Transcript of an interview with Anne McLoughlin (https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/education/professional-development/professional-development-tutor-profiles/anne-mclough/)

Anne is the leader of Edge Hill's dyslexia programme. The programme is a blended course – mostly online - delivered via our Blackboard VLE and the Collaborate web conferencing system, with some face to face conference days. I interviewed Anne earlier this month, and asked about her experiencing using the Collaborate product, how the system has been received by students, and her advice to colleagues about using web conferencing in their courses.

(The audio recording can be accessed via this link: http://www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/5767/

Q: How did you hear about the Collaborate service?

I first heard through the TEL steering group and I thought it sounded quite interesting. At that time we had Irfan as our technologist, dedicated to our programme - he was driving it forward the time. So I started to get involved in some pilots – testing things out, and just sort of built on from there. I found it quite an interesting concept.

Q: What was the rationale behind using the video conferencing system?

Part of the rationale for us was that we have students all over the country – Birmingham, London, Yorkshire, and the North East – so it was to try to engage those students and make them feel part of the University – to give them a better student experience – because some of the feedback we've had previously was that students who were off campus didn't get the same experience as on campus students. So we thought that would be one way of helping to engage them.

Another [driver] is that our courses are blended learning courses where there are elements of face to face, and online teaching, so we thought Collaborate was a good way of getting them to engage with online learning after the face to face teaching was finished … We wanted to try that out and see if that engaged them.

Q: How are things going with Collaborate at the moment?

We're using it with all the groups. One of the main ways … is … the course inductions … so all the students have the same induction whether they are in London or Ormskirk. [Inductions are] … online via Collaborate … [presented by] … the course tutor and/or module leader as well as Learning Services and Learning Technologists. [Students are shown] … how to use the library, how to get a card, and then the Learning Technologist gives a general overview of how to navigate way around Blackboard. One of the things we've found most useful is [the recording feature] … so if a month later they forget how to use the library they can go back and just remind themselves. [We've notice that] … doing face to face inductions … for a whole day and … they had forgotten a lot of it by the time they got out of the door.

[We also] … use it to supplement the face to face days, so after they've had a session on assessment we'll do a Collaborate session in-between – to do follow up work on assessment – so it enhances the face to face sessions.

Q: What do the student think? What sort of feedback have you had from the students who have actually use the Collaborate product?

Students either love it, or they don't like it. On the whole the experience has been good. But, our students are all postgraduates and full time teachers [who have] … different levels of knowledge of technologies (not like undergraduate students) – so some have adapted to it better than others. We felt the ones that were struggling with it, they just needed a bit more support. The ones that couldn't use it intuitively, we've given them a little more support. On the whole, there's always some people that say it's not for them. One of the other problems is the timing of the sessions – the day they can't access it – because we tend to do them between 4&6pm – and some say they can't do it because [of childcare commitments]. For those people, we have a recorded session – and although that's useful, they haven't got the interaction that allows them to ask questions and get some straight answers. The only thing I'm using [Collaborate] for at the moment is to do tutorials with distance students – [noting that] students who *are* on campus can ask for a tutorial at any time. [So for] … distance students … I just get them into a Collaborate session.

Q: Which Collaborate do you get them into – noting that we have 'Tutor Rooms' – is that what you're using?

Yes – I used that yesterday for the first time – just noticing it yestday – I tried it – and it worked. So I've now set that up and the student came into that room at that time. It seems fairly straightforward to use. That worked quite well – a 20 min to half an hour session [1].

Q: You've mentioned some issues in terms of people's experiences and competence with IT. Has that been the main issue?

A: We sometimes have issues with the technology – such as the Java thing – it's quite often a problem [2].

Q: What about Mobile – do any of the students use the Mobile App?

A: Yes they do … the ones that use the Mobile I've found the least problematic. They tend to be able to 'just use it' – very easily.

Q: Do you know of any using on a 10-12" tablet?

A: Both – phones and iPads – generally finding that fairly straightforward. The ones that have Java problems tend to be because their schools haven't go Java on their computers. But these problems we can generally resolve – sometimes it takes a bit of time to support them with that.

Q: So – the Learning Technology and the support that you've got – our guides [3], technologists, tutorials, and sessions [4]. Which have you found the most useful from the Learning Technology team?

A: There is an 'Introduction to Collaborate' [**LINK**] that we put on our VLE so they can download that before they actually come to the session – the document that says what you need – which microphone etc. They have that before the session. Sometimes we still need to put it up to talk them through things. Those that bother to 2read it do find [they have no problems].

Q: What would your advice to other staff who are thinking of have a look at the Collaborate product with a view to using it in their teaching and learning?

A: I'd definitely say have a go at it – it'd be good to have a practice run just with some students that were open to using it. Perhaps a small number to start with. And then just 'go for it' – there might still be one or two technical problems – but there's nothing that you can't get over. I think it has more advantages than disadvantages. The feedback we've had from students [says] that it has made them feel more part of the University.

Q: You've become a bit of an expert with Collaborate – but cast your mind back to the really early days. What do you think were some of the difficulties that you originally had, and how did you get around them?

A: I think it's the fear of doing it in the first place. At that time we were luck to have [a dedicated technologist] on our shoulder to help us with that – but it was really knowing that there was somebody there to help with that rather than physically being there – even if only at the end of a phone – that was still helpful. I would say to anybody – just have a go. I think most students can cope with it as well – they all do online shopping, and booking holidays! It's not that different! It's having high expectations that the students will be able to use it rather that the fact that they're not going to be able to use it – **EXPECT** them to be able to do it.

Q: Have I omitted anything about the product / service?

Q: I found the support from the Learning Technology [Department] has been really good. We did have Irfan as our designated technologist, but there was a period when we didn't … and other members of the LTD team were very helpful. You responded to phone calls from students saying 'I can't get on' – and other members of the LTD have helped as well. We do manage to get over most of the problems.

Q: Thank you.

A: Thank you – I love it!

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Anne would be pleased to discuss her approach to using Collaborate with anyone at Edge Hill – her contact details are above.

If you have more general questions about the Collaborate service or any of the tools within the Learning Edge Suite contact your Learning Technologist (see the **Faculty Contacts on this page**) or email the LTD Team on LTDSupport@edgehill.ac.uk or 01695 650754 x7754.

[1] Note that I'm creating a blog post on how to have a virtual office link at the end of your signature – so watch out for that in a few days time – or contact one of the LTD team if you want to do it now.

[2] Blackboard have removed the need for Java in the next version of Collaborate.

[3] We have many guides and resources – here are some that we understand have been very useful to colleagues:

https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/wiki/display/ls/University+Systems+for+Teaching+and+Learning

Blackboard Collaborate: Audio and Video Equipment (Device Guide and Recommendations).

Planning Collaborate Sessiosn: An Overview (http://www.eshare.edgehill.ac.uk/4850/)

Introduction by Blackboard: Collaborate Web Conferencing Online Orientation: (http://www.brainshark.com/blackboardinc/vu?pi=zGLzYw5XBz35Sgz0)

The LTD Best of TEL Blogs – such as:
http://blogs.edgehill.ac.uk/learningedge/2014/08/27/collaborating-all-over-the-world/

[4] Developing Digital Excellence sessions – such as
Basic Introduction to Blackboard Collaborate (Student Services Webinar) 22/07/14