

Episode 033: Pedagogy of Canvas

Hello and welcome to episode 33 of the learning and Teaching at Newcastle University podcast.

My name is Ben Steel. I'm going to do a quick introduction for this episode.

In today's episode, we have one of a conversation with Matt Laidler and Dan Graham from LTDs.

They speak to Dr Adam Potts and Dr Chris Graham about their canvas courses, and essentially, as the title suggests, the pedagogy of canvas.

This is a two parter, and there's quite a lot of information some is going to hand over straight to Matt.

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the LTDS podcast. My name is Matt Laidler and I'm joined by my colleague Dan Graham.

Hello, I'm Dan Graham, and we are learning enhancement and technology advisors in the Learning and Teaching Development Service.

We advise people on best practise for canvas. We organise a lot of the training and we're here today to talk to two to two

academics who've done some really interesting things with their canvas courses.

If you want to introduce yourselves. Hi everyone. I'm Chris Graham.

I'm a senior lecturer and I'm also the director of digital learning and Maths Physics.

So I'm a keen canvas user.

But I also work with our digital learning team to support teaching and learning of mathematics through the use of technology.

So we develop tools like I can. No, the assessment system that you may have heard of and a tool for accessibility as well.

So great to see you. Hi, everyone. My name is Adam Potts.

I'm a senior lecturer in philosophy, also the co-director of Education for School X. So in that role,

I've been thinking about digital education, some of the practises that are being talked about at the FEC and in the previous role before that,

I was the DPD in philosophy, as well as kind of had an oversight of the programme and trying to think about what the canvas looks like,

the philosophy as well as so, yeah, fantastic. OK.

So I guess the first questions I think will be relevant for a lot of people now that we're sort of

approaching that point in the year where things are starting to wind down for this semester a little bit.

How do you plan for designing your courses in canvas?

How do you kind of approach the design phase of planning your how are you going to run a course with canvas?

So. So I was thinking about designing my courses. I'm really talking about, first of all, starting from the from my school's come this blueprint.

So here I'm thinking about those elements that we need to ensure consistency for.

So how do students find out key information?

So the assessment information, the syllabus, contact details, that sort of thing so that so forms are so baseline.

And then I'm really thinking about how students who are entering my compass course are flowing from the home page to get to their learning material,

to get whatever, to whatever it is that they need for adult content like teaching session.

And I, I tend to do that through countless pages.

And so I'll talk about that, I think getting a little bit later in more depth.

I think more more generally, I I really thinking about thinking about building my module almost from canvas up, if you like so.

So thinking of of first rather than the lectures or countries is sort of that a home for, you know, announcements and and course material?

It's really my if I think about a week's content,

it's the the first connexion I have with students will typically be an announcement saying, you know,

I've released this week's material and they have all sort of input in front of them rather than the my first contact being in in the lecture and saying, this is what we're covering this week. By the way, there's some material online, so I'm really thinking about building up from from canvas upwards.

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I guess some overlap, maybe some some some little differences as well.

I mean, I do have and I'll talk about this.

Maybe in the next question, I do have a template for modules that I kind of roll over on the year that I think have worked quite well.

So I always have that in mind. Like Chris was saying, I think the homepage is this really important.

So to kind of rethink this this year and I've actually used a kind of intro,

I did a module video intro to the module that I put in the home page rather than text, and that's been a nice place holder.

But I guess a little bit different from Chris. I guess my and this design comes out with the course design from lectures.

So in the existentialism module, I do, for instance, I have three themes that I group the weeks through.

So the themes or nihilism, faith and hope and I have certain topics.

There are certain things that are associated with those themes so that that kind of thematic structure of the module feeds into a module mark,

which I used to use in the module handbook I display in lectures I put at key points on canvas,

and that module marks somatic route essentially allows us to organise the material on canvas.

And then I start thinking about, OK, well, which material beyond lecture slides or seminar questions for specific topics.

Deal with those kind of thematic issues? And where would I want to place them so.

So the depending on the module,

the organisation of that module that will feed into the canvas design a little bit so similar CRISPR slight difference, but that's great.

And I guess we'll start with you for this one item then. So you talked you mentioned a little bit about this.

So how do you organise the content within canvas then? Yeah.

So um, so yeah, on on the on the home page at trial this year using module intro videos to sort of talk about the aims of the modules,

not just in terms of the maths, but in terms of, you know, the specific topics I'll be covered this year, the assessment,

the structure, the learning expectations and then in the module sections.

Yeah, like Chris, I'm pretty much using the pages, but I have a of a template that I go through.

So and it's quite close to the initial the kind of default template that's offered by Congress with some tweaks.

So I always have a weekly overview section.

And then I was up two items. So the first I have a session intro video.

So record this on PowerPoint. It's normally about five minutes. It's introducing the week it displays the module map.

It talks about the aims and objectives, and it talks about what they need to be doing that week to complete the session.

Then following that, I have it planning the time,

planning your time section that just breaks down the timing and that's always put in line with the moth.

So it's always a bit of a guessing game.

How long it might take a student to read it a chapter, but you might say, OK, this is going to take you an hour and 20 minutes.

You've got a five minute intro video, spend 20 minutes with the seminar questions and jot down some answers.

So I always start with the weekly overview. Then I have a pre-work section, which is always like I either read or watch.

So with philosophy, there's always normally set reading each week. As I say, sometimes I might include some audio visual content on there.

So what I did with existentialism when I was in reducing the themes.

So if it was the first week on nihilism, for instance, I did a I did a nihilism intro video, which was about 15 minutes long.

And that would kind of give an overview of what that concept is, the theme, how it really relates to the thinkers.

And I'd roll out over each week for everything dealing with nihilism as an optional content in case you missed it.

Then following that, I'll have the lecture and seminar material,

so I'll try and post the the PowerPoint slides in advance and only just use PowerPoint.

I'll embed the recap in there from the recap page. As well, so they can go from the slides into the video once that's recorded.

And I was trying to post the Semiole questions with aims and objectives in advance as well.

Then the the weekly wrap up section at the end, as well as summarising the session.

There was module maps that I was talking about. I mean, this is an idea I stole from my colleague rather than going on from years ago.

And I've just never left it, by the way, so I can't claim it. But the module map that just talks week when materials about what the topics are,

when the online materials are available are displayed up in the wrap up every week so they can see what's coming up next and what's yeah,

where we've been, where we're going. And that's a nice kind of feed into the to the following week,

very similar sort of philosophy to item in terms of ensuring that students have that material easily accessible to them.

And I'm a big fan of campus pages, and I sort of take the the weekly overview that we have in the in the blueprints.

I sort of take that and run with it. So. So normally, Craig, I normally call these a weekly dashboard.

I call them dashboards and I'll usually create one for each week of contents.

Now, Mike, I'm looking at things that my my contents of quite naturally falls on, on, on weekly new topics.

I think I'm lucky in that respect that it makes it very easy to organise material on on canvas.

So I will have one of these weekly dashboards for each week,

and I usually link those directly from the homepage, making the current with the most prominent link.

And and on that weekly dashboard, I use a very similar philosophy to what I can talk about,

that I'm really presenting everything that the student needs.

Basically, in trying to make that one click away. So I'm happy to have the the aims and objectives of that week.

I have the learning material.

I do watch them just in terms of trying to set expectations around the time that students will need to spend on on different pieces of material.

I think that's a really good idea. So embedded is usually an embedded sort of introduction to the week's content, similar to what I was talking about.

Zoom links the timetable for the week ahead in terms of one of the lectures, one of the office hours.

Our formative assessment links just a sentence. When is your next assessment?

Is this date here? Or here's how to find it. So really, I'm thinking about when students enter my course.

They one click away from the weekly dashboard and then just one more click away from whatever it is.

It's out there, but they're looking for within within weeks.

I'm really thinking about that and about that flow. So, yeah, some similarities.

But I I use I'm a big fan of campus pages, and so creating tables and getting everything laid out was easy to to navigate.

So how do you make sure that your course? I mean, it sounds like you're doing way more than the baseline,

but how do you how would you what advice would you give people to make sure that their course is kind of meeting the baseline?

And how do you ensure that you do that? Yeah.

So I guess in terms of ensuring the baseline, it's it's it's very tempting taking that approach with with canvas pages.

It's very tempting, for instance, to hide the modules page because I'd like to encourage students down the pages route proxy.

I don't do that.

I try to stick to old schools blueprint as closely as possible as sort of the base so that students have a consistent experience across.

So if that is what they used to and of the modules they have reached in my own and I think in terms of the canvas baseline,

it's really primarily it's it's sort of that blueprint level.

I think in our school we get a lot of those blueprint items ticked off.

And so actually my involvement with ensuring that we, we meet the baseline is more about being involved with the design of our school blueprint.

So we sort of think about the the guidelines for the baseline, but also about student feedback.

So what we get through module stage evaluations and that sort of thing to help steer the

the contents of that and then and then during the academic year will then ensure that

we have complaints about baseline by including looking at compass courses of our pure

observation and sort of stage level overview of what's going on and covers courses that.

I mean, I think what Chris mentioned was really important in terms of, you know,

thinking about baseline in terms of learning and teaching within your unit.

And I think that's where we really were, where our focus in philosophy as well.

I mean, because we know Congress does a lot of the work for us in terms of recommending baselines, and it is good at catching a lot of that.

But yeah, thinking about what that looks like in terms of signposting, learning objectives,

thinking about what that looks like in terms of PowerPoint displays and accessibility of PDFs and things like that.

I guess maybe something I do individually which feeds into this, which, you know,

would be things like the mini intro videos and the module maps, which are just these.

I mean, you know, you don't necessarily have to be doing them on a module.

It's not seeing a lot of that content isn't covered, say in the lecture or in the handbook or something like that.

But it just gives students a variety of materials and ways of engaging with some of those key things that are essential to just accessing a module.

So without too much repetition, repetition,

trying to kind of diversify how you present certain information seems to be working quite well in terms of

the stuff I've been doing fantastic and that that kind of pulls nicely to the next question I wanted to ask,

which is you briefly touched upon the concept of accessibility.

And I think that's something that that is obviously really important for us as a university to make sure that all our materials are accessible.

So how do you go about doing that? How do you go about making sure that you know your campus courses are as accessible as possible?

Yes. I mean, obviously looking in the design phase around PowerPoints and videos and things like looking at some of the baseline in terms of,

you know, the base ends up being offered buyouts and trying to follow in line with that, you know, captioning videos.

Although when I did do this and Microsoft Stream, I did a caption once that I was teaching Dada an early 20th century movement and a

translate is due to an hour late into the module and realised students had been lost.

And that is so it's not always foolproof, but keep an eye on things like that.

I think, like Chris was saying, having kind of peer observation,

learning and teaching committees where you sharing good practise and MIT module surveys,

I think getting a sense of what students are finding in terms of access accessibility.

And not because I mean, obviously, we have these baselines and templates that we can use,

but each student's different and it's getting a sense of, yeah, what they found accessible,

what they found,

perhaps not and trying to respond to that in real time as well as sort of the MIT module servers have been quite important for capturing that.

Yeah. And this is not some important things 18 months and I'm not repeating and definitely we'll go into some of my other captions.

Stories should not be appropriate for your podcast, and accessibility in in months is a real challenge, actually,

because we, we we tend to write material using software that goes beyond, you know, your words and your PowerPoint.

And so typically in maths, some lecture material is prepared using typesetting language,

hillbilly tech and it's very tech will typically produce a PDF, which is not very accessible.

So actually, this is something that we we as a digital learning team in innocent must have some physics of of pixel panel.

And we've actually developed an external tool that integrates with canvas.

It's called Kyra.

And and so in my modules and many of our other modules in maths, we use this tool to present material as an alternative to just uploading a PDF.

And it produces it takes a latex source code this this type second language and it produces a NHT Mal,

a website output that is very accessible along with a PDF version and of the ways of the flexible ways to sort of digest content.

And so that's that's amazing. I mean, things are really that we we have these sort of extra issues in maths that we need to need to accommodate.

And that's been our approach. And that's all sort of integrated in with with canvas as an external tool.

Fantastic. So again, just so how do you use audio visual materials and cameras?

How do you integrate that into your into your practise?

So in terms of terms of any V, really, I'm really thinking here about, you know, the recap videos,

whether that's the lectures that's being recorded or videos that I've prepared.

I think Adam mentioned earlier were all about embedding those video recordings inside covers pages.

I think that is a really nice thing to do from a couple of perspectives.

It's it's one less click for the students to go and find that kind of video, but also keeps everything together.

So, you know, so for Adam, if he's going to have a video introduction on a topic, there's no point in having that video, you know,

sticking a folder somewhere it should be right there with with the material itself, and I think that's really important.

So I do that on my weekly dashboards where it's where it's relevant.

One more thing I do, which is which is a it's an overhead,

and I do like to change the titles of my recap lecture recordings from from the default that you get into a more readable date,

the lecture number, the topic that was covered in the lecture.

It only takes a few seconds to to do from this sort of recap page in such study course.

And yes, it is a pain to remember. I usually have a calendar and notification weekly calendar notification, remind me,

but I think it does make a big difference in terms of students being able to find, you know, looking back.

We knew that students use these recordings for revisions.

You know, when they're going back to that material, seeing just a bunch of dates is not very helpful.

So to been able to pinpoint what they're looking for, I think is very helpful.

And so that's one more thing that I do, but it does have that additional overhead of work.

One thing I have found in terms of audio visual stuff for something like philosophy that's found it's

really good for essay writing tips and guidance because I always find when you deliver that live.

So it was quite a dull grey session and you get the death stare sometimes from students.

So it allows you. It frees up a week where you can be teaching content or you can do something a bit more engaging.

But it also just gives the material that you can kind of dip in and out of, whether it's referring to the questions or really specific essay writing stuff.

So I always try and do that on a module every semester and make sure embed that in one of the weeks.

How do you integrate canvas into your teaching practise?

So well, I think I mean, there's the integration in the in the kind of much, not just traditional sense of set reading before lecture and making sure the contents on there.

But I think getting these these little additions in terms of introductory videos, videos may be related to thematic issues or essay writing.

It starts to pull converts into the teaching is more of as much more Garissa resource and a tool.

And I think, you know,

signposting that early on in the lectures and communications that it's not just the kind of file Dom where they go find reading.

It's a place where there's there's other resources. I mean, one thing, although it's a bit challenging to maintain,

sometimes I found it work quite well during COVID was to have discussion boards on certain content as well.

So this this felt like the you know, there was a bridge between each lecture.

We went just waiting for the the next lecture or the of the seminar.

So I guess that's the main way really, really indicating what the use of canvas is for students on that on the module quite early on.

I will often star of lectures with a with a tour of what's new on canvas.

I think always thinking about that, you know, link from canvas to lectures and lectures from canvas.

And I think, as Adam says, it's really about making it feel like, you know, it's the home,

it's the home of the module rather than just something that's just on the side and an added extra for my from a practical sessions,

from my modules I'm using to I talked about earlier to embed those worksheets, right, right inside canvas.

So it really does feel like that's the home of that material.

Yeah. And that seems like a good place to stop for this episode.

You've probably noticed all episodes on monthly now, however, for this episode, we're going to release Part two next week.

So thank you to Matt and Dan from LTDS and Adam and Chris.

We'll hear more from them next week.