

Spark: UAL Creative Teaching and Learning Journal

‘1minuteCPD’: Connecting digital presence and professionalism through experiments in micro-learning

Catherine Wasiuk, Learning Technologist (Distance Learning), University of Manchester; Kate Soper, Colin McAllister-Gibson and Chris Meadows, Technology Enhanced Learning Advisers, Manchester Metropolitan University

Abstract

University staff increasingly face the challenges presented by the need to operate effectively in a complex, digitally networked environment. This study discusses micro-learning as a potentially successful vehicle to support staff in their Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It describes an experimental approach to training used at Manchester Metropolitan University, which led to the creation of ‘1minuteCPD’ – an open educational resource (OER) that rapidly reached wider communities beyond this institution. As a professional development resource, this blog format has potential, providing an effective mechanism that builds both digital presence and more targeted professional development and addressing the difficulties of time management faced by staff in adapting to the fast transitioning digital environments used within higher education.

Keywords

micro-learning; open educational resource (OER); Continuing Professional Development; training; e-learning

Introduction

One of the biggest challenges facing higher education today involves digital capability. Prensky’s controversial notion of ‘Digital Natives’ (2001) has led to expanded focus on digital disassociation in education and it is important to consider how these issues influence staff presence and professionalisation (Austen *et al*, 2016). Manchester Metropolitan University is the fifth largest university by student population in the UK – with 4,500 staff, of which 1,500 are academics. Within this busy environment, faculty support programmes have revealed high degrees of anxiety and decreasing levels of engagement, with staff repeatedly citing lack of time as the reason for non-engagement with training, as mirrored by much research in this area (Singh and Hardaker, 2014; Kopcha, 2012).

With the aim of overcoming these barriers to training, the Learning Innovation team at MMU embarked on an experiment, using micro-learning techniques, delivered in the form of a flexible, easily accessible open educational resource (OER). Our blog, [1minuteCPD](#) provides a daily, drip-fed collection of tips on educational technologies. Via micro-learning, the OER breaks down time barriers to training, by creating resources that only take one minute to digest and can be accessed anytime, anyplace, anyhow. These short, regular iterations expose staff to different technologies and techniques, building foundations and familiarity with technologies – sparking a culture of ‘I can’ as a positive preface to future professional development.

Faced with the need to alleviate pressures on academic teaching staff, the daily advice topics needed to be easy to implement and directly relevant to students' learning needs. To identify relevant topics, we have used thematic analysis of thousands of comments, garnered from our Internal Student Survey (ISS), in which students rate satisfaction with courses or learning programmes. Focusing on technology enhanced learning across the institution, our analyses determined five core developmental areas, which we then incorporated into posts:

1. Effective communications
2. Moodle organisation
3. High quality learning resources
4. Use of audio / visuals
5. Interactive lectures

Through this on-going evidence-based approach, *1minuteCPD* helps the University close the feedback loop between learning these technologies and their application, providing staff with informed, relevant, targeted and timely training interventions.

The 'big idea'

We are a small team of learning technologists, working to develop digital competence across learning and teaching platforms. At the start of the project in December 2015, our main focus was on academic staff, as we noted a decline in their attendance of support programmes, which thus reduced digital development amongst staff and consequently, the student experience. We detected growing anxiety and frustration from academic colleagues, who were under increasing time constraints. Pressures fueled by a proliferation of competing requirements from the growing demands of management duties, increasingly savvy and discerning students and the increase in data generated by the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Internal Student Survey (ISS).

This explosion of metrics and the subsequent demands they placed on academics, eroded the time available for Continuing Professional Development (CPD), with figures indicating that sessions on digital and technology enhanced learning were particularly hard hit and under-attended. In this context, traditional approaches – such as workshops, drop-ins, one-to-one sessions, dedicated programme training, cross faculty training meetings or webinars – that had been successful in the past, began to stall and enter into noticeable decline. The question of how to get academic staff to engage became the biggest issue faced by our team.

High sign up rates to these training sessions indicated a demand for support and interest, but these attrition rates translated into low attendance, with lack of time cited as an excuse. We became aware of an over reliance on immediacy, a demand for just-in-time or retrospective training – 'Oops this went wrong, how do I fix it?'. Following yet more disappointing attendance at sessions in December 2015 two Technology Enhanced Learning Advisors at MMU, Catherine Wasiuk and Kate Soper, devised the '1minuteCPD' – with the aim to deliver 1 minute of CPD every day to all staff for a year, which would equate to over 6 hours of professional training.

In order to assist academic staff with their job, *1minuteCPD* needed to respond directly to student needs. It made sense to ground *1minuteCPD* into the Internal Student Survey (ISS), which runs tri-annually and provides thematic analysis of student feedback, used internally to strategically focus faculty development. 42,000 free text comments were filtered down to approximately 2,072 on Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). The comments were coded according to themes, allowing us to identify key elements, those things appreciated by students, those aspect of teaching they would like to be improved.

Philosophies

Further to the intention that *1minuteCPD* should be timely and require minimal time investment, its development was underpinned by a number of philosophical themes.

Access

Ease of access was to be fundamental: the resource needed to be shared and posts accessed with ease – minimising barriers (so no logins, passwords, firewall). We created a public online blog connected to social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Since the first post on 1 January 2016, the initial take-up and engagement – both inside and outside the institution – has been encouraging. As of September 2016, we had over 36,580 views from 10,108 unique visitors across the globe.

Answers

Because *1minuteCPD* is pitched towards staff – and intended as a constructive response to their feedback as well as that of students – it asks a question before offering a training-based solution:

Haven't got enough time? Well, this will only take a minute!
Can't come to a training session? No problem, we'll come to you!

The targeted topics delivered through this format flip traditional models of delivering training – though we did not realise it at the time, this was 'micro-learning' in action.



Figure 1: Post #314, 'Outlook Calendar getting cluttered? Create a new one!' *1minuteCPD* (2016)

Openness

1minuteCPD was devised with the distinct aim that it be utilised and re-purposed elsewhere. Time-constraints to digital training are issues unique to MMU, so why not let others benefit? Accordingly, the platforms used no branding, so that the concept could become a community resource, easily

adopted by people outside of our institution. The blog-format and templates have since been released under a Creative Commons license, allowing them to be reused (with acknowledgement). The share-alike ethos that instigated *1minuteCPD* is thus integral to the overall project as it moves forward.

Relevance

Equally critical was relevancy: bearing in mind our intention towards openness, the content of *1minutecpd* was not only be relevant to University staff, but also wider communities. To make the resource more useful to varied communities, we cross-referenced our posts with those of the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and their 'Digital Capability Framework' (2016). Content needed to be up to date, accessible to all and of a wide and varied range and the technology free or as near to cost neutral as possible.

With these philosophies in mind, we set up *1minuteCPD* and created our first post, uploaded and pre-scheduled using Wordpress. We use other tools and platforms, including Google Drive to record progress and establish a schedule. Videos are hosted on YouTube, with titles cross-referencing or linking to the blog. Twitter has become one of our main distribution methods, with automated *1minuteCPD* tweets are linked to each blog post. Scheduled updates are likewise automatically added to Facebook. Within MMU, *1minuteCPD* is promoted by each of the faculties in weekly newsletters, encouraging colleagues to follow the blog via email, meaning they receive the daily post direct to their inbox.

Evaluation

Upon reflection the timing of the initial idea and the impetus to have something in place for the start of the year meant that time was of the essence. As such, strategic thinking was not at the forefront during these early stages of development. Consequently, reflection, revision and reconsideration have been required along the way. Overall, reactions from colleagues – and the higher education community – have indicated that, despite this haste, we may have tapped into something. Feedback gathered via a user survey has revealed that the majority of the audience viewed *1minuteCPD* either on a daily or weekly basis – the majority being weekly – with 70% of respondents reporting that they have implemented parts of advice into their teaching practice. Further evidenced by the traction on Twitter from re-tweets and impressions.

Impact within the University has been wide and varied, with good engagement from support staff in addition to academic staff and management staff at all levels. There has been particularly strong enthusiasm from library and technical staff. The MMU library now has weekly briefings on topics featured on *1minuteCPD*, indicating that the initiative has a wider reach and application beyond our intentions, outside of traditional approaches.

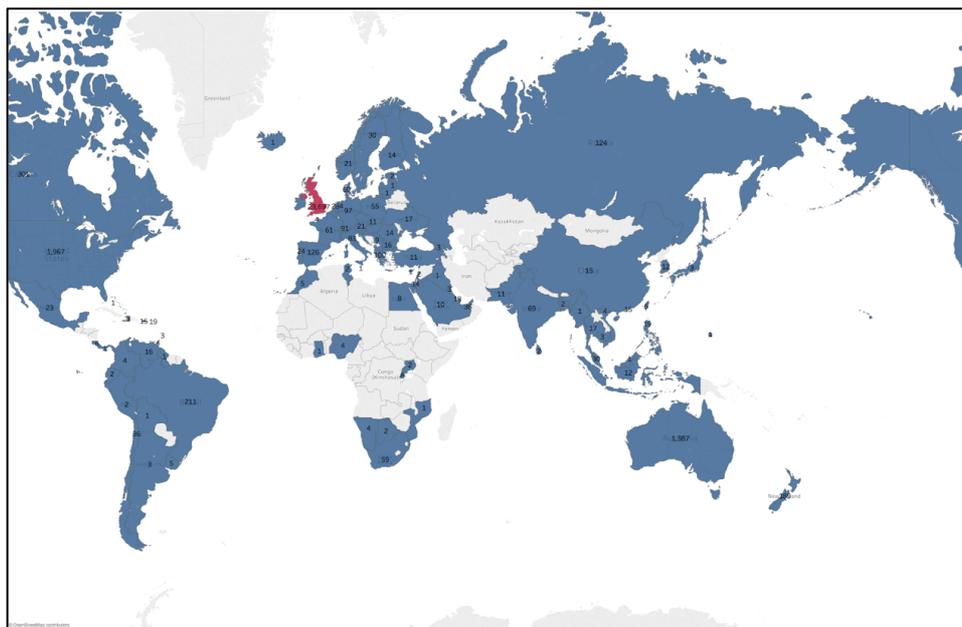


Figure 2: Map of original *1minuteCPD* blog global reach (Wasiuk *et al*, September 2016).

In broader higher education, the impact has been substantial. As of September 2016 there have been over 50,000 views of *1minuteCPD* material, from over 12,000 visitors, in 107 countries. As expected from an English language resource, visitors from the UK, Australia, New Zealand and America are among the countries viewing posts most often.

Since launching this project, the JISC have approached the *1minuteCPD* team and requested to include these materials in the JISC Digital Capability Analysis Tool and that we in turn, point our users towards such resources. This project has sparked conversations with institutions that we had not previously had contact with: several universities have adopted *1minuteCPD* as a resource with others referencing and re-purposing content as per the Creative Commons release. Others have approached us to provide consultancy in assisting to develop a micro-learning approach.

In the next steps of this project – extending conversations, training and resources within MMU and developing *1minuteCPD* – we hope to engage with colleagues on national and international levels. Potential adaptations may include a 'Take 5' approach – with longer videos and/or a student-focused version. More work is to be done as we extend these conversations, pursue a collaboration with the JISC and undertake more extensive analysis of *1minuteCPD* analytics, enabling us to leverage more use, map content and consider its relevance to national frameworks.

Conclusion

We identified micro-learning as a novel strategy to tackle the pervasive issue of time-anxiety as an impediment to CPD. The solution we proposed was a bite-sized approach with encouragement to access habitually. This approach, allied with the ISS research we conducted identified emerging themes for content to impact positively on the institutional strategy.

Highlighting themes of effective digital communication, consistent use of digital tools, interactivity in learning and the use of audio visual tools targeted support in developing staff digital capability. This equipped staff with new digital skills allowing them to more fully utilize the digital in supporting and enhancing the student experience.

References

Austen, L., Parkin, H.J., Jones-Devitt, S., McDonald, K. and Irwin, B. (2016) *Digital capability and teaching excellence: an integrative review exploring what infrastructure and strategies are necessary to support effective use of technology enabled learning (TEL)*. Sheffield Hallam University: QAA Subscriber Research Series 2016-17. Available at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Digital-capability-and-teaching-excellence-2016.pdf>

(Accessed 16 March 2017).

Joint Informaton Systems Committee, JISC (2016) *Building Digital Capability*. Available at:

<https://www.jisc.ac.uk/rd/projects/building-digital-capability> (Accessed: 16 March 2017).

Kopcha, T.J. (2012) 'Teachers' perceptions of the barriers to technology integration and practices with technology under situated professional development', *Computers and Education*, 59(4), pp.1109-1121. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.05.014>.

Prensky, M (2001) *Mark Prensky*. Available at: <http://marcprensky.com/digital-native/> (Accessed: 16 March 2017).

Singh, G. and Hardaker, G. (2014) 'Barriers and enablers to adoption and diffusion of eLearning: a systematic review of the literature—a need for an integrative approach', *Education + Training*, 56(2/3), pp.105-121. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2012-0123>.

Soper, K. (2016) 'Outlook Calendar getting cluttered? Create a new one!', *#1minuteCPD: Improve your digital skills one minute at a time*, 9 November. Available at:

<https://1minutecpd.wordpress.com/2016/11/09/314-outlook-calendar-getting-cluttered-create-a-new-one/> (Accessed: 16 March 2017).

Wasiuk, C., Soper, K. McAllister-Gibson, C. and Meadows, C. (2017) *#1minuteCPD: Improve your digital skills one minute at a time*. Available at: <https://1minutecpd.wordpress.com/> (Accessed 16 March 2016).

Biographies

Catherine Wasiuk is a Learning Technologist (Distance Learning) at the University of Manchester. Catherine is currently developing new Masters programmes at Manchester for distance learning. She is responsible for the full scope of design including robust quality assurance processes. Catherine has a Masters in Electronic Communication and Publishing from UCL, a Postgraduate Certificate in E-learning and is a Fellow of the HEA.

Kate Soper is a Technology Enhanced Learning Advisor for Manchester Metropolitan University. Kate has been working in e-learning and e-assessment for the past 11 years, with a particular interest in staff development and support. Kate has a PgCert in Online and Distance Education and is currently working towards her Masters in Academic Practice. Kate's research so far has focused predominantly on staff use of, and relationship with, the University's Virtual Learning Environment, Moodle.

Colin McAllister-Gibson is a Technology Enhanced Learning Advisor at Manchester Metropolitan University. In addition to researching technology to facilitate teaching and learning, Colin develops staff in the Faculty of Science and Engineering in their use of Digital tools in teaching and learning. He was previously the Innovation Manager at Burnley College, leading the strategic approach of the

college to Technology Enhanced Learning. He is a Fellow of the HEA and is completing a Masters in Academic Practice.

Chris Meadows is a Technology Enhanced Learning Advisor at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has worked in a film production background and was a Creative Trainer for Apple for a number of years before venturing into Learning Technology. He has a Masters in Academic Practice, is a Fellow of the HEA and is currently working towards a Doctorate in Education. His research interests include the use of Virtual Reality and visualising learning analytics.