Confer: Collaborative Professional Learning in the Zone of Possibility

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Abstract. This demo paper presents Confer, a tool being developed by the Layers project to support collaborative learning in professional settings. The tool is developed though an innovative process, which combines inputs from theory with analysis of current practice and user feedback on proposed innovation. It guides and supports groups of practitioners through a process of progressive inquiry.

Keywords. Learning design · educational design research · design patterns · design narratives · patterned practices · stakeholder participation

1   Introduction

The Learning Layers Project (http://learning-layers.eu/), funded by the EU FP7 programme, is developing technologies to support informal learning in the workplace, specifically in the healthcare and construction sectors. The healthcare team of the Layers project developed an extended version of Participatory Pattern Workshop methodology [2, 3] as appropriate to our work (**Fig. 1**), which we call "Patterns of Practice and Design" (PPD) [1].
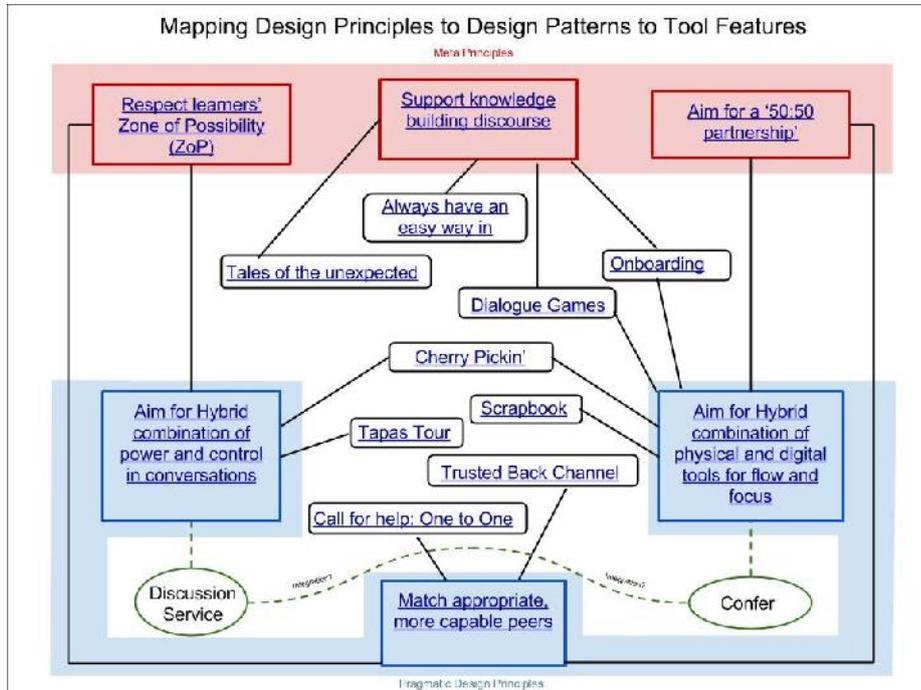
Fig. 1. Schematic diagram of the PPD methodology

To support this process, we use a platform called ILDE (Integrated Learning Design Environment), developed by Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona [4].

Using the PPD and the ILDE, we articulated a set of design principles and design patterns which are being used to guide the software development (**Fig. 2**).

Fig. 2. Map of design principles and patterns (https://goo.gl/aL1MXt)

We developed a set of storyboards, which we presented to representatives of the target group, to obtain early feedback. We also conducted a series of role-play walk-throughs to test early prototypes. Through this process, we have developed an initial version of the Confer tool (**Fig. 3**).
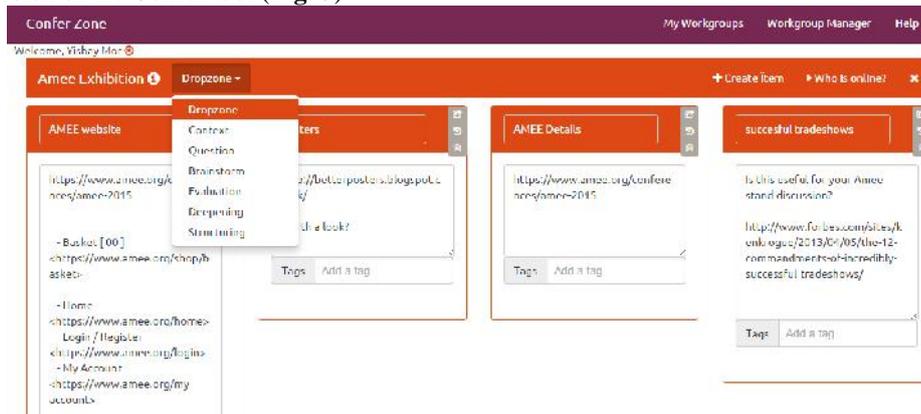

Fig. 3. The Confer tool

The Confer tool leads allows practitioners to define workgroups, and guides and supports these workgroups through a process of progressive inquiry [5]. In this process,

participants have a "dropzope" to share anything they find relevant to the issue at hand. Alongside the curation of resources, participants negotiate the definition of the question to be inquired and the context in which it occurs. From the dropzone, items can be transferred to a brainstorming are, where they are discussed and elaborated. They are then evaluated in the evaluation area, and used to construct structured arguments in the deepening and structuring areas. Finally, they can export a report reflecting the outcomes of the process.

We will shortly begin a user evaluation of this tool.

2 References

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Prototype presentation at the conference booth

The prototype presentation will include a map of the PPD process, the ILDE used to support it and the design artefacts produced within it, the storyboard used to elicit user feedback, and the online Confer tool itself. We will include remote team members to simulate the collaborative learning process in Confer: we will work with those team members as a workgroup, define an inquiry project, and trace it through the steps of the progressive inquiry process.

One of the storyboards used in user research.