2018 – Inquiry: Students & Online Resources

2018 was a challenging year as in term 1 I was employed at Westlake Boys High School and this inquiry began there. The student survey, done in term 1 was completed at Westlake where MS Teams was the only option. Unfortunately, things at Westlake did not quite work out and by the middle of term 2 I had found a new home at Massey High School. I continued with the practice of involving students in decisions around resource placement and the reflections at the end of this document are the result of my experiences at both schools.

Questions/Actions	Inquiry
Inquiry area question	How can I ensure that students can easily find online resources / course materials?
Who/which class	All classes
Data collection	Quick survey asking students how they currently access material (and whether doing so is easy).
Classroom practise/T & L	Based on responses to surveys set up materials in Teams / OneDrive so that students can easily find any given resource. Set up system where students can ask 'where is it' which would allow me to quickly see if a resource was not easy to find and would allow it to be moved to a more logical place (from the student's perspective).

Background Research / Rationale

In class I have observed that students often struggle to find resources and instructions despite being shown where said resources are located. Having everyone in the group able to find instructions and resources to complete course work / assessment work would be massively beneficial.

Usability is a concept in Computer Science where the focus is on making interfaces and outcomes easy to use. The underlying principle is 'Don't make me think' – users should not need to wonder how to use an interface / piece of software – it should be obvious. Translating this into the classroom, students should not struggle to find the location of resources / where to put checkpoint work – it should be obvious.

Another concept in Usability involves usability testing – it turns out that what is 'obvious' to interface designers / developers is often not obvious to users. In the classroom, similar things happen where teachers think their instructions are clear and easy to follow and the location of resources is 'obvious' but students struggle to find material and don't know what to do (even after they have been shown). In cases where usability is done well, interfaces have been tested by asking users to perform a task and then changes have been made based on how the interface is being used. In the classroom, something similar can be done. When time permits, teachers can observe how students are accessing material and where issues are encountered, they can take steps to make things easier to find.

Survey (Term 1, 2018)…

I asked my students to fill in a quick survey. This survey was posted after I had gotten into the habit of asking them where things should be (ie: when they were stuck, instead of telling them where an item was, I asked where they were looking for it and then put it in the place that they were looking).

2. Think back to the start of the year. How easy was it to find task instructions in DTC / DTP?
More Details

113
Responses

★★★⯪★
3.36 Average Rating

3. Think back to last week. How easy was it to find classwork instructions in DTC / DTP?
More Details

113
Responses

★★★★☆
4.16 Average Rating

From the survey, it looks like things improved after I changed my approach **but** some improvement would have been expected as students got used to the overall class set up. Interestingly, students do find it quite easy to find material in their other classes too. In the comments area students noted that they had books / worksheets (so finding material was not an issue) or that teachers only used OneNote so there really was only one place where things might be.

5. How easy is it to find resource / instructions in your other classes?
More Details

113
Responses

★★★★☆
3.93 Average Rating

Other comments…

Students were generally positive about the use of Teams in the school overall although one student noted that…

"There is quite a lot of confusion outside of DTP classes around Microsoft Teams. For example, the files area, the assignments area and the class notebook are often mixed up. In my maths class we had to had in a document. The teacher made an assignment on assignments but expected the work to be in the class notebook. Also in Science the teacher made an assignment and then looked for the work in the class notebook."

This is possibly a reflection on the fact that Teams is new for staff and it will take everyone a while to get to grips with the functionality.

Another student commented…

"Sometimes the teachers may not put it where they say it is like they don't put it in teams maybe the put it in one note instead and i can't find it"

That last comment was interesting and it gives weight to the idea of involving students in where material is placed so that it is easy for everyone to find.

Most of the responses to the survey indicated that material was easy to find but it was not clear if students were talking about DTC / other classes or both. Whilst making improvements is desirable, it is good to know that overall we are on the right track.

When asked what teachers could do to make things easier to find, students suggested…

- Having everything in one place rather than spreading things out
- Having clearly labelled folders / headings / tabs
- Naming things by topic rather than standard number
- One student asked for fewer sub-folders which was interesting

Post reflection:

In general, involving student in decisions around where resources are stored was hugely beneficial. The advantages were as follows

- Students became more confident in asking where resources were
- Students would generally look for a resource (and often find it) before asking for help
- Students were able to easily find material and this allowed them to make effective use of class time as they invariably knew what to do or would ask for guidance – so less time was wasted.