers relating to the use of the VLE in blended learning were: lack of flexibility in relation to navigation and interface; time in developing resources; competency level of tutors (confidence in developing online resources balanced against other flexible open resources); and factors affecting the engagement of ‘digital residents’ (White & Le Cornu, 2011).

The experimental approach adopted in this study involved a partnership between the Learning Technology Advisor and the academic members of staff to enable suitable strategies to be developed and implemented to improve navigation and aesthetics within the VLE specific to the creative learners. In a way this took on the form of a participatory research as explained by Bergold and Thomas (2012) where in the participants took a step back cognitively from their routine practices in relation to their use of the VLE and questioned and reconsidered the established methods of VLE use in their day to day teaching and learning activities. The model presented identifies a potential solution to overcome the challenge of embedding the VLE in creative arts disciplines. The findings from this work demonstrate the positive impact on staff and student experience, and promote good practice in blended learning through the VLE.

***Reference:***

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