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## Blended learning design: a shared experience

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### Abstract

Five Flemish Higher Education Institutions developed an institution-transcending professionalization course, with focus on: learning design, for blended and multi-campus learning, in a Professional Learning Design Team (PLDT).

These elements are no common practice and therefore innovative within the context of Flemish higher education.

The course was first offered in Spring 2015, in an assignment-based and blended format. This allowed participants to personally experience these forms of instruction during their professionalization. At the same time, the course was an example of blended learning.

17 teams of 3-4 people started the course. 1 team dropped out. 8 teams offered blended learning during the 1st semester of this academic year. For 2 other teams all blended course materials are ready for the next semester. 1 Team had to shelve its plans because of other priorities. For 5 teams we are currently still missing the information.

The participants appreciated working in a PLD-team and the step-by-step assignment-based blended approach. The relative short time frame and regular supervision and intervision were determining factors for the successful completion of the process.

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## 1. Introduction

Every teacher tries to create quality learning material. Some do it systematically from a didactic framework or from existing material, others do it intuitively and artistically from an implicit beliefs-based approach (Conole & Witthaus, 2012). Consequently, development processes do not always follow the 'instruction manual' (Coun & Specht, 2008; Schlusmans, Koper & Giesbertz, 2004).

During quality assessment it is striking how much the quality of the learning material varies. Some professors are able to develop material in such a way that 'teaching in the strictest sense of the word' is no longer needed, because support, directions, assignments and tests are provided along with the content. Other courses are characterized by a summary of isolated learning contents. In this case, students are expected to be sufficiently creative to think of 'learning activities' to process the content. An education curriculum can therefore show a variety of different courses with a range of different technical and educational approaches. Literature (Abdous & He, 2008) is clear about the consequences of too little attention being paid to learning design: low quality instruction.

There is also a big variety as to when the learning material is ready for use. Some professors develop their material well before the course is offered. In other cases, lessons are prepared only the evening or even the night before. It goes without saying, that in this latter case there is little time for reflection.

In most of higher education (in Flanders) only students give feedback on the learning resources and lessons. And this is only done after the learning activity has been offered. This procedure is in sharp contrast with scientific research, where peer-review usually precedes publication.

In 'Designing with models', Van Den Boom (2011) describes how the learning design and development process is usually not well streamlined. The process is poorly standardized and too few guidelines are in place for quality assurance.

In Flemish higher education, teachers are often hired based on experience in the course of study they are going to teach. Therefore, the teacher's 'Content Knowledge' is usually fine. However, to create quality instruction, didactic and instructional technology skills are also vital. Unfortunately, these are not always sufficiently present.

Five Flemish higher education institutions collaborated to address the problems described above. Together they developed an institution-transcending professionalization course, which supports its staff in developing their didactic and instructional technology competences. This assignment-based and blended course, focusses on:

- learning design,
- for blended and / or multi-campus instruction,
- in a professional learning design team.

## 2. The 'Masterclass Professional Learning Design Teams'

To develop this professionalization course, a project was started: 'Masterclass Professional Learning Design Teams' (MC PLDT). The project went from 1 February 2014 to 1 February 2016. The 1st year of the project was used to develop the course and work on creating awareness on 'Learning Design', 'Professional Learning Design Teams' and 'Blended Learning'. During the 2nd year, focused on the implementation of the Masterclass, the evaluation and the sustainable implementation in the involved.

### 2.1 Masterclass development

The masterclass professionalizes teams of teachers, didactic staff and instructional technologists to become professional pioneers in blended and / or multi-campus learning.

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