Institutional VLEs – is 'vanilla' content as good as it gets?

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Context

- VLEs in market place > decade

- Fairly 'established' learning technology

- Possibly a little 'passé'

- In the shadow of Web 2.0?

- Predominant use as 'content repository'?

Harmon and Jones – model of web usage

1. Administrative	Providing only **administrative information** (e.g. grades, syllabus, office hours). It is **possible for students to pass the class without accessing the web course site**. Direction of communication is Teacher to Student.
2. Supplemental	In addition to the above, **the course site may provide course materials or enrichment materials, which the students can also get in print form**. Assignment descriptions, a calendar, and other course activity guidelines are provided. **Students can pass the course without accessing the web course site, but might have trouble getting materials.** Direction of communication is mostly Teacher to Student. An exception may be the Mail tool, where students can ask questions individually of the instructor.
3. Essential	As the name implies, **to be successful students must access the web course**. **Students** will not only **retrieve** course materials but will **submit** assignments and **participate** in discussions that reinforce or expand face-to-face discussions. Direction of communication is now Teacher to Student and Student to Teacher. Inter-student learning is not the goal at this level but student interactions may take place. This level **still relies on regular class meetings**.
4. Communal	At this level the **formation of a learning community becomes evident** as **students engage in teaching one another** and guiding the direction of instruction. At this level **class meetings may be infrequent**.
5. Immersive	This is the **fully online class** where the **instructor and students may never meet face to face**.

Source: Harmon, S., Jones, M. (1999). The five levels of web use in education: Factors to consider in planning online courses. Educational Technology, 39(6), 28-32.

VLE content delivery – options?

'**Push**' – single content source, non-differentiated delivery, 'one size fits all'

'**Pull**' – multiple sources, *some* end user choice(s), reliance upon user 'effort'

'**Personalised**' – flexible, responsive, knowledge-based. 'Like good teachers'.
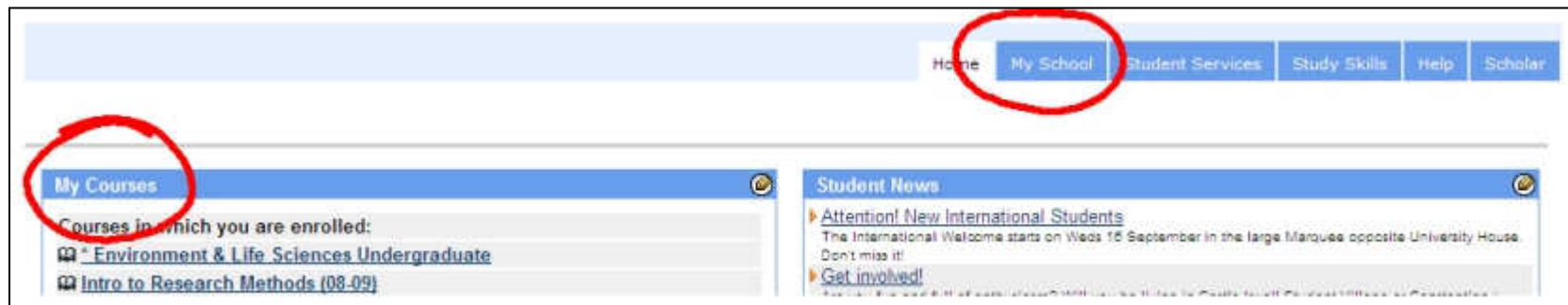
Potential Issue?

Unthinking, unchallenged, quantitative implementation of VLEs ..

Possible risks:

- *Encourages* the view that students are a homogeneous population?

- *Discourages* difference and individuality?

- *Intrude* into flexible provision by knowledgeable, capable and charismatic academic colleagues?

  - strengths: previous knowledge /academic ability

  - weaknesses: learning skills / recognised disabilities

  - commitment: fulltime student / fulltime worker?

  - interests: engagement / motivation

  - social circumstances & support mechanisms

  - preferred learning styles: concrete / abstract

Personalised VLE content (1)

- **Systems** orientation:
  - What <u>do</u> we know about students? – (… *very little*)
    - School
    - Faculty
    - Programmes and modules

Personalised VLE content (1)

- What <u>might</u> we know about students? – (... *much more*!)
    - Dyslexia
    - Hearing impairments
    - Leisure /sporting interests / clubs / societies
    - Others?

- <u>Issues</u>:
    - Increasing the level of data granularity
    - 'Sterile' curriculum -vs- 'rich' experience of HE?
    - V<u>L</u>E -vs- Portal?

Personalised VLE content (2)

- **Pedagogic** orientation – example #1 ☐

  - **Wimba Create** (aka Course Genie)

    - Single source > multiple outputs (themes)
    - e.g. 'corporate', high contrast, 'dyslexia' …

    - Manage content in Bb using Adaptive Release (AR)
    - AR & Bb Group Membership determine content deployment

    - Default > all of cohort sees 'corporate', BUT,
    - Students identified as dyslexic only see dyslexic theme (same content), OR,
    - Students with visual difficulty only see high contrast theme
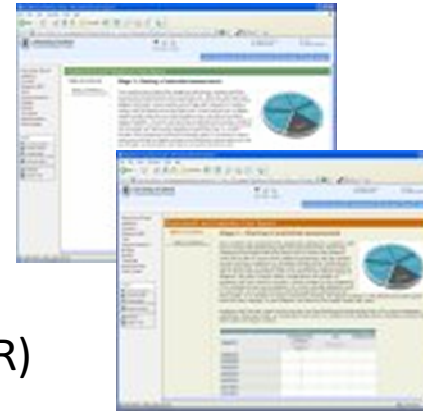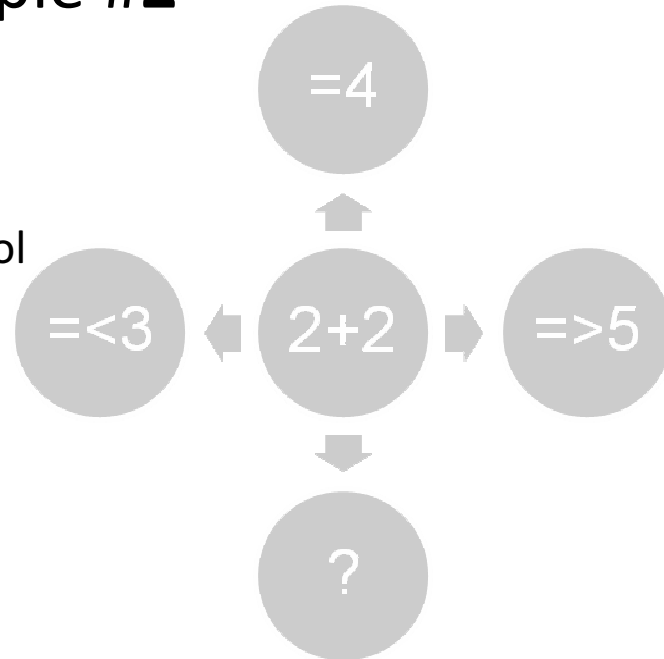
Personalised VLE content (2)

- **Pedagogic** orientation – example #1

  - **Possible benefits:**

    - <u>Single source</u> of content

    - Relatively low effort for <u>central</u> creation of multiple themes

    - <u>Automated creation</u> of Bb groups

    - <u>Consistent</u> deployment of differentiated content through themes

Personalised VLE content (3)

- **Pedagogic** orientation – example **#2**

  - **Formative assessment**

    - Development and deployment using Bb tool

    - Entry created in Bb Grade Centre

    - Creation of remedial content loops

    - All students offered assessment content

    - Manage assessment in Bb using Adaptive Release (AR) and performance rule

    - Performance rule checks student score (=, <=, =>, score between, etc.)
    - AR delivers new content based upon performance

Personalised VLE content (3)

- **Pedagogic** orientation – example **#2**

  - **Possible benefits**

    - Promotes formative assessment (*...hobby horse!*)

    - Remedial instruction relevant to performance, OR,

    - Potential for fast tracking more capable/knowledgeable students

Personal reflections

- Successful online delivery:
  - involves strategic solutions
  - requires multi-player involvement
  - is too important to be left <u>only</u> to academic staff

- There is still some life left in institutional VLEs – but we need to look beyond the obvious toolset

- VLEs <s>can</s> **/** **should** be much more than a delivery medium of 'vanilla' content

- Vanilla can be good – sundaes may be better!