Workshop:

Identifying and contacting disengaged students in an LMS

Increasingly, teachers are including more and more online content and activities in their unit. Typically teachers do not have the same level of contact with their students in the online compared to the face to face environment. As a consequence, teachers are unable to identify students that may be struggling to complete the unit. Teachers need better methods and tools to give them information about their students so that they can offer timely support to students that are online.

Research has shown that through the use of learning analytics, students at risk of not completing a unit can be identified (Arnold, 2010; Macfadyen & Dawson, 2010). Preliminary research has shown that the Moodle engagement analytics plugin (MEAP) used in specific contexts can be used to identify students that are at risk of not completing the unit (Liu, Froissard, Richards, & Atif, 2015a). MEAP has been improved to include additional indicators and functionality (Liu, Froissard, Richards, & Atif, 2015b).

This 120 minute workshop aims to give participants an understanding of how simple learning analytics in a learning management system (LMS) can help staff identify students who are becoming disengaged in their unit. It will focus on the practical application of a learning analytics tool in Moodle that could be used to identify disengaged students. Whilst the workshop is around the use of a tool in Moodle the discussion and issues explored will be relevant to other LMS.

During the workshop participants will explore the difficulties in using a learning analytics tool to identify disengaged students. Participants will develop an understanding of how course structure influences the use of a learning analytics tool. This experience will provide the context to discuss issues such ethics, efficacy and reliability of using learning analytics to improve student retention.

Participant engagement will be via hands-on experience in working with a learning analytics tool. In the workshop they will explore the difficulties in choosing proxies to measure engagement as well as the inherent difficulties in interpreting information in an LMS.

Specifically the activities planned for the workshop will include participants:

1. Being introduced to learning analytics and the plugin.
2. Logging into a Moodle server giving them access to a sample unit to explore.
3. Thinking about the indicators for the unit (forums, logins, assessments, gradebook scores) that could be used to tell them whether a student is engaged in their unit. Next they will think about the parameters (number of posts, minutes spent online per week, grade, etc.) and apply them to the plugin.
4. Looking at what the plugin is telling them about students’ engagement.
5. Making changes to the indicators and parameters to look at their impact on student identification.
6. Discussing their results around indicators, parameters, efficacy, ethics and reliability.

References

