

# **EMBEDDING THE TESEP 3E APPROACH IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATORS: A CASE STUDY OF THE MSc BLENDED AND ONLINE EDUCATION**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper explores the design of Napier University's MSc Blended and Online Education (MSc BOE), a part-time fully online programme for education professionals seeking to further develop their pedagogical and practical knowledge of technology-enhanced teaching and learning. The MSc BOE was developed in parallel to the work that Napier University was undertaking as the lead partner in the cross-institutional Transforming and Enhancing the Student Experience through Pedagogy (TESEP) project. TESEP was driven by a 'learners in control' ethos in the work it undertook to embed pedagogically sound, yet creative and transformative ways of using current and emerging technologies to enhance teaching, and particularly learning, across the partner institutions.

The 3E Approach was one of the main tools developed within TESEP as a means of illustrating to practitioners what an embedding of the ethos and pedagogical principles adopted by TESEP might look like in practice, within the redesign of their own courses. The 3E Approach, and particularly the emphasis this places on increasing learner control and autonomy through enhanced, extended and empowered learning opportunities, was adopted as the blueprint for the design of the MSc BOE. After outlining the TESEP project, and exploring the essence of the 3E Approach, this paper describes how the 3E Approach was embedded in practice within the MSc BOE with a specific focus on the three core modules.

After considering the views of participants on the MSc BOE, this paper concludes by reflecting on the challenges of implementing the 3E Approach within the MSc BOE, and also how it is influencing future programme developments.

## **THE TESEP PROJECT**

Funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as one of six projects in their £6 million e-learning transformation programme, the TESEP project was undertaken as a joint initiative between Napier University in Edinburgh, Lauder (now Carnegie) College in Dunfermline, and Edinburgh's Telford College.

TESEP commenced in 2005 and officially concluded in summer 2007, although as the focus of this paper suggests various initiatives instigated or informed by the work of TESEP continue apace. This is appropriate given that a primary aim of TESEP was to introduce and nurture the development of a perspective and approach to technology-enriched learning and teaching that would become increasingly embedded within the institutional culture of the partner institutions within the funded lifetime of TESEP, and which would ultimately continue to be self-sustaining and transformative beyond the conclusion of the funded period.

'Learners in control' was the ethos at the heart of TESEP. In essence this reflects the belief that we can most effectively help our learners to develop the professional and broader knowledge and skills they need through providing opportunities for greater learner autonomy, supported through engagement in

local and wider learning communities that use current and emerging technologies in meaningful ways that reflect how knowledge is being created and shared in today's world (Mayes, 2007). While a detailed consideration of this ethos and the philosophy it is grounded within is not the purpose of this paper, there are important challenges and implications here that include: changing tutor and student roles; the need to think beyond the VLE to consider what we can broadly refer to as 'Web 2.0' technologies offer in educational terms; and recognising the more democratic and empowered way in which knowledge is being shared and constructed in networked global society.

TESEP was concerned with addressing these issues, but more importantly the opportunities they offered, by tackling them within pedagogic approaches that could further enhance and, wherever possible, transform the learning and teaching experience in ways that were sensitive to today's and tomorrow's student, the needs of the tutor, and critically also to institutional needs and challenges. Reflecting wider debate in the sector, these challenges were seen to include widening access, pro-actively responding to increasing student diversity, and the development of employability skills and other key attributes required in the professional environment. Each partner institution also identified specific areas for enhancement they wanted to focus on within TESEP, e.g. collaborative curriculum design, FE-HE articulation, and placement-based learning.

In seeking to address the issues outlined above to meet the kinds of aims and challenges described, TESEP was simultaneously about curriculum design, staff development, and institutional policy and strategy. A key element of the work undertaken involved an initial wave of practitioners from across the partner institutions being seconded to TESEP for one or two days a week, to work on designing or redesigning one of their own courses. Staff were drawn from a range of subject areas including computing, art, joinery, accounting and economics, nursing, drama, and engineering, with the courses being worked on spanning SCQF (Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework) levels 4 to 11.

In being tasked to redesign an existing course or design a new one in a way that embodied the TESEP ethos, the practitioners (who chose which course to focus on, and ultimately how their course would be designed or redesigned) were supported through a multi-faceted, blended staff development experience. This set out to role-model the kinds of pedagogical approaches that TESEP was seeking to promote and further embed, and involved cross-institutional mentor groups, participant-driven workshops and online events, informal sharing of ideas and resources, and engagement with 'critical friends' (pedagogical specialists, staff developers, technology experts) from the FE and HE sectors.

The freedom and choice given to the seconded practitioners in terms of what to work on within the context of the TESEP project, and many of the ways in which they were supported in doing so, are mirrored within the nature of the MSc BOE.

A fuller exploration of the TESEP project, including practitioner and institutional stories, can be found within the range of reports, papers and interactive case studies that are available at <http://www2.napier.ac.uk/transform>.

## TESEP 3E APPROACH

The pedagogical foundations for TESEP were very much rooted in the social constructivist perspective, and emphasised the need for greater learner autonomy and control within learning communities where peers may be learners on the same course, and also peers in wider local and global contexts.

As detailed in Mayes (2007), allied to this broad view was the idea that current and emerging technologies, and particularly forms of social software, could enable individuals and groups elsewhere to play a role in helping to discuss and refine the understandings within the community, and could also help the learning community itself to take increased ownership for finding and creating the materials and 'artefacts' that would support their learning.

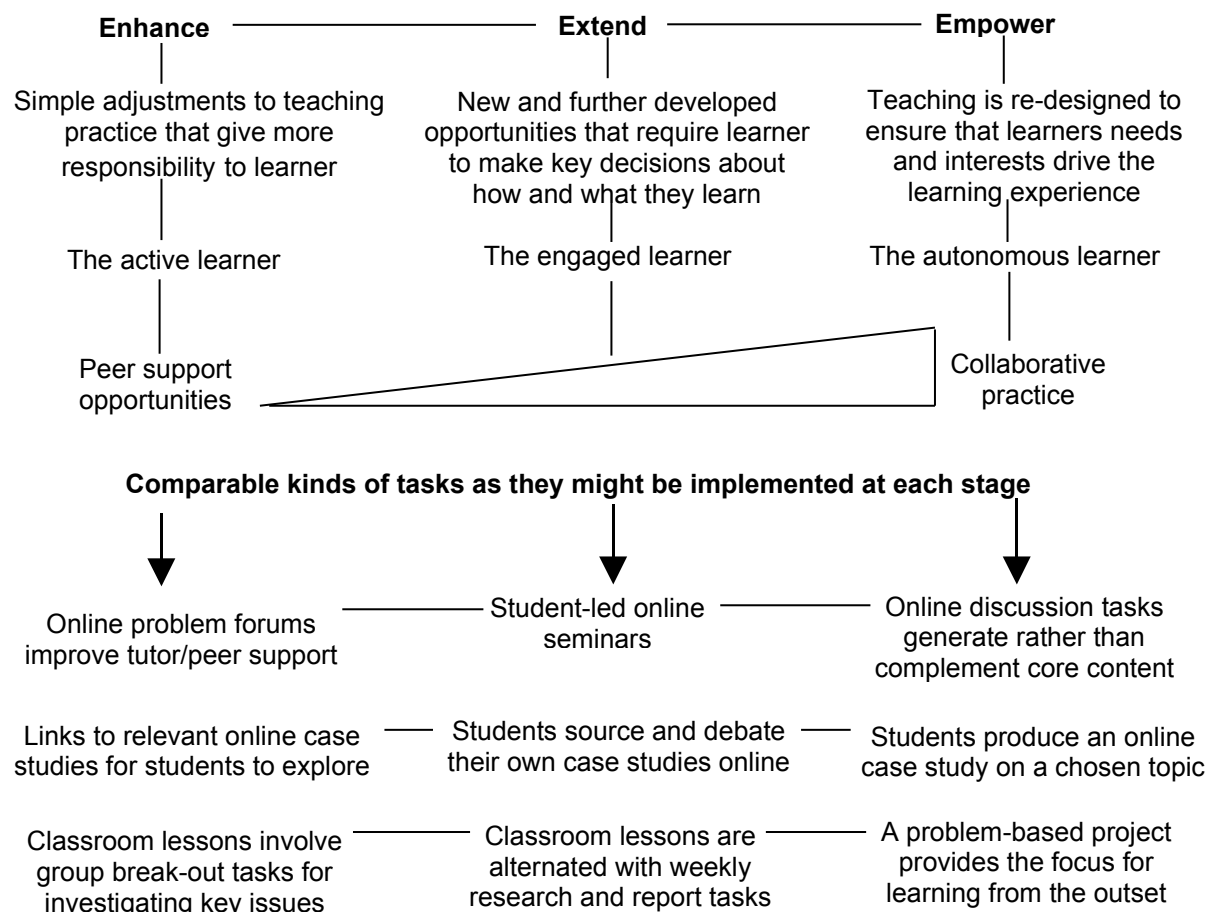
While there is clearly a resonance here with Siemens' (2004) theory of connectivism, and Leadbeater's (2008) more recent treatise on 'We-think' as a mass innovation phenomena, TESEP was concerned specifically with the possibilities offered by bringing together a social constructivist model of learning and teaching with emerging technologies in FE and HE course contexts. To this end, the practitioners were encouraged to work towards an embedding of the following five principles in the design or redesign of their courses:

- **Ensure every learner is as active as possible.** Design tasks that address the question: how can we challenge learners to think more deeply about what it is they are learning?
- **Design frequent formative assessment.** Encourage the learner to test their understanding regularly and ensure they get responsive feedback including from peers.
- **Put emphasis on peers learning together.** Create small groups who will work together to produce something – a report, a lesson, a demonstration. Consider where groups can teach each about their chosen topics. Try to engender a sense of ownership.
- **Consider whether learning tasks can be personalised.** Allow the individual learner, or a small group, choice over what is to be achieved. Negotiate with learners wherever possible. Aim for project/resource/discussion-based learning – not direct instruction.
- **Consider how technology can help to achieve these principles.** Online, learners can be actively carrying out tasks, taking formative tests, producing class resources or group outputs, discovering new content for themselves, and through social software discussing and sharing all this with each other, the tutor, and other peers and experts.

The overarching aim of putting these principles into practice was to realise the 'learners in control' ethos of TESEP as fully as possible within a particular course context. However the concept of putting learners in control, and the related notions of empowerment and transformation, are challenging to address and were met by many important questions from practitioners. These included questions around how much control is enough?, how do I build upon what I'm already doing well?, what are the implications for tutors and students?, and what do these kind of changes to learning and teaching look like in practice?

To help address these questions, and make the possibilities clearer, the TESEP project developed the 3E Approach. This envisaged, with examples and further guidance, the kind of transformation in learning and teaching encapsulated within the TESEP ethos as involving a continuum of enhanced, extended and empowered learning opportunities (described more fully in Smyth, 2007).

Shown in overview form in Figure 1, the 3E Approach tries to clarify the kinds of ways in which it is possible to make changes to teaching practice that provide learners with more control over their learning, and the role that technology can play in supporting this process. In doing this, it attempts to show that transformation in learning and teaching practice can be seen as an iterative process for the tutor and their students, involving progressive changes that move the learner further towards finding, using, creating and sharing knowledge in ways that reflect the kinds of individual and collective responsibilities they will have in the professional and broader societal contexts they are preparing for.



**Figure 1. TESEP 3E Approach**

In this respect the 3E Approach can be seen as a 'framework' within which to think about the design of a course and progression within it, although an equally important point is that any course could offer a mix of opportunities at any of the 3E stages based on what is appropriate for the subject, student group, tutor and desired outcomes in question. This point about appropriateness is a critical one, as is the view that while the Empower stage may be viewed as the ideal to

aim for, changes in practice at any of the stages are equally valuable when viewing transformation in learning and teaching as a developmental journey.

There are clear parallels within the 3E Approach with long established pedagogical theories and concepts, for example cognitive apprenticeship and scaffolding (Brown et al, 1989; Collins et al, 1991), and furthermore the literature is rich with models and frameworks designed to aid interpretation of specific pedagogical principles (e.g. Van Merriënboer et al, 2002; Biggs and Tang, 2008). While in this respect the 3E Approach is on long established ground, it certainly proved to be a useful means for articulating and exploring the aims of TESEP with the practitioners the project worked with, who seemed to feel it was an accessible way to engage with the ideas it encapsulates.

Beyond the ways in which the 3E Approach informed the course redesign within the context of the TESEP project), the 3E Approach has subsequently been adopted in various ways by the TESEP partner institutions. At Carnegie College the 3E Approach now forms the basis of the Learning and Teaching Framework, while Edinburgh's Telford College are currently revising their Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy around the 3E Approach and its related implications for their provision. At Napier University, the 3E Approach has formed an important part of the guidance given to staff in moving from a 15 to 20 credit modular system, has been the focus of staff workshops, and has been integral to the development, nature and outlook of the MSc Blended and Online Education.

### **MSC BLENDED AND ONLINE EDUCATION**

Napier's MSc BOE (<http://www2.napier.ac.uk/ed/boe/>) is a part-time, fully online programme for FE and HE tutors and other educational professionals seeking to learn more about technology-enhanced learning and teaching, regardless of whether they are completely new to this area or are seeking to take what they already do further. Launched in 2007/08 after a successful pilot the preceding year, the MSc BOE has a diverse cohort that includes staff developers, e-learning managers, lecturers, teaching fellows, and consultants.

Developed in parallel to the work being undertaken on TESEP, the MSc BOE shared a common ethos with the TESEP project. The programme is collaborative and practice-based, and from the outset participants work collectively and individually on projects that are relevant to their own roles and interests, and which include case studies, design and implementation projects, and evaluations of technology-supported learning and teaching initiatives.

There is an element of choice and negotiation in every task undertaken, and current and emerging technologies are used in ways that model good practice and facilitate engagement within and beyond the geographically dispersed programme community, which includes online interaction with invited guest experts and engagement within other online groups and communities.

The intention is very much to provide an 'immersive' experience that allows practitioners to learn about blended and online education while simultaneously experiencing both what it is like to be an online learner, and applying their developing understanding within their own work contexts. In this respect, the programme team view the MSc BOE as a natural extension to the kind of learner-centred staff development experiences in technology-supported teaching

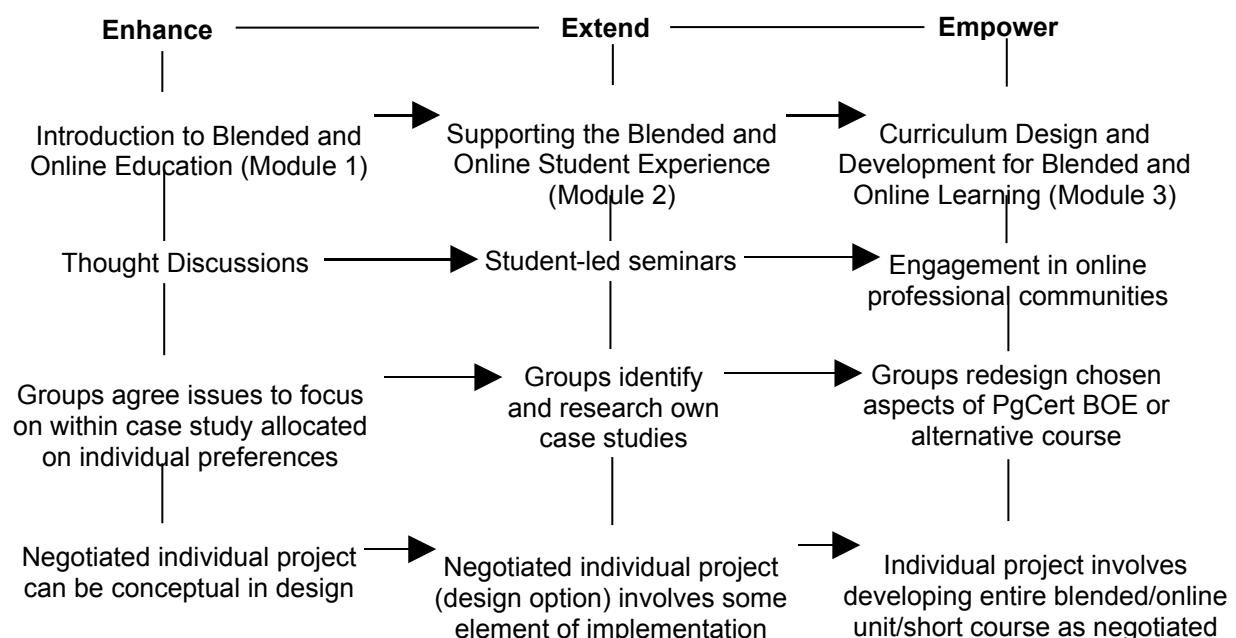
and learning that have been increasingly called for over recent years (e.g. Littlejohn, 2002; Oliver and Dempster, 2003; Mainka, 2007), and which the TESEP project itself was seeking to provide for the practitioners it supported.

The extent to which the MSc BOE is designed to meet developmental and professional needs was recognised in June 2008 by the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), and any participant successfully completing either of the three exit awards (PgCert, PgDip, MSc) now receives their own individual accreditation against SEDA's Embedding Learning Technologies award.

### 3E IN PRACTICE ON THE MSC BOE

While the ideas the 3E Approach encapsulates are consistent at a broad level with the philosophy and rationale of the entire MSc BOE programme, the three core modules that comprise the PgCert element of the programme, and which provide the basis for the other exit awards, were deliberately designed according to the 3E Approach. The intention here was to build in opportunities for participants to assume more control of their own learning within the programme, so that over the course of the three core modules each individual, regardless of where they were starting from, could become more fully autonomous as a blended and online educator by the end of the third core module.

By 'fully autonomous' this does not mean expert and self-sufficient within every aspect of blended and online education, but instead well equipped to assume ownership of their own practice, with a rounded knowledge of what is appropriate within their own contexts, and an understanding of how to keep abreast and sustain their own development in blended and online education.



**Figure 2. 3E Approach on the PgCert BOE**

The three core modules for the programme which also comprise the PgCert BOE, are: Introduction to Blended and Online Education (IBOE); Supporting the Blended and Online Student Experience (SBOSE); and Curriculum Design and Development for Blended and Online Learning (CDD BOL). Figure 2 provides an overview mapping of key aspects of the core modules to the 3E Approach.

The three core modules are typically undertaken in the order shown, and while each module features tasks and activities at each of the stages of the 3E Approach, at a broad level of design the modules in their normal sequence map to the successive stages of the 3E approach (Enhance, Extend, Empower).

A feel for how this works in practice is provided through considering the Thought Discussions element of the IBOE module, which as the first module is primarily focused on providing 'enhanced' learning opportunities. The Thought Discussions essentially involve participants tackling a choice of questions relating to the theme for a particular unit, and sharing their views, experiences, or perspectives on associated readings, news items, or examples with the wider group. The Thought Discussions are tutor facilitated, and work well as one important way for each new cohort to begin engaging with the subject area, and provide a good introduction to online discussion for those completely new to this.

Moving on to the second module SBOSE, where there is a focus on providing 'extended' learning opportunities, the Thought Discussions give way to student-led seminars. This involves typically two participants coming together over their preference or interest for a particular topic or theme, and designing and facilitating over two weeks an online seminar for the group to take part in. Each pairing is given advice from an assigned tutor, but their tutor remains hands-off and, along with other members of the programme team, assumes a position of being a participant within the seminars which are self and peer-assessed.

There is a clear move from experience to applied practice and skills development between these two discussion-based activities for modules 1 and 2. Within module 3 CDD BOL, there is a further shift towards autonomy when the participants are required to identify and begin engaging with an online or online-supported professional community that could help support their continued learning and development away from the programme, which is particularly important given that some participants may exit with their PgCert after module 3. The professional communities the participant chooses to engage with can be educational communities within their own subject area, or within the broader area of blended and online education. By coming back into the module to share what they have found, everyone is then exposed to a range of communities that may offer developmental opportunities beyond their time on the programme.

Other examples provided in Figure 2 show the 3E transitions between different forms of case study projects, and individual design and development projects.

In addition to the increased control participants take over their own learning, it will hopefully be evident from Figure 2 that participants take increased ownership of the programme itself, for example through the student-led seminars discussed above, and in redesigning previous elements of the programme as they become more experienced as online educators. This idea

that the programme itself is 'up for grabs' as a focus for discussion and critique is fundamental to the nature of the programme, as is the idea of the programme and as safe, collegiate platform for practicing and developing online tutor skills.

In tandem with increased control participants take over their learning and aspects of the programme, the programme team themselves move between tutoring, facilitating and ultimately co-learning roles. The programme tutors as co-learners is another critical element to the outlook of the programme, which is after all for already experienced educators, and which is seeking to meaningfully exploit the promise and democratising potential of emerging technologies.

On the MSc BOE, while the VLE provides a central presence it is but one of a range of spaces participants work within and across that includes blogs, wikis, Second Life, and social bookmarking applications. Participants are also free and actively encouraged to explore applications available elsewhere, and are supported in harnessing them effectively within individual and group projects.

In addition, there is a focus within the programme on the potential to use emerging technologies for what the programme team currently (perhaps clumsily) refer to as 'legacy learning' opportunities. This involves each new cohort working collaboratively by choice (this task is not assessed) on a learning 'artefact' that can support themselves, but which can also be passed on to new members of the course community. Examples of artefacts produced so far include a wiki-based glossary of key concepts, and a social bookmark collection.

In all of the preceding discussion of TESEP, the 3E Approach and the MSc BOE, there is repeated mention of learning communities, professional communities, course community and so on. While sensitive to the debate around what constitutes a 'learning community' or 'professional community' (without inferring they are the same), and whether such communities can be created or create themselves, the view of the MSc BOE programme team is a pragmatic one.

The programme team accept Wenger's (2008) view of a community of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly", and view the course cohort as a form of community of practice that has come together around a shared professional interest in blended and online education. A course community may be viewed as a temporary one, or alternatively a community which has specific mechanisms for renewing its membership over time. Either way the MSc BOE course community is certainly developing into an effective, engaged and collegiate one whose members are beginning to support and share with each other beyond the confines of the formal course content and spaces.

This is in many respects something that may be hoped for as natural outcome of embedding what the 3E Approach represents into a programme of this type. It certainly evidences the kind of learner autonomy the programme aims to support the development of. It is also indicative of another view within the programme team around the issue of 'learning communities', which is that it is possible to 'design in' to a programme opportunities for Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation to occur, whereby novice members of the community assume a more central position of expertise over time. Indeed, the transition from active to engaged to autonomous learner within the 3E

Approach, and the way the MSc BOE tutors increasingly assume co-learning roles with the programme over time, are both instantiations of this perspective.

### **PARTICIPANT VIEWS**

While studying on a programme like the MSc BOE is not going to be without challenges, not least due to the continual engagement over time that is required, the programme aims to be fully transparent about what is required from participants, and why the programme is designed in the way it is.

This seems to be well understood and appreciated by participants, and feedback to date seems to indicate that the design and approach taken on the programme is providing the kind of immersive, collegiate and developmental experience intended through applying the 3E Approach to the design of the programme.

While further evaluation of what is still a young programme is an ongoing concern, illustrative comments that are representative of general views include:

“I wanted to become a ‘Tutor 2.0’ – someone who can exploit the capabilities of Web 2.0 technologies and critically utilise state of the art blended and online learning pedagogies to create and maintain a learning environment befitting 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners’. The programme more than fulfils this for me.”

(John Sinclair, Senior Lecturer, Napier University)

“This is a very hands on course with many different ways of reaching the learner and catering to many different learning styles, supported by current research articles in this area...This will help me to design and deliver blended learning more effectively, hopefully without making the mistakes of past initiatives.”

(Dr Steve Wilkinson, Principal Lecturer, Leeds Met University)

### **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

The levels of engagement within the MSc BOE, and the tangible benefits that evaluation and coursework indicate are being experienced, is encouraging evidence that the design of the programme is supporting learning as intended.

Despite this, there have been challenges and revelations in embedding the 3E Approach within the design of the programme, and more generally in facilitating a programme of this kind. One is in helping to prepare participants to learn in increasingly more empowered ways, in contexts where current and emerging technology is to be a meaningful enabler of effective learning. This point is a general one that will apply across many course contexts. However in the context of the MSc BOE, in which a rich range of technologies are to be used as meaningful enablers and where the meaningful use of technology is in itself a topic for study, finding ways to enable participants to quickly overcome technical issues to engage in the pedagogical ones has been particular concern. This has been tackled by ensuring that the first week of any module is dedicated to technical and general module orientation, in which a series of ‘light’ activities are used to ensure the main tools to be used are explored, and that participants and the programme team have useful opportunities to interact informally.

The online discussions across the programme quickly become extremely busy, and there has been a focus here on helping participants negotiate these levels of activity in a meaningful way. To enable every participant to gain all they can from their time on the programme, and ensure it meets their own development needs, it has also been important to take time to help each participant to plan ahead particularly in relation to negotiated individual projects. This requires some discussion early on in the programme, and at points throughout, and has been aided by the introduction of Personal Development Tutor arrangements.

An obvious question to ask of a programme like the MSc BOE is the amount of development and facilitation time it requires from the programme team. The main challenge here has been in getting the overarching framework and progression between modules right. Although there is an inevitable front-loading in development time and tutor-led activities for module 1, through its alignment with the Enhance stage of the 3E Approach, through subsequent modules the programme shifts considerably for the tutors towards being more heavily focused on facilitation and being participants themselves.

On the tutor as a participant, or co-learner as previously described, one thing that has become very apparent is that within a course such as this, or indeed any course that attempts to use emerging technologies to their full empowering potential, there is a need to think beyond the now well-established distinction between "sage on the stage" and "guide on the side" (e.g. Jones, 1999; Mazzolini and Maddison, 2006), and even more recent conceptualisations of the tutor's role as a "ghost in the wings" (Mazzolini and Maddison, 2006). Pedagogical practice that fully embraces the notion of learner control, and which harnesses the empowering possibilities emerging technologies offer learners to share and help shape perspectives in a more democratic way, mean that the 'tutor as co-learner' provides a new end point on the 'sage on stage' to 'guide on side' continuum, and another role for the tutor to mindfully think about playing.

## **CONCLUSION**

Within the MSc BOE the 3E Approach has provided an invaluable framework for embedding the kinds of progressive pedagogical practice the TESEP project was committed to promoting within the professional development of educators. One hope is that in turn the practitioners on the programme will embed some of what they have experienced and explored within their own teaching and learning contexts. Designing the MSc BOE according to the 3E Approach required careful consideration and the meeting of particular challenges, but the usefulness of the 3E Approach as a framework for thinking about course design is continuing to inform current developments on the MSc BOE. This includes through exploring ways in which to build in further 'legacy learning' opportunities, and further opportunities for engagement in wider professional communities. Perhaps most indicative of the direction the programme may take in a further embedding of the 3E Approach, and associated philosophy, is the development of a module that will take the 'learners in control' and 'tutors as co-learners' concepts to the next level by allowing participants who have successfully completed their PgCert BOE to become co-tutors for new cohorts coming on to the programme.

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