Distance learning at ITM presented at eLearning Africa

As e-learning expert of the Department of Public Health, I went to the annual eLearning Africa conference last September to present our distance learning module for animal health experts.

22-11-17 - Sara Roegiers

Dit is de omschrijving

eLearning Africa has been held for the twelfth time. The working languages are English and French. This year's hosting country was the beautiful island of Mauritius. The Mauritian government has put digitisation of education and the digital economy high on the agenda, and hosting the conference was one way to announce that to the world. Next year's edition is set to take place in Kigali, Rwanda 26-28 September.

eLearning Africa is the place to be for anyone active in e-learning and distance education in Africa, from policy makers (UNESCO, ICT/education ministers), over technology providers (Blackboard, Proctorio, Avanti), to teachers and other practitioners from the educational field (primary school, higher education, life-long learning). This year's theme, learning in context, inspired topics like localisation, access to IT careers for girls, and the importance of innovation by Africans for Africans.

My contribution was a poster presentation on the instructional design approach used in the distance learning module 'Advanced One Health: Public Health Approaches to Zoonosis Control'. The poster shared the experience of a team developing an online distance learning module.

This web-only module for in-service professionals is an elective in the collaborative Master of Science in Tropical Animal Health, jointly organised by the University of Pretoria (UP) and ITM. The MSc targets an international audience of animal health professionals and researchers. It embraces the One Health philosophy, acknowledging that the health of people is connected to the health of animals and the environment. The One Health approach calls for an interdisciplinary collaboration between human and animal health actors, both on a local and global scale.

Lai Jiang, educationalist for ITM at the time of designing the course, guided the application of the 4C/ID (Four-Component Instructional Design) model. The 4C/ID didactic model focuses on real-life learning tasks that facilitate the integrated acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes and challenges students to solve real-world problems in a self-directed way. The learning tasks allow participants to engage in critical thinking. In addition, the tasks mirror real situations; this element of authenticity is essential as it facilitates putting theoretical knowledge into practice.

Several public health colleagues signed for the different 'learning tasks' of this module. Tine Verdonck, coordinator of the module, created the learning task on vertical analysis, 'Recognising the big picture' and the task on evaluating scientific articles based on applicability and strength of evidence, 'Finding and appraising evidence'. Marjan Pirard developed the 'Dialogue with stakeholders' where the students voiced their own role of animal health professional, based on a case study by Séverine Thys on cystic echinococcosis in Morocco. Veerle Vanlerberghe created the learning task 'Tackling an outbreak situation', where participants learned how to investigate a public health outbreak situation. The outbreak exercise was built in Articulate Rise software. The other tasks were created on UPretoria's learning Platform Blackboard, with a variety of media used: textbook excerpts, scientific articles, and the occasional video.

'Advanced One Health: Public Health Approaches to Zoonosis Control' ran for the first time from January to May 2017, with 9 students, based in South Africa, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda. Students appreciated the variety of learning activities, its applicability to real situations, and broadening of perspective the module offered.

Connect with Sara Roegiers on Twitter @sroegiers